

A Critical Theory of Eurocentrism

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Nicholas D. Hostettler

## Abstract

Conventional accounts of Eurocentrism tend not to recognise their own Eurocentricity. Critical theory mitigates this lack of historical reflexivity by disclosing the deep structures of Eurocentrism in the modern tradition of political and social theory and in the forms of modern social relations and social formation.

'Eurocentrism' tends to express negative judgements about the world and its representation from the perspective of civil sociality and its sense of commutative justice, and to point to distorted distributions of modern goods. That perspective is treated here as the ideologeme which provides the conceptual framework of the Eurocentric, 'Modern Imaginary'. This ideologeme it establishes the forms of civil sociality as transhistorical, universals. It also operates as an empirico-transcendent doublet, generating the tradition's contradictory and antinomial categorical structure. The Eurocentric nature of this contradictory structure is disclosed in terms of the critical realist conception of anthropic irrealism.

A similar work of categorical transformation discloses the Eurocentric forms of the modern world system. Concretely, Eurocentrism emerges through the competitive universalisation of European (and neo-European) states; their tendencies towards the institution of transnational hegemony; and projects for the Europeanisation and/or functional subordination of the non-European. In terms of abstract social relations, Eurocentric universalisation tends to the creation of global social totalities mediated by the really abstract relations of civil society.

A general account of the contradictions between the abstract and concrete dimensions of Europic social formation is provided with an interpretation of Marx's *Capital* in terms of real irrealism. Also, the epistemic and sociological critiques of Eurocentrism are drawn together as internally related dimensions of the Europic Problematic: the combined and uneven dialectical universalisation of the categories and forms of civil sociality. The implications for critical theory, meanwhile, are that it comes to be understood as critical-theoretical anti-Eurocentrism in contrast to the theoretical-Eurocentrism of traditional theory.

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## Chapter 1 - Eurocentrism, Critical Theory, Dialectics and Form

Being inside Eurocentrism means being enmeshed in certain forms of relations; It means being tangled up in the constraints imposed by specific forms of seeing and knowing as well as of being and doing. These entanglements mean that our understanding of ourselves and our world has a limited and partial character. Coming to understand Eurocentrism means having to work through these limitations and disclose their forms to ourselves. European universal social relations exert a powerful influence on our capacities to conceive our world, reinforcing the illicit universality of the dominant forms of thought. However, amongst their many contradictions are tendencies towards deeper self-understanding, and the critical theory of Eurocentrism is oriented towards the identification of these internal constraints and contradictions. This does not mean stepping outside the modern; it means realising an immanent possibility for change which this form of life makes possible.

Critical theory develops out of its confrontation with problems of social form: a critical theory of Eurocentrism evolves through the critique and disclosure of the essential forms of European modernity.

The real, essential, forms of social life are neither ideal nor changeless. Our theories of such forms need to be able to give an account of the many, varied and changing relations that constitute a given mode of existence. Peter Winch, when he used the idea of a particular 'form of life,' was drawing our attention to something of fundamental significance about the nature of culture in general and about cultural diversity: what really distinguishes different cultures from each other is not just one or other peculiar characteristic, or even distinctive sets of characteristics, but the particular ways in which their characteristics are related to each other.<sup>1</sup> So, for Winch, there can be no reduction of cultural diversity to, say, the simple fact of different languages. When detached from the proper context of its form of life, language is abstracted and reduced to little more than a collective idiosyncrasy. Instead, Winch speaks of a 'form of life' so as to insist on the internality of language to a way of life. On this account, forms of life are complex wholes and active modes of being in the world: the tasks of social theory,

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1958.

politics, sociology and history, meanwhile, are to give accounts of the ever-changing structural complexities of such wholes.

Winch offered his considerations as a contribution to a general philosophy of culture, i.e. to a philosophical anthropology, one with many implications for political and social theory. One implication of the internality of language to forms of life is that culture necessarily has a hermeneutic dimension, demanding the rejection of any kind of positivistic naturalism that seeks to bypass language and meaning. It follows from the philosophical presupposition of forms of life that there can be no comprehension of cultural being without an understanding of forms of representation. The forms of life and of representation are internally related: the ways that a given culture understands and represents itself, its wider world and its relations to that world, cannot be divorced from how that culture organises its relations with others and with nature: the structures and organisation of modes of representation are related, to put it no more strongly, to the structures and organisation of the broader culture.

These general categories, 'form of life' and 'form of representation', do not imply anything specific about the kind and degree of organisation, differentiation, internal consistency, etc. of any particular culture. Such questions are the proper subject matter of historical and sociological inquiry. However, the philosophical presuppositions of these disciplines make them more or less open to different kinds of conceptions of form and of historical change. For instance, critical theoretical engagement with Eurocentrism demands a coming to terms with the emergence and the specificity of forms of modern life, and therefore depends on an adequate ontology. This, I shall be arguing, is what Roy Bhaskar's realism provides.<sup>2</sup> Realist ontological presuppositions can sustain general conceptions of historical change as well as the special characteristics of modern forms of social relations, forms of representation and the relations between them. One very general characteristic of modern forms is that they are essentially contradictory.<sup>3</sup> In order to sustain its theoretical accounts of modern social relations, critical theory needs to embody an ontology which opens up a conceptual space in which to disclose the nature, extent and development of these really contradictory relations and processes. That is, it must be able to ground social and historical

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<sup>2</sup> Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, Verso, London, 1994.

dialectics. Without ontologically grounding such dialectics, critical theory denies itself the possibility of disclosing modern forms and remains unable to fully explore their implications. Taking it as a given, for the moment, that Eurocentrism is essentially constituted by modern social forms, a critical theory of Eurocentrism depends on being able to conceptualise dialectical forms and dynamics, and so it depends on realist ontology.

Eurocentric forms of representation and self-understanding presuppose the absence of realist ontology: they are essentially 'irrealist'. That is, they are unable to sustain conceptions of real contradiction and/or real change and are therefore inadequate to the task of self-theorisation. Critical theory, though, is a response to the irrealism of traditional theory: it is a programme dedicated to overcoming the incapacity of modern social theory to theorise its own contradictions; its aim is to understand the complex and contradictory relations which constitute that form of life, including the internality of traditional theory to such forms. Critical theory confronts these problems and faces the task of conceptually reconstructing the form of life we inhabit.

These remarks, though, barely even sketch out an argument which needs to be made in much greater depth. Indeed, while the next part of this chapter will stake out a more substantive account of these matters, the dynamics of the relation between Eurocentrism and critical theory will remain an important theme running through the thesis as a whole: there is an intimate relation between the two, one that shapes the very nature of critical theory.

For its part, Eurocentrism needs to be approached as a special form of ethnocentrism, whose peculiarity derives from its emphatic self-universalisation. The concept of Eurocentrism that emerges from the critique of this will be developed in terms of a 'Europic Problematic': the ensemble of Eurocentric, universalising, thought and social relations. Aside from establishing this somewhat broader meaning of 'problematic' than is conventional, the primary theoretical innovation of this account is a sociological development of the concept of 'dialectical universalisation'.<sup>4</sup> The Europic problematic

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<sup>3</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Ben Fowkes (trans.), Harmondsworth, London, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> The term is taken from Roy Bhaskar, though its meaning and significance are quite different to those he develops.

will be elaborated in terms of a dialectical co-evolution of ‘universal’ social relations and forms of representation: its relational universals, and their dialectics, will be seen to have quite peculiar political, economic and social forms, as exemplified by capital; its equally manifold ‘universalist’ modes of representation will be seen as so many theoretical elaborations of these relations of civil society.

As these remarks indicate, the development of a critical theoretical account of Eurocentrism is intimately related to existing critiques of civil society and political economy. However, as they stand, such critiques do not constitute a fully developed theory of the nature of Eurocentrism. Nor does critical theory possess an adequate understanding of the significance of Eurocentrism, either as a dimension of the theory, practice and social formation of civil society, nor in terms of what it means for the development of critical theory itself. The critical theory of Eurocentrism, as it is developed here, emerges only through the mutual interrogation of positions within the wider field of debates around various modes of critical theory. Only by drawing out the implications of questions related to universalism and relativism, for instance, or to ideas of Eurocentrism in literature and social science disciplines, has it been possible to begin to develop the outline of the theory of Eurocentrism as set out in the following pages.

The following two sections of this introduction provide an outline of the cognitive problem that Eurocentrism poses for critical theory and a brief statement of the direction that this work takes in setting out a solution to that problem. The final section then provides a brief summary of the chapters that follow.

### I. Prefatory Introduction: Inside the elephant.

A critical-theoretical account of Eurocentrism is needed to address a theoretical absence. The need arises not because there are no accounts of Eurocentrism which draw on forms of critical theory. Indeed, there is some diversity here. Rather, there are serious questions about how adequate such accounts are. As it stands, critical theory is to Eurocentrism as the blind men of the fable are to the elephant.<sup>5</sup> The story gives us a metaphor for how religions reveal god, with blind men standing in for religion and an

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix.

elephant for god. Each man encounters only a part of the elephant and uses his curtailed faculties to feel his way around. Each one offers up rival accounts of what he had found to the others, insisting that they alone had experienced the truth about the animal. So one, having grasped the trunk, is able to tell of the texture of the skin and its hair, its length, what its movement is like, and so on. Another, having deftly traced over the surface of a leg, can detail what he has found. Still others have investigated, say, the tail or a tusk. The moral of the tale, of course, is that each description offers a doubly partial truth, one which acquires both its validity and its limitations from the fact of its limited perspective. The lesson we are supposed to draw is of the need for the humility to recognise that our own perspective is like this, and for the charity to accept that we can learn from others in similar but different positions.

The story, though, is not quite adequate to our situation. True, there are strong similarities between the relation of modern theory to Eurocentrism and that of religion to god: each is partially constitutive of its object of inquiry. What this means for critical thought is quite different. If the men in the story had risen to the occasion, each one would have provided the others with the best account that could have been given from their limited vantage point; each of them would have come to know what all of the others did. Yet, the creature would have remained mysterious to all of them. They would still not have known how each part related to each of the others; they would still have yet to find out how it all fitted together. Despite all their endeavours to discover and communicate, they would have continued to be without what they set out for: an adequate account of their common object - the elephant. They might have been able to speculate, drawing on their shared knowledge of other creatures, but these conceptions would have been necessarily incomplete, constituted by absences which would have been papered over in some way or other. Their collective understanding of the elephant would have been far superior to each individual, isolated and reductive view, but it would have remained a partial and limited form of understanding. The best idea of the elephant they could reach would bear the traces of their social and historical cultural conditions: their social relations to the elephant would have conditioned, and been 'reflected' in, the kind of understanding they would have been able to reach.

Eurocentrism, like the apocryphal animal, is also of a piece. Like the elephant it is a large and complex organism. It too has many features, some of which are to be found on

the surface, but many of which lay hidden below it. The labour of uncovering the mechanisms at work and of linking them with the evidence to hand poses a considerable challenge. Like the blind investigators, theorists of Eurocentrism have accumulated fragments of knowledge. They too have approached their object from a range of limited perspectives; they too face the difficulty of assembling these fragments into a more coherent whole. What they do not yet have, what they have so far been unable to construct from their collected fragments, is their equivalent of the idea of the elephant: their theoretical object.

The social sciences are no less disputatious than the fabulous wise men: they are not some special preserve of humble and charitable seekers after greater truths. They are riven by disciplinary distinctions and divergent intellectual traditions, and by personal as well as political contentions. Rivalry and competition may be spurs to the pursuit and growth of knowledge, but the ways in which the disciplines have been institutionalised have not made these unequivocally virtuous qualities: there is no necessary connection between academic competition and the emergence of truth. It may also be that the conditions under which modern social sciences exist foreclose on the emergence of consensus, that its concepts and categories are essentially unstable and are therefore irreducibly contestable. Such considerations, however, still suggest that it is possible to pursue the virtues indicated by the fable. One way of addressing the multiplicity of ideas is by seeking to ground them more clearly in their common conditions of existence. Critical reflexivity demands a strong sociology of knowledge concerned with disclosing its own relation to the historical world it seeks to know. Ideas of Eurocentrism which do not relate their own forms and contents to the formal, substantive and processual qualities of the world from which they arise must be lacking in important respects. The greater the extent to which such connections can be made, the more the limitations of existing ideas can be explained.<sup>6</sup>

There are, of course, many accounts of 'the rise of West' from different traditions only some of which belong to the West itself, but all of which have been profoundly touched

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<sup>6</sup> Against this it could be argued that while enhancing a capacity for self-contextualisation is necessary there is no guarantee it will be sufficient for producing a definitive theoretical object. Indeed, it is reasonable to suppose that the development of cognitive capabilities will always be marked by the constraints imposed on them by their conditions of existence.

by it. Some are glorifying, others wrestle with some internal problems, while still others are more critical of this experiment in human existence, of what it does to those who pursue it and to those subject to it. That European powers have risen to global prominence during the course of the past half millennium is not contested. A series of imperial ventures, related to the dynamics of state formation toward the end of the feudal period in Europe, saw European states consolidate their positions domestically and extend their political and economic relations out into the wider world: Spain and Portugal, Holland, France and Britain, as well as the neo-European United States of America. While recent administrations in Washington have sought 'full spectrum dominance', by no means all of this expansion can be accounted for in terms of technical or military superiority. Some of the most devastating weapons deployed in imperial and colonial struggles have been deception and disease, while many individual conquerors took more than their fair share of luck with them. Nevertheless, connected to the growing reality of political-economic-military superiority has been a strong sense of cultural superiority. Historically, two broad themes emerged. There has been a broad shift from ideas couching European superiority in terms of its Christianity to those emphasising the development of its secular institutions and outlook. Within this, there has been a growing emphasis on accounting for Europe's place in the world in terms of its capitalist economy rather than its political institutions, a shift in emphasis which has broadly accompanied the rising significance of science and technology as a force of production.<sup>7</sup>

For very many commentators, there is little doubt that rationalisation, under one or other description, has played a most significant part in the development of modern European culture: Law, bureaucracy, civil society, science and technology, culture and the arts have all been related to rationalisation and secularisation. For some, an essential characteristic of the modern is the rationalisation of relations with nature and of social relations more broadly. Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic*, presented religion as the unwitting vehicle of secularisation, thanks to its incubation of a certain mode of rationalisation. For others there are even longer term continuities, characterised as a 'western metaphysic', stretching back to the classical antiquity of Mediterranean and Levantine cultures. Either way, a distinctively 'rational' outlook has been widely

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology and Ideologies of Western Dominance*, Cornell University Press, London, 1989.

attributed to European culture and has been used to explain the rise and dominance of the West.

Such accounts are, of course, contested, giving rise to the rich and diverse tradition of reflecting on the condition of modernity. While rival understandings of this condition need to be treated on their individual merits, one of the fundamental issues raised by the question of Eurocentrism concerns the standards by which this social formation and reflections on it should be judged. Broadly speaking, political philosophy can be understood as raising two kinds of questions: one revolving around the distinctions and relations between universalism and relativism; the other concerning relations of power and knowledge.

Making a claim for the universality of either a form of knowledge or some other aspect of a form of life is to make claims about social nature. It is to imply some ontological extrapolation from particular ways of knowing and being: it is to make the claim that this particular form is of general relevance, far beyond its localised existence. To attribute relativism to some aspect of life, on the other hand, is to affirm its localised significance. Where universalism implies transcending the spatio-temporal boundaries of culture, relativism implies socio-historical containment.

The culturally transcendent implications of universalism involve an apparent paradox, for it implies a sense of both cultural neutrality and, at the same time, of cultural superiority. Universal reason, for example, is represented as culturally neutral on the grounds that it is a common feature of all cultures. The form and categories of universal reason are neutral between cultures because they are applicable in all cases. Their formalisation is merely a way of representing that commonality. However, the kind of reflexivity which produces the universalist mentality, and the kind of culture generated by acting on it, implies a cultural superiority. It is one thing for universal truths to exist, another to know and act on them. This ambiguity arises from the theory and practice of universalism, and is a constitutive feature of the modern political tradition.

The power/knowledge distinction raises the problem of how forms of power and knowledge are related. The most common positions tend to oscillate between illicitly separating them and reductively collapsing one into the other, while positions asserting

that they are internally related are advanced to overcome these splits and reductions and related categorial errors.<sup>8</sup> Autonomised accounts of knowledge understand forms of knowledge as developing quite separately from forms of power; they are concerned with the development of ways of knowing whose form and content cannot be accounted for as effects of power. The common epistemological tactic for separating power and knowledge is to cut out the possibility of social mediation by naturalising a form of knowledge, or by claiming that some particular form of knowledge has a privileged relation with nature. Such a tactic involves a more or less explicit deployment of ontological claims about knowledge and is readily recognisable as a universalising strategy. By contrast, a concern for the internal relations between power and knowledge leads to emphatically sociological, as opposed to ontological, strategies. Questions may be asked, for instance, about the extent to which the development of the distinction between manual and theoretical labour, on which all modern forms of knowledge depend, itself depends on the development of class relations.<sup>9</sup>

When the universalism/relativism distinction is brought together with power/knowledge it generates a pattern of possible perspectives on the politics of modernity. Universalist accounts imply, more or less explicitly, that the success of modern social formation is due to some special relation to nature. Modern forms are held to transcend their social and historical origins because of some essential affinities with natural and/or human being. They are, in some sense, a realisation or fulfilment of what it means for humans to exist, and/or of what it means for humans to know.

Universalism can serve to legitimate modern institutions, portraying them as the ideal conditions of self-realisation. It also provides a vantage point from which any form of life, including actually existing modern ones, can be criticised. Ontologised conceptions of the modern can be projected as deontological idealisations against which its mundane realities can be found wanting. Such idealisations can also be invoked to show how the practical organisation of actual institutions imposes unnecessary limitations on

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<sup>8</sup> While Winch remains largely content to assert the internality of social relations others have given greater attention to what this means. See for instance Bertell Ollman's 'The Philosophy of Internal Relations' in *Dialectical Investigations*, Routledge, London, 1993. An internal relation is constitutive of the things so related, meaning that they cannot be fully understood in the abstract.

<sup>9</sup> See Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A critique of epistemology*, MacMillan, London, 1978.

possibilities of human realisation. Either way, the condition of modernity is translated into a generally applicable, universal, ethic.

Universalist representations of power and knowledge are similarly ethicised. On the one hand, actual forms of power and knowledge can be presented as free from systematic bias or distortion and therefore as the effective means of removing cultural distortions to, or obstacles in the way of, human development. Alternatively, the universalist ethic is critical, exposing the distortions of power tied to particularistic ends and its negative effects. Such ethical idealisations are behind demands to properly harness modern powers to the project of bringing the modern back to the truth of itself. They provide an endlessly renewed impetus for pursuing the universalistic vision. In this way, universalism generates a strand of critical theory, one which supports visions of a de-politicised, neutral, reason, as Rawls and Habermas do in their different ways.<sup>10</sup>

Other strands of critical theory have different problems. Given that the universalising strategy entails the illicit transformation of self-conceptions into ontological ones, there is a double task to perform. The first is the anti-philosophical task of deconstruction, closely identified with Wittgenstein and Derrida. This project attacks the forms of abstraction produced by the dominant tradition as illicit universalisation. Wittgenstein's 'philosophical pictures' and Derrida's writing under erasure are both forms of immanent critique designed to reveal the implausibility of traditional attempts to produce transhistorical generalisations. The second task is the reconstructive one of replacing the old philosophies. While the first form of critical theory is engaged in this, it tends to reproduce the problems of the tradition. Deconstruction, meanwhile, draws on the experience of the tradition to deny the distinctiveness of philosophical questions and, as a consequence, effectively neglects philosophical and ontological questions. This gives rise to the curious spectacle of relativism raising philosophical questions only to avoid them. Having undermined the overly self-confident aspect of modern philosophical self-consciousness, this mode of critical theory cleaves to its more sceptical side. There is, though, no escaping the problem of universals: social theory demands a philosophy, and any serious attempt to abandon the pursuit of philosophy simply undermines the

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Jurgen Habermas on the differentiation and autonomy of social spheres. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vols. 1 and 2, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1986, 1989.

possibility of theory. A critical theory without a philosophy cuts the ground out from underneath itself.

Critical theory proper, then, begins with relativistic criticism of the universalist claims of modernity but it must lead on to a radical, deeper, critique of the forms of those universals. It must combine a strong sociological programme with an equally effective philosophical one which, unlike both other modes of critical theory, encompasses an ontological dimension. A critical relativism of this kind will locate modern institutions in space and time; it will treat their tendencies to universalisation as only relatively superior, being produced by mechanisms which just happen to be the most powerful and successful contemporary experiments in being human; it will recognise that their success is due, at least in part, to the universalistic self-conceptions which inform them; it will show how claims for the universality of the modern are intrinsically contradictory and, ultimately, indefensible - for both universalist self-legitimation and idealisation illicitly collapse particularity into universality, and must do so continually as conditions change; it will show that the efficacy of universalism depends on minimising any appearance of ethical hypocrisy by continually 'resolving' the symptoms of real contradictions as and when they appear. Such a perspective on illicit European universalism and universalisation will show that, in practice, the ontological and deontological strategies of universalism are intimately related. The ethical ideals of universality, informing the establishment of and reform of modern institutions, cannot be separated from the obstacles and distortions found in practice and associated with the effects of power.

Many of these issues have been addressed by the tradition of Western Marxism, one of whose persistent features has been the investigation of the internal relations between the forms of modern theoretical universals and the structures of dominant social relations. Lukacs, in his critique of reification, relates analytic forms of thought to class relations; Adorno relates the problems of identity thinking to modern forms of political domination; Althusser drew out the relations between the inner structures 'theoretical humanism' and bourgeois class relations; Bhaskar, similarly, deals with the contradictory forms of the modern tradition, allowing for the forms of modern

universalism to be theorised in terms of anthropic irrationalism.<sup>11</sup> Although not explicitly directed to questions of Eurocentrism, they make an indispensable contribution to them.

Only by developing these approaches will it be possible to address the problem posed by the fable of the elephant. As it stands, the various perspectives on Eurocentrism provide divergent accounts of Western political, economic and social domination: Eurocentrism appears in many guises, such as Imperialism and Orientalism, Westernisation, globalisation and so on. While they all reveal something about Eurocentrism, these accounts tend to be what Wallerstein calls Eurocentric anti-Eurocentrism.<sup>12</sup> That is, they tend to reproduce the Eurocentricities of the philosophical and theoretical discourses on modernity. They are immanent, but partial, critiques belonging to traditions which are both of and for modernity: ways of thinking which have emerged out of the modern and have largely been intended to feed more or less directly back into it. These kinds of critique are in fact the dominant ways in which moderns have understood themselves.

The analogy between the elephant and the historical object of Eurocentrism, however, has its limits and should only be taken so far. In the first place, theorists of Eurocentrism do not approach their real object from the outside. Rather, they are already inside it, they inhabit it. Eurocentrism is the very milieu of theory, constituting its encompassing environment. More importantly, perhaps, and here is the second limit on the analogy, the object of theory is inside it. Eurocentrism is a part of what modern theory is. The starting point for a critical theory must be the fact that the theories and realities of Eurocentrism are inside one another, mutually constituting one another, with each making the other what it is.

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<sup>11</sup> Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Merlin Press, London, 1971; Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973. Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, Verso, London, 1994. At this stage, 'anthropic irrationalism' need only be taken to gesture towards Bhaskar's expansive elaboration of the themes raised by Lukacs, Adorno and Althusser.

<sup>12</sup> 'Eurocentrism and its Avatars: The Dilemmas of Social Science', *New Left Review*, 226, November/December 1997.

II. Introductory Conclusions: A thoroughly problematic universalism.

The account of Eurocentrism towards which this thesis is working is as follows: Eurocentrism is the Europeanisation of the world through word and deed. It is the theory and practice of universalising the modern. It designates the changing intellectual and practical capacities for developing modern social forms and for extending them into the world. Theoretically, Eurocentrism is the illicit self-universalisation of the European. Eurocentric theory is the systematic misrecognition of the abstract generalities belonging to modern societies and putting them forward, illicitly, as universals; it is a distorting mirror held up to modern society in which the European appears to be universally valid. Practically, Eurocentrism combines historical processes of universalisation and their effects, where Eurocentric processes tend towards eliminating real cultural difference, and/or subordinating such difference to its own ends or otherwise constraining its significance. Eurocentrism entails the development and exercise of capacities for universalistic social transformation; it is the ensembles of processes through which these capacities are set to work in the effort to eradicate cultural differences and cultural autonomies; the means by which real identities between the European and the rest are established.

These forms of theory and practice are oriented towards the institution of 'universal' social relations. Equally, the institution of such relations provides a stronger social grounding for these forms of theory and practice. The ensemble of forms, and its dynamics of development and expansion, shall be dealt with here as elements of the overarching 'Europic Problematic' and elaborated in terms of 'dialectical universalisation'.

The significance of dialectics, in this context, derives from the contradictions and absences which reside in the core of both the theory and practice of European universalisation. Eurocentric theory is constituted by generalities abstracted from modern social forms, but which are treated as if they were validly applicable to all social life. As Eurocentric theory systematically 'forgets' the particularity of the European it constitutes itself as a web of absences and contradictions.

However, while its constitutive holes make it prone to critique, the intellectual problems they generate are hardly sufficient to bring the edifice of modern theory crumbling to the ground. For while theoretical claims to universality lack internal consistency, such theory does not want for purchase on the world. Indeed, so long as this form of theory continues to feed into modern institutions, and through them into capacities for changing the world, theoretical doubts can be subordinated to political ones. Eurocentric tendencies to universalisation do not rest solely, even primarily, on the abstract coherence of claims to universality. Rather, the real validity of Eurocentric theory is a practical one: its continuing ability to 'resolve' apparent problems and to reproduce and enhance capacities for universalisation. Theory works in as much as it helps to create the conditions under which modern categories can be practically applied to the world. The dynamics of the theory and practice of universalisation entail the identification of those parts of the world from which modern social relations are absent, so that they might be extended into them.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, the internal contradictions of universalism, and their effects, are of real significance for the processes of universalisation. While they are constitutive of the processes of cultural expansion, they are most keenly felt at the internal and external limits of this form of life. Externally, both the natural world and other forms of cultural life persistently pose obstacles, some of which are more or less easily overcome, others of which might threaten catastrophe. At these limits the particularism of the Eurocentric project, the attempted subsumption of all forms of life under its own categories, is starkly exposed: A truly universalising project does not face 'no go' areas.

The internal contradictions of Eurocentrism are less readily expressed so succinctly. Here it is necessary to turn away from the processes of global expansion and look inwards, to investigate the deep inner structures of this dynamic social formation. It is necessary to inquire into just what it is that is being universalised by delving into the specificities of modern European social relations. Hidden in the depths of these social relations, as it were, are the well springs of Eurocentrism. Modern social relations, following Marx's analysis of capital, have a characteristic duality: the simultaneity of

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<sup>13</sup> On this view, universalistic 'critical' theory, as sketched in the above section, becomes a vital moment in the overall process of universalisation. Universalistic criticism is simply criticism of the absence of the universals in question.

the concrete and the abstract. What is more, the abstract dimension is the dominant one. Indeed, it is this abstract dimension, rather than any specific concrete form of life, which is the real object of universalisation. It is also the abstract dimension which appears in theory as universals. What this means is that Eurocentrism has to be understood as the contradictory universalisation of contradictory universals, i.e. it is essentially dialectical.

The expression used at the very beginning to describe Eurocentrism, 'the theory and practice of universalisation,' now has this double significance: an internal inflection and an external inflection; both of which are essentially contradictory. On the one hand, the self-referential side refers to self-constitution in terms of 'universals', to the development of a society dominated by really abstract general social qualities, qualities which appear to transcend this form of life by assuming universal status. On the other hand, there is a relation to otherness, an overreaching process of cultural expansion, through which others are re-constituted in terms deriving from the self, but under the sign of the universal.

Commonly, 'dialectic' brings together process and contradiction. There are two types of dialectic: good and bad respectively. Good dialectic implies a process which is motivated by contradictions but through which those contradictions are overcome: dialectic as transformation through the transcending of internal contradictions. Bad dialectics are processes in which constitutive internal contradictions are preserved, or even intensified. Bad dialectics continue until such contradictions can no longer be sustained, at which point a crisis emerges.

These two senses of dialectic can be applied to the understanding of Eurocentrism. The first sense of dialectic here relates to the process through which we come to a critical theory of Eurocentrism: this first dialectic is the progressive one of critique.<sup>14</sup> It is the process through which the internal contradictions and illicit universalism of Eurocentrism are disclosed and articulated. As an internally contradictory form of knowledge, the universalist problematic is unable to disclose its own contradictions adequately. Disclosing these contradictions requires that a new sense of universality is

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<sup>14</sup> Critique is distinguished from criticism in that the former goes beyond pointing out errors and limitations by offering an explanation for them.

established. This involves the dialectics of real change to the conceptual form of existing universals, such that the deep, underlying conditions of theoretical production are transformed. It is here, in the development of a distinctive theory of the form, i.e. categorial structures, of the illicit universalism of Eurocentrism, that realist philosophy is of the utmost importance.

There are three moments to this process of critique.<sup>15</sup> Firstly, immanent critique discloses contradictions. Secondly, omissive critique explains those contradictions by grounding them in what is missing or absent. Illicit universals lend historically specific categories transhistorical status, so the key absence or lack within their categorial structures is an adequate distinction between the levels of particularity and generality. Without a sustainable distinction between these levels, the categories of universalism generate a dual language in which the two levels are fused together: the transhistorical is treated as the historical, while the historical becomes transhistorical. This fusion of levels, the effective collapse of any distinction between the philosophical and the sociological, however, generates the contradictory symptoms on which immanent critique feeds. The third move in this dialectic is explanatory critique: here the categorial errors and absences of theory are explained in relation to their broader social milieu. In the case of Eurocentrism it means explaining illicitly universalistic theory as the self-understanding of those enmeshed in really abstract, universal, social relations.

In addition to this epistemic inflection of dialectic, there is also an ontic one concerning the object of investigation: Eurocentrism. The process of universalising abstract social relations is itself dialectical. This time, though, we have a bad, regressive, or negative, dialectic. While constituted by contradictions in its theory, practice and social relations, it is not oriented towards their real resolution, let alone the transformation of their conditions of existence. Far from it. The negative dialectics of universalising European abstractions are those of the expansion, intensification and displacement of its constitutive contradictions. This bad dialectic is internally differentiated, with many interlocking aspects. For instance, it encompasses processes of subjectification, in which the universalist abstractions become the means of social communication and co-ordination. It also entails processes through which modern subjects are subordinated to

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<sup>15</sup> See Bhaskar *Dialectic*, Verso, London, 1993.

the often harsh realities of abstract social relations. Moreover, this dialectic tends to universalise its own conditions of existence, drawing in the world as a whole. To this end it extends its own internal absences and contradictions into other forms of culture, at the same time seeking to displace its worst effects onto them. This requires the removal of all constraints standing in the way of its doing so, producing a quite specific sense of universalisation as dialectics: the removal of the obstacles in the way of overcoming the absence of universals.<sup>16</sup>

This gives us a provisional definition of Eurocentrism as the European problematic which encompasses the dialectical universalisation of theoretical and real abstractions appearing under the guise of universals. Fortunately, for the possibility of critical theory, the contradictions within the historical processes of the European problematic constitute it as the ground from which dialectical critique emerges. That is, the European problematic is constituted by a double dialectic, with the good dialectic of critical understanding subordinate to, but emergent out of, the bad dialectics of our present mode of being. The task of critical theory is to realise the possibility for a positive theory of Eurocentrism which is immanent within the negative dialectics of Eurocentric universalisation. Indeed, as the above references to Marx and others have intimated, it is from this tradition of critical theory that many of the most valuable resources for addressing Eurocentrism have emerged.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Bhaskar gives a special place to this conception of dialectic: he speaks of 'the removal of the absenting of constraints on the absenting of absences, or ills', e.g. *Dialectic* p. 396. This conception of dialectic is central to his ethical ideal of the process of securing conditions of human flourishing. However it can be applied to modern universalisation, which generates its own perspective from which absences or ills are judged. Whether good or bad, this conception of dialectic presupposes a state of fullness or completion from as the perspective from which the dialectic must be understood.

<sup>17</sup> It is commonplace to take the opposite view and affiliate Marxism with Eurocentrism, not least because of the political practices of many communist parties acting in Marx's name. Marxism generally has also been one of the principal targets of postmodernist accusations of reproducing a Eurocentric 'grand narrative' of history and civilisation. It is not my intention here to rebut such accusations. Rather I will be concerned to show that the Marxian tradition is irreducible to these strands. Marxism possesses intellectual and political resources of a quite different kind.

### III. Chapter Outline

This work, then, sets out to develop an integrated account of Eurocentrism. It will seek to do so through a series of mutually enhancing critiques of existing ideas, carried out on two broad fronts. The first opens up an epistemic perspective on Eurocentrism, one oriented towards consolidating a self-understanding of critical theory as a critique of the forms assumed by Eurocentric universals. This self-understanding remains incomplete if it does not develop an appreciation of the process of critique, i.e. the dialectics of its own emergence and of the development of the categorial forms specific to critical-theoretical knowledge. This aspect of the work draws considerably on Louis Althusser's conception of a bourgeois-humanist problematic and Roy Bhaskar's account of a critical realist dialectics.<sup>18</sup> Both writers thematise the 'centrism' of dominant modes of thought, with Bhaskar setting out a detailed account of the irrealist, anthropocentric, forms which underlies it. By drawing Bhaskar's general theory of anthropocentric contradictions onto the more specific terrain of Althusser's problematic, it becomes possible to outline the problematic of Eurocentric universalism and to understand critical theory as a conceptual field within which this problematic can be theorised.

The second perspective on Eurocentrism is ontic. This involves a shift from the investigation of forms of knowledge to that of social relations. Of primary interest here are the deep structures and developmental tendencies of modern social relations, i.e. the forms of real universals and processes of universalisation. This dimension is developed through an integration of sociological critiques of civil society and political economy, on the one hand, with philosophical-anthropological critiques of universalism often associated with relativism. Emerging from this encounter is an account of Eurocentrism as the dialectical universalisation of the categories of civil society, i.e. the penetration of culture throughout the world by the forms of value, law and rationality specific to the modern social formation.

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<sup>18</sup> While this work draws heavily on Bhaskar's work, there are significant problems with Bhaskar's oeuvre. Bhaskar's commitment to philosophy, i.e. to the elaboration of abstract, real, universals, is ultimately 'traditional'. That is, he has a tendency to disregard the strictly formal character of philosophy and to collapse distinctions between the abstract findings of philosophy and the progressively more concrete ones of sociology and history.

While there are shifts between these epistemic and ontic concerns, throughout the following chapters, they are always treated as mutually related perspectives on a whole: Eurocentric knowing and being are considered to be internally related, as one another's mutual, and co-evolving, conditions of existence. The theoretical account of this wholeness draws the epistemic and ontic together under the overarching concept of 'combined and uneven dialectical universalisation'. It generates a deeply unsettled sense of wholeness: one characterised by partialness, precariousness, awkwardness, whose tendencies to completeness are combined with opposite tendencies to dissolution or collapse.

These themes will be elaborated in the next chapter, 'Critical theoretical Anti-Eurocentrism', which establishes the basic framework for the project as a whole. The work of this chapter pushes Althusser's conception of a 'problematic' in the direction of Winch's account of a 'form of life'. In so doing it offers a certain counterbalance to the emphasis that Althusser is understood to place on ideology and theory as the primary moments of a problematic. The conventional use of problematic is expanded in such a way that it comes to encompass theory, practice and social relations as elements within a broader complex and contradictory ensemble.

The imaginary and lived dimension of this theoretical object are developed in terms of what Fredric Jameson has called 'ideologemes', and by treating Charles Taylor's account of the Modern Imaginary as the basic ideologeme of modern social theory. This 'master' ideologeme provides modern theory with its basic ontological and anthropological presuppositions, its peculiar vision of social order and its sense of commutative justice. This aspect of the problematic can be understood as the 'ethical economic problematic'.

The key points of reference for the relational dimension of this first attempt to sketch out the theoretical object of Eurocentrism are Trotsky's 'uneven and combined development' and Gramsci's account of hegemony and the extended state.<sup>19</sup> The former inspires an account of the various modes of universalisation implied by the fragmentary expansion of forms of civil society, while the latter is deployed to illuminate modern

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<sup>19</sup> See Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, David Fernbach trans., Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1980.

political struggles as conflicts over their institution and co-ordination. Gramsci's understanding of the institution of hegemony in terms of 'unstable equilibria' also makes it possible to give an account of the conditions under which it becomes possible to represent political formations as 'realised' versions of the ethical economy.

Subsequent chapters are devoted to elaborating various aspects of the European problematic. In chapter, 3: 'Universal Ethnocentrism', the Eurocentric nature of modern social formation is explored through developing a contrast between modern universals and realist categories. The realist critique of the form of the 'universalist' categories of social theory is used here to emphasise the specificity, i.e. non-universality, of these categories. From the perspective of philosophical anthropology, 'ethnocentrism' is examined as a general, genuinely universal, feature of cultural life. From a sociological perspective, modern universalisation is established as a form of ethnocentrism. These moves are undertaken through an exploration of the emergence of the discourse of 'Eurocentrism', understood as a form of social criticism linked to movements for reform.

The public sphere within which this discourse emerged possesses a certain 'logic' of cultural and political representation, a logic which at once enables and constrains social criticism. Criticism politicises and/or depoliticises social ills, bringing existing visions of political reality into question, thereby exposing the illicit nature of their claims to universality. However, the form criticism takes means that the alternative visions it generates possess the same, illicit, form of universality. This tends to guide political practice into the reproduction of the underlying causes of social ills – causes which remain underrepresented, if not altogether unrepresented, in the public sphere.

A full and proper understanding of Eurocentrism only emerges through an interrogation of the deep structures of modern 'universalism' and its consequences for the possibility of historical reflexivity. The fourth chapter 'The Imaginary of Dialectical Universalisation,' deepens the preceding work by showing how the universalism/particularism antinomy is a basic structural feature of social theory. A critical theory of the 'universalist problematic' is developed through critiques of Ricoeur's discussion of universalism and Mannheim's account of ideology and utopia.

This resulting 'dialectic of ideology and utopia' provides a certain level of explanation for the limited nature of social criticisms of Eurocentrism. Constrained by this inner structure, the term can only be deployed as a partial form of ideology critique. It exposes forms of distributive injustice whose presence blocks the possibility of representing the world in terms of the commutative justice proper to civil society. The 'resolutions' for this kind of problem of 'Eurocentrism' are essentially policy recommendations for forms of redistribution, which generally lack any strong conception of the forms of political struggle required to bring them about. They also completely fail to disclose the realities of dialectical universalisation, reproducing its inner form and logic.

Chapter 5, 'The Dual Dialectics of the Ethical Economic Imaginary,' further deepens and broadens the concept of the Eurocentric problematic. In addition to the dialectics of ideology and utopia, the internal contradictions of the problematic also generate a second, transformative, dialectic. This locates the tendency to realist critique inside the Eurocentric problematic. The primary tensions of the problematic are shown to be a consequence of the systematic ambiguities between transhistorical and historical categories, and the strains they produce. Much critical theory is symptomatic of both tendencies, but tends to be drawn back into the Eurocentric problematic. The rationality debates and disputes over relativism provide clear illustrations of these opposing tendencies at work, and of the 'gravitational' effect of ethical economic thought.

Chapter 6, 'The Anthropic Form of Europic Universalism,' is the first of two chapters drawing out the significance of Bhaskar's account of 'realism' and 'irrealism' for the disclosure and critique of the forms of Europic Dialectical Universalisation. It provides a thorough examination of Bhaskar's development of the concept of 'anthroporealism', and explains how the categories and forms of realist dialectics are essential for comprehending the full range of real contradictions internal to modern universalism. On the one hand, Bhaskar's conception of anthropic irrealism is presented as a generalisable critical theory of universalism in philosophy, social and political theory. On the other, it suggests some direct parallels between Bhaskar's critique of philosophy of science and Marx's critique of political economy. The latter aims to show how the ethical economic imaginary posits a denaturalised world that lacks its own substantive essence and how it envisages a reconstitution of nature on the basis of desocialised

abstract relations. Within this imaginary, concrete realities are denaturalised and de-essentialised, only for this insubstantial reality to be sublated under the desocialised abstract essences of civil society.

Chapter 7, 'The Dialectics of Irrealist Social Forms', further elaborates the concept of the forms of Eurocentric universalism, showing how it can be informed by the dialectics of critical realism. Moving from the categorial structures of symbolic representations to those of social relations, Bhaskar's account of the analytic-dialectic distinction is translated into a, somewhat abstract, sociological account of the dominant forms of Eurocentric modernity. The peculiarity of modern, universal, social relations is their really abstract and analytic character: the process of their institution, meanwhile, is an over-arching dialectic. The institution of such relations is a process of universalisation, a process which entails the formal and real subsumption of concrete forms by these abstract relations. The dialectics of this form of universalisation are shown to presuppose the (coercive) mediation and reconstitution of concrete realities and the institution of the profoundly contradictory social forms of Eurocentrism.

Finally, chapter 8, '*Capital* and Europic Dialectical Universalisation', moves towards a more substantive conception of Europic Universalisation. This is achieved by offering an account of Marx's work on the value relation and fetishism. It shows how the value relation must be understood in terms of the anthropic, irrealist, forms of both its symbolic representation and social relations. Once this has been established, the development of capital comes to exemplify the conception of Europic dialectical universalisation advanced in previous chapters. This, in turn, makes it possible to understand Europic universals more generally in terms of the form of the value relation.

The concluding chapter sketches out 'The Mutual Implications of Critical Theory and Eurocentrism'. It gives a brief account of the real object of critical theoretical anti-Eurocentrism, i.e. the Europic Problematic. This can be understood as the combined and uneven multiple and complex dialectical universalisation of the Europic universal categories of civil society. It also reiterates the profound centrality of the question of Eurocentrism to the context, nature and purpose of critical theory. The theoretical contradictions grounded in the experience of Europic realities provide critical theory

with its teleonomic push, driving it on towards their disclosure and explanation. At the same time, its search for its proper theoretical object provides its teleological pull.

## Chapter 2 - Framing the thesis: Critical theoretical Anti-Eurocentrism

### I. The critique of civil society and the disclosure of Eurocentrism

A genealogy of this thesis would highlight the significance of Louis Althusser's work and his account of the modern tradition and the problematic of 'theoretical humanism'. This is, though, somewhat counter-intuitive for two reasons. The first is that the work of other thinkers has a far more prominent role in what follows than does his: his influence being more implicit than explicit. The second reason is that it would not be possible to locate this work within what has passed for the 'Althusserian tradition' of structuralist anti-humanism. This tradition, bearing his name and interpreting his work to the world, has not done him justice.<sup>1</sup> Going against the grain of much, though by no means all, reception of his work, my work intimates, if no more, that Althusser's work belongs at the very heart of any project to develop critical theory.

The Humanist Controversies revolved around the argument that Marxism, at the leading edge of the evolution of the critical theoretical development of social science, comes into its own through its opposition to 'theoretical humanism'. Marxism emerged as a 'theoretical anti-humanism': a form of politically engaged intellectual inquiry into its own conditions of existence which 'broke radically with every theory that based history and politics on an essence of man'.<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of theoretical anti-humanism, its antagonist, theoretical humanism, was revealed as the hard core of the ideologies of bourgeois cultural revolution: Marx's critique of political economy indicated how the various strands of humanism belonging to the realm of symbolic representation all possessed a common structural form which made possible a wide range of strategies for legitimating the various manifestations and configurations of bourgeois society.

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992, for a sympathetic account of Althusser and a positive account of his legacy.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Marxism and Humanism,' in *For Marx*, Verso, London, 1990. p. 227. Althusser's rhetorical announcements of a definitive break from humanism were a source of much difficulty for him and have harmed subsequent assessments of his work. Modern social theory is best understood as being dominated by forms of theoretical humanism, but containing within it tendencies towards theoretical anti-humanism; the Marxian tradition is just that region of modern intellectual terrain in which these counter tendencies are at their strongest. The present work is meant to both clarify this distinction and contribute to its Marxian pole.

Theoretical humanism could be deployed in settings as diverse as Eighteenth Century Britain and the Twentieth Century Soviet Union and still retain its ethico-political functions of both normalising the present and moralising projects for the future.

In order to show how it was able to play these legitimating and adaptive functions, 'theoretical humanism' had to be identified with the philosophical anthropology of bourgeois cultures. It provided a mode of conceiving of human being and of human association which made it possible to speak in positive ethical terms about both the social relations which constituted those societies and the inequalities they engendered. From an individual standpoint, substantive inequalities are legitimate consequences of their endeavours, given the framework within which those endeavours are undertaken. From a social perspective, inequalities are rendered ethical through their links to wealth creation and social order. That is, inequalities can be represented as mutually, if asymmetrically, beneficial.

Humanism makes it possible to represent the structures and consequences of capital, political sovereignty, and the other dominant transformations of modernity, in terms of an overarching ethical norm. The most significant theoretical/ideological achievements of theoretical humanism is to have established the arena of civil society as both the locus of humanist realisation and as the ethical standard by which all forms of life were, ultimately, to be judged. Crafted to suit the needs of the essence of man, as it appeared within theoretical humanism, the many theories of civil society mediate the institution of modern societies. These societies are defended, promoted and developed in terms of universal, humanist, interests transcending class and nation to encompass all members of the species.

It is in forms of civil society, in its broadest sense, that theoretical humanism establishes the identification, between modern European culture and wider humanity. So it is here, I shall be arguing, in the universalist notions of this form of society, in the ideological habitus of humanist 'man', and in the historical processes through which the categories of bourgeois culture are universalised, that we find the true location of Eurocentrism.

None of this should be taken to imply that these connections between Bourgeois, Nation, Europe, and Humanity are either easily established or that once they are in place

they are stable and durable. Rather, theoretical humanism is what Gramsci might have called the ultimate 'universal plane' on which political and cultural endeavours to forge and sustain such links are undertaken. How such disparate identities are characterised, identified and differentiated, and how they are related to one another, co-ordinated or brought into conflict, is the very stuff of struggles for and over hegemony. Meanwhile, the possibility of ideological success comes from the remarkable flexibility afforded by theoretical humanism and from its capacity to 'resolve' social contradictions, even if it can only do so for relatively limited periods and only in restricted spaces

As it stands, most accounts of Eurocentrism are produced on the terrain of 'theoretical humanism'. They display the symptoms of traditional theory in their profound ambiguity towards Eurocentrism: they decry some aspects of it while theoretically, normatively and practically advancing others. They can be expected to approach Eurocentrism as an ethical problem in relation to the (Eurocentric) development of forms of civil society; they can be expected to treat Eurocentrism as a problem which appears from the perspective of some or other (Eurocentric) political project on the terrain of civil society.

This connection between Eurocentrism and theoretical anti-humanism also suggests that the critique of Eurocentrism must be an extension of existing critiques of civil society, although the sense in which this is so needs further clarification. To begin with, this thesis attempts to produce theoretical objects which provide answers to the question: what really is Eurocentrism? How can its structures be understood? What kinds of tendencies does it exert? What kinds of effects does it have? It answers these questions through an interlocking set of theoretical investigations into the nature of the Eurocentricity of the theory and the reality of modern social formation.

The framework within which these questions have been approached has emerged through the pursuit of three intimately related lines of inquiry into Eurocentrism and the social sciences. Coming from one direction, 'Eurocentrism' opened up a critique of the modern traditions of political and social theory. This requires an extensive engagement with the reflective and critical strands of the modern tradition, and, in particular, it means addressing the problematic character of philosophical debates over the nature of the knowledges produced by this tradition. The theoretical object towards which this

first line of inquiry has been working is what I shall be calling, with due deference to Althusser, 'theoretical Eurocentrism'.

Coming at things from another direction, the thesis also contributes to a social scientific understanding of the Eurocentric realities of modern social formation. Making progress along this avenue demands working through accounts of the nature of modern social practices and relations, and tackling problems related to the social world they have engendered. The object with which this second line of inquiry is concerned is what I shall be calling 'real Eurocentrism'.

Thirdly, this work confronts a defining characteristic of the terrain of 'theoretical Eurocentrism': it makes adequate self-understanding impossible, being structured in a way that makes it impossible for the theoretical objects 'theoretical Eurocentrism' and 'real Eurocentrism' to appear within its horizons. A necessary condition for the production of such theoretical objects is a distinctive terrain, i.e. 'theoretical anti-Eurocentrism'. The pursuit of this alternative form of representation is the third orientation of the present work.

The theoretical results of this investigation are best appreciated when approached from four vantage points, with each perspective providing a more finely tuned answer to the questions about the nature of Eurocentrism. The first take on this is to say that the three theoretical tasks just outlined are intimately related to one another. This follows from the ways in which Eurocentricity in social theory and Eurocentricity in society are internally related, as discussed in the previous chapter. In addition, the distinctive theoretical terrain of theoretical anti-Eurocentrism emerges in the course of a critical-reflexive theoretical struggle with the structures and effects of Eurocentrism in theory and reality. Two kinds of theoretical struggles are therefore indissolubly linked together: that for the disclosure of theoretical and real Eurocentrism and that for development of theoretical anti-Eurocentrism. Put in these terms, the extent to which the social sciences engage in the struggle for a theoretical anti-Eurocentrism serves as a way of defining the very nature of those sciences. To the extent that the modern tradition is indeed a reflective movement towards the self-understanding of modernity, then the development of social science is a continuous struggle for critical-theoretical anti-Eurocentrism.

A second perspective enriches the first by lending it a greater measure of specificity. The illicit universalism of Eurocentrism is both one of its defining characteristics and an essential feature of the armature of modern social formation. It is though also a weak point: the problems of both the theory and practice of modern social formation are at their most concentrated in their universalism and universalisation respectively. Working towards theoretical anti-Eurocentrism means exposing both the explicit claims for, and the unacknowledged implications of, universalism. So, the argument goes, the 'royal road' to theoretical anti-Eurocentrism is to critique the universalism of theoretical Eurocentrism – attacking the modern tradition at its Achilles' Heel.<sup>3</sup>

A third take provides further specification. The dialectics of universalisation are neither concerned with ahistorical notions of the European, nor with European categories in general. Rather, they are a matter of the specifically modern character of the European associated with the emergence and pursuit of 'bourgeois cultural revolution', or with the global implications of the development of civil society and what I am calling 'ethical economy'.<sup>4</sup> 'Bourgeois cultural revolution', as used here, is a doubly broad conception of modern social transformations. On the one hand, it is sufficiently wide to encompass the philosophical, political and historical dimensions of a whole culture. On the other hand it is sufficiently abstract and loose a notion to allow it to encompass regions of modernity whose appearance bears little if any similarity to the European but which would be unintelligible in the absence of Europeanisation in some sense.

A persistent temptation of political and social theory is to understand Europeanisation as the expansion of, and dominance by, specific concrete forms of culture. This can be done at the expense of recognising, say, underdevelopment as more than the effects one culture has on the development of another. An adequate understanding of underdevelopment, rather, will acknowledge its modernity; it will be able to account for it not only in terms of relations between cultures, but also in terms of the 'internalisation' of modern social relations by peripheral locations within a world system. Today, Americanisation, for instance, is spoken of in terms of the spread of

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<sup>3</sup> Roy Bhaskar uses this idea of an Achilles Heel critique: *Dialectic*, Verso, London, 1993. Chapter Two; Section 3.

specific institutions and commodities, from the prescriptions of structural adjustment and good governance, to MNCs, schools of management, fast food or troops on the ground. However, while the dialectical universalisation of the categories of civil society can have such substantive implications, they do not necessarily do so. Their universalisation is transfactual, i.e. they produce effects which are apparently and substantively quite varied. Ghanaian farmers who mill rice using passing cars and trucks bear no resemblance to any European or neo-European farmers. Yet this practice is unintelligible outside the context of the combined and uneven development of the categories of civil society on a global scale. The penetration of Ghanaian society by the relations of state and capital is a form of real Europeanisation, but the structures, appearances and functions of social formation here are quite individual. Ghanaian modernity is the result of a specific history of becoming European and being, problematically, integrated into a European dominated world order.

The universalisation of modern relations, then, is compatible with very different pathways into a singular, encompassing, modernity. What is needed is a way of understanding the Eurocentricities of modernity in terms which cannot be reduced either to the effects that bourgeois culture revolution has produced in societies in Europe, nor to these local configurations (and trajectories) of relations between state and law and capital and ideology. Instead, Europeanisation is a process in which the universalisation of the categories of civil society entails their continuing disaggregation and reconfiguration: Europeanisation is the uneven and combined dialectical universalisation of the categories of civil society.

The fourth and final take indicates how this idea can be fleshed out. What I have said up to now implies that 'theoretical Eurocentrism' and 'real Eurocentrism' are both modes of the uneven and combined dialectical universalisation of the categories of civil society. What I want to point to here are the three main sources for 'critical-theoretical anti-Eurocentrism'.

What has already been said about Althusser indicates that Marx's theory of capital provides one of the most important resources for developing a theoretical account of

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'bourgeois cultural revolution' is used by Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*, London, Routledge, 2002.

dialectical universalisation. I will show how capital is indeed a form of dialectical universalisation, and how it is possible to generalise from this to other modern forms of social relations.

The reference to Althusser can also be taken to suggest two other primary resources. Althusser development of non-reductive political-economy depended, in part, on his engagement with Gramsci's writings, and it is to Gramsci that I have turned for similar reasons. In the present context, however, Gramsci's writings on hegemony will also be taken to be directly dealing with the political, philosophical and wider cultural problems arising from *the uneven and combined dialectical universalisation of the categories of civil society*.

Lastly, elsewhere it has been argued that Roy Bhaskar's work on critical realist philosophy can be seen as the most valuable elaboration of the philosophical implications of Althusser's work.<sup>5</sup> Broadly accepting the spirit of this judgement, I shall be treating Bhaskar's work as a philosophical elaboration of Marx's account of capital. In effect I shall be arguing that dialectical critical realism takes the philosophical dimension of 'theoretical anti-humanism' forward. What is more, Bhaskar has also developed a conception of dialectical universalisation. While I use his work in a very different way to that he intended, I nevertheless use it to make a fundamental contribution to this development of 'theoretical anti-Eurocentrism'.

These then are, in outline, the main themes taken up in the course of this work: how the efforts to produce the two theoretical objects of 'theoretical Eurocentrism' and 'real 'Eurocentrism' demand that 'theoretical anti-Eurocentrism' is driven by a real engagement with the relativity of the modern tradition; how coming to terms with historical relativity means confronting the illicit universalism of the modern tradition and by implication, relating that universalism to the social conditions under which it has

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<sup>5</sup> Resch, *Althusser*. This verdict was reached before the publication of Bhaskar's *Dialectic* and could not have anticipated later works such as *From East to West* London, Routledge, 2000; *Meta-Reality*, Sage, New Delhi, 2002; *Reflections on MetaReality: Transcendence, Emancipation and Everyday Life*, Sage, New Delhi, 2002. I draw primarily on *Dialectic*, though not on those parts which most clearly anticipate Bhaskar's subsequent trajectory. I have explored the tensions in Bhaskar's work elsewhere. See Hostettler and Norrie, 'Are Critical Realist Ethics Foundational?' in *Critical Realism: The Difference it Makes*, Justin Cruickshank, ed., Routledge, London, 2003.

flourished, and to whose ongoing reproduction and change it contributes; how addressing European forms of universalism and universalisation demands a more specific engagement with the theories and practices of the bourgeois cultural revolution that engenders the spread of civil society; how holding onto the principle that civil society does not expand as a piece, but evolves through a movement in which its constituents move into the world in an uneven and combined manner; how developing 'critical-theoretical anti-Eurocentrism' means drawing together the most advanced contributions to theoretical anti-humanism, i.e. the political, economic and philosophical dimensions of the critique of civil society.

## II. Marxism and Eurocentrism

Contemporary critical theory voices a widespread concern with issues related to Eurocentrism. This includes numerous criticisms of Marx and Marxism. Not only do many currents of critical theory flow away from Marx's work, they are often motivated to do so by a concern that Marxism has been complicit, philosophically and/or politically, with the darker, negative, sides of modernity. Given the available streams of critical theory, then, it might appear perverse to identify the critique of Eurocentrism so closely with strands of Marxism. However, thinking about Eurocentrism has been severely hampered by this self-denying ordinance, and ways need to be found to overcome this by examining some of the problems faced by these negative assessments of Marxist critical theory.

A brief examination of the most important resources I draw on is sufficient to show how weighted it is towards 'Western Marxism.' For a general account of modern politics I have turned to Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony and to others who have taken up his ideas; for the critique of political economy, of course, I draw on Marx's work on capital, but also on the writings of later commentators such as Derek Sayer and Moishe Postone who pay special attention to the abstract qualities of the culture of capital; for a valuable take on the spatial dynamics of capital I used David Harvey's *Limits to Capital*; Harvey has also contributed to contemporary European cultural theory, but it is Fredric Jameson's work, notably *The Political Unconscious*, which provides greater scope for a more general account of 'bourgeois cultural revolution'. All these are, of course, in addition to the philosophical contributions of Althusser and Bhaskar.

I have not turned to these writers because an explicit concern with Eurocentrism is either widely shared by many of them, or even given a very high priority by any of them. Indeed, they have notably failed to produce any sustained engagement with the problems of Eurocentrism. There are some, such as Jameson, who have been personally drawn into disputes about their portrayal of the realities of Eurocentrism, and others have attracted criticism on the grounds of their supposed Eurocentrism. Western Marxism as a whole has been largely preoccupied with the critical elaboration of Marx's legacy under the socio-political conditions of twentieth century Europe and neo-Europe, conditions which changed in important ways since Marx grappled with them. With Fordism and Post-Fordism, post-modernity and the culture of late capitalism as its primary substantive objects, it might reasonably be objected that Western Marxism has had too narrow a focus to be of great value for theoretical anti-Eurocentrism.

Also, Marx's own writing, along with that of many who adopted them as a way of understanding the world, have been identified with the plainly Eurocentric notions of progress prevalent during the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Marx's account of capital has appeared to some as yet one more attempt to grant European culture undue world-historical status. In terms drawn straight from the very political economy Marxism is meant to be so critical of, we find the forward looking creative dynamism of capital contrasted with the sluggish, aimlessly gyrating, backward looking cultures whose death and decay is further hastened with capital's every advance. Marx's story of capital appears as just another telling of the familiar, Eurocentric, tale of the miracle birth of modern Europe and its subsequent diffusion into a world which ought to be grateful (at least for the prospect of socialism).

However, the critique of civil society can be understood in terms of a developing theoretical anti-Eurocentrism. This is largely due to the often unstated implications of this tradition and its tendencies towards theoretical anti-humanism. The critique of civil society operates at a number of different directions at once: it has a general,

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<sup>6</sup> Prominent 'anti-Eurocentric' writers, such as Rajani Kanth and John Hobson, in their very different ways, try to locate Marx's work within a Eurocentric framework. Their respective assessments, however, fail to recognise the tensions within Marx's work. Rajani Kanth, *Against Eurocentrism*, Palgrave MacMillan,

philosophical, dimension concerned with transhistorical categories; it has an epoch specific dimension, exemplified by the general theory of capital; it has a substantive, political and historical sociological dimension concerned with the specifics of historical processes and conjunctures. Within Marxism, this theoretical differentiation has of course long been recognised, with the distinction between dialectical and historical materialism being only one of the most prominent expressions of this. However, these various tendencies can all be seen in realist terms. Its philosophical dimension is oriented towards philosophical realism: a general, ontological, theory: its 'middle range' orientation is towards a sociology of modernity; substantively, it pursues historically specific ensembles of structures, processes and events.

Against this, Eurocentric social science systematically fails to sustain the distinctions between these levels of historical generality: its categories are reductive/antinomial, running together and/or splitting apart the transhistorical, the capital specific and the historically specific. Its categories are necessarily ambivalent, making it impossible to properly disambiguate the level at which categories are pitched. When Althusser asserts the realist thrust of Marxism in terms of its opposition to all forms of reductive essentialism, it is this categorial structure he is working against. The critique of essentialism and theoretical humanism hinges on developing the novel categorial forms able to sustain the necessary distinctions and connections between levels of generality needed for greater internal coherence. The critique of Eurocentrism is no more than the further development of these tendencies.

However, theoretical developments within and between each of these dimensions are never even: the development of realist, theoretical anti-Eurocentrism has its own complex and uneven temporality. Not only does realist theory struggle to keep up with the combined and uneven developments of capitalist modernity, it also struggles to hold the various senses of reality together. The stratification of theory into these different dimensions means that establishing a coherent field of theory is an extremely difficult task. There is a constant danger of theory losing its way when it becomes divorced from the reality it seeks to comprehend, a danger which is reproduced within theory when the development of each dimension is divorced from the development of the others. While

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New York, 2005: John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

the underdevelopment of realism in one dimension can retard it in another, it might equally be the case that the overdevelopment of the realist thrust in, say, philosophy, can be at the expense of its underdevelopment in, say history.

For example, recent decades have witnessed an intensification of those trends initiated within the Frankfurt School which have gradually led to a marginalisation, not to say to exclusion, of Marx's work within the field of cultural criticism. These developments have led to a retrospective broadening of the field of critical theory, a field whose genealogy encompasses many 'masters of suspicion' including Nietzsche and Wittgenstein as well as Foucault and Derrida. The related emphasis on language has been associated with an inclination to philosophical relativism and a repudiation of realism. As a consequence, while much of great value has come from these developments, this turn has often been at the expense of a sufficiently broad view of the social, with some critical approaches risking a linguistic reduction of social life, and even falling into the trap of eschewing any sense of the reality which lies beyond the language used to deal with it.

This critical-theoretical project requires that the criticisms of Eurocentrism levelled at Marx and subsequent writers are properly addressed. Broadly speaking, as mentioned above, two kinds of problem have been raised. The first is historiographical, and it takes issue with representations of Europe which identify, or fuse, it with capital, at least in the first instance, while separating, or splitting capital off from the non-European. The various schemes of successive modes of production are regarded as grounding the theory of capital in a grand narrative which culminates in European modernity. This identification is deemed to be illicit in the sense that it denies the universality of possible cultural progress. Alternative histories argue for the immanence of capital in all of world's cultural zones, or else argue that capital developed in the non-European world but was appropriated by Europeans.<sup>7</sup> In general, this strand of criticism associates

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<sup>7</sup> Hobson's account locates the development of capitalism within a history of world economic development. Europe was the first country to fully develop it, but the ground had been prepared by others, especially China and the Muslim world, which might otherwise have made 'the breakthrough to modernity' on their own account. Blaut's similarly argues that capitalism was emerging in non-European locations within a world system, but that Europeans imposed colonial control over that system.

Marxism with a failure to sustain universalist humanist commitments. Marxism appears Eurocentric in the sense that it lends support to the idea of a special relationship between Europe and cultural progress and lends a measure of justification to European domination of the modern world system.<sup>8</sup>

The second kind of criticism is more philosophical in character, and takes the opposite view of the first. Where the historiographic issue is cast in terms of a failure of modern universalism, the philosophical critique is advanced in terms of Marxism's essentially modernist commitments.<sup>9</sup> From this perspective Marxism is complicit with the defining European tradition of 'rationalism' and 'materialism', where these terms are used in a strongly negative fashion. From this perspective Marxism appears Eurocentric in a rather different way. In keeping with the post-structuralist and deconstructionist impulses which drive such criticism, Marxism appears to be complicit with the illicit universalism of modern tradition.

The stream of critical theory on which I draw, then, is regarded more as a source of Eurocentrism than as a possible resource for theoretical anti-Eurocentrism, but its critics place Marxism on both opposing sides of philosophical debates about the nature of modernity and reason. These kinds of criticism cannot be dismissed out of hand: both illicit particularism and illicit universalism are found in Marx's writings and in writings of those who use his name; there is no question that these forms of Eurocentrism are present in this tradition. However, criticisms of these strands have been made from within the Marxist tradition itself. Not only has the grand narrative of modes of production, for instance, been rejected after Marx but, as Etienne Balibar points out, Marx personally wrestled with this issue.<sup>10</sup> Any claim that Marx's writing or the subsequent tradition can be defined by its Eurocentrism greatly overstates the case and ignores all evidence to the contrary. At the very least the ambiguities need to be recognised. More importantly, the full implications of such criticisms can only be realised by pushing them forward on Marxian, realist, terrain.

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Identifying Europe with capital is akin to denying primitive accumulation by making a claim for original possession. This in turn serves as a justification for the unequal profits that accrue from a distorted political-economy.

<sup>8</sup> The form of these kinds of arguments is dealt with in chapter 7.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Rajani Kanth's *Against Eurocentrism*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2005

<sup>10</sup> Etienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, Verso, London, 1995.

The arguments supporting this run parallel to the one Althusser makes about reading *Capital*. Althusser developed a theory of *Capital* as a step in the evolution of a distinctive problematic. This means that it cannot be properly interpreted or understood when read in the idiom of political economy, which belongs on the irrealist terrain of theoretical humanism. In the absence of a full appreciation of the transformative tendencies at work, perspectives on *Capital* make it appear wrong-headed or as something of a mystery, because it is assumed that the meanings of the theory should be translated back into those of theoretical humanism. However, critique works on the forms of appearances embedded in reality to produce a novel substantive theory of that reality, and it also has unavoidable implications for a novel form of philosophical realism. Misquoting Kuhn, after such critique one lives both with the sense of a new reality and with a new sense of reality, only the first of which is available within the horizons of theoretical humanism.<sup>11</sup> A great deal of commentary on Marx's work, and most criticism levelled at Marxist and critical theory, emanates from the terrain of theoretical Eurocentrism. These interpretations are shaped by their own presuppositions, and by the patterns of presences and absences they reproduce.

None of this should be taken to imply that the Marxian tradition can be simply exonerated in the face of accusations of Eurocentrism. To the contrary, it needs to be acknowledged that some of Marx's own writing, and a great deal of the subsequent writing in his name, have reproduced the conventional forms of wisdom that critical theory seeks to overturn. More seriously, it also needs to be recognised that some strands of the Marxist tradition have been profoundly implicated in Eurocentric political projects. However, there is much more to this work than any simple verdict would allow. Althusser argued that theoretical production takes place on the terrain of hegemony, and is therefore marked by class struggle. This can be read in the relatively narrow terms of class antagonisms being inflected through theory or, more broadly, as a site of potential resistance to bourgeois cultural revolution and the institution of the modern Imaginary and the vision of civil society. There needs not only to be a recognition of the intense struggle that goes on between tradition and critical theory, but also of that which takes place within the Marxian tradition itself. The benefit of doing

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 1962.

so is that *Capital* provides resources without which Eurocentrism is unintelligible. Belittling, never mind excluding, its disclosure of the realities of modernity only closes down the possibility of theoretical anti-Eurocentrism.

### III: Eurocentrism, ethical economy, hegemony.

The above general comments offer some vindication of pursuing the tendencies of Marxian theory. The following offers some rather more substantive thoughts on its relation to Eurocentrism. Drawing out the intimate relations between the problems of philosophy and those of politics can set the scene. For an account of the former, Bhaskar's work on philosophical irrealism is most valuable, while Gramsci's work on hegemony is indispensable for the latter. The following step turns to the symbolic terrain on which these two sets of problems co-mingle: what shall be called 'ethical economy'. The account of ethical economy given here will provide an outline of the essential form of theoretical humanism, and it begins with what Charles Taylor has called the Modern Imaginary – a vision of social order whose parameters provide the conceptual and normative limits of visions of modern society. The form of the ethical economy provides a more general object of critique than the discipline of political economy, and it provides the starting point for a broad critique of theoretical Eurocentrism. There shall be a brief account of the implications for understanding modernity within the horizons circumscribed by this Imaginary which turn on its illicit universalism and ethnocentrism. Finally, the suggestion that dialecticisation is the appropriate response to the illicit universalism of ethical economy will be taken up. Dialectics, here, will be understood as submitting given forms and categories to a radical historicisation. The dialectics of critique will be presented as the undoing of illicit universalism and the simultaneous generation of theoretical anti-Eurocentrism. Finally, this dialectic generates an account of both theoretical Eurocentrism and real Eurocentrism: it shows how the illicit universalism of ethical economy operates as a dialectic, and it discloses the dialectical universalisation of the social relations underpinning the ethical economy.

Turning first to the relations between the philosophical and the political. Modern philosophy and politics confront what appear to be analogical problems: on the one hand there are issues of identity and alterity, while on the other hand there are problems

of order and change. More than this, these problems are intimately related to one another. Firstly, philosophy and politics mutually interpenetrate so that their respective problems are not merely analogical but have in practice become two aspects of a single problem, i.e. they are both aspects of the problematics of hegemony. Secondly, both problems have a certain 'shape,' i.e. they have a common character. They are both attempts to resolve problems of the 'ethical economy'.

Within philosophy, Bhaskar has argued,

Two great problems have dominated philosophy: (a) *the problem of the one and the other*, of *diremption* from an assumed original unity, of negation and of change – the dialectical problem par excellence; and its analytical counterpart, (b) *the problem of the one and the many*, of order and its opposition, the problem of chaos.<sup>12</sup>

He goes on:

The immediate origin of both for us lies in the Platonic response to worrying change and diversity – the problem of relativism, bounding the tradition. The analysis of negation in terms of difference and the establishment of a (potentially) dialectically accessible hierarchy among the Forms, aligned under the primacy of the Form of the Good, provides, as Whitehead correctly appreciated, the base-line for all subsequent philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

Bhaskar goes on to argue that the way in which these questions were answered established the tradition of philosophy as *irrealist*.<sup>14</sup> Irrealist philosophical representations of the world are (i) constituted by *anthropic* contradictions and (ii) have the effect of normalising past and present changes. Its contradictions mean that the irrealist tradition is essentially antinomial/reductive: splitting human existence from the world and/or collapsing the two together. The result is a set of internally related anthropocentric and anthropomorphic fallacies. Meanwhile, these contradictions allow philosophical and political theory to function as ideologies. They make possible the basic task of the dominant symbolic order, i.e. the formal resolution of real contradictions.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, p. 309. Italics in the original.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, *passim*. The next two chapters, 4 and 5, give a full account of irrealism and how it relates to the problematic of Eurocentrism.

<sup>15</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*. Jameson draws on Levi Straus's account of the symbolic order.

Bhaskar's work on the anthropic categorial structures of irrealist philosophy and theory shed light on the workings of theoretical humanism. However, in order to realise their full worth for this project, it is necessary to historicise these very general claims about anthropic irrealism. The tradition of theoretical humanism is certainly anthropic, but in its own peculiar way, i.e. it is Eurocentric. This cultural specificity of theoretical humanism is due to its internal relation to modernity, its essentially political role in informing and stabilising bourgeois cultural revolution, i.e. its participation in real Eurocentrism.<sup>16</sup> These ties give its anthropic irrealism a determinate, bourgeois, character,<sup>17</sup> and imbue the irrealist anthropic contradictions and absences of theoretical humanism with their specific form, i.e. forge theoretical humanism as theoretical Eurocentrism.

It is Gramsci's work which best informs our understanding of the relations between modern philosophy and politics. His critique of traditional political theory pivots on the 'expansion' of orthodox conceptions of the state.<sup>18</sup> Regarded as the 'master noun' of modern political thought, the state has been treated largely in legal and constitutional terms and/or instrumentally.<sup>19</sup> However, Gramsci relocates the 'master noun' within the problematic of hegemony, moving political theory away from theoretical humanism and towards a realist historical sociology of political modernity. Hegemony is a complex concept, providing a framework within which to draw together the social processes of the 'integral state': an emergent, complex, social location, formed through the development, articulation and interpenetration of the dominant social relations of modernity - value, law, democracy and reason.<sup>20</sup> Hegemony involves the struggle to achieve political and cultural leadership within (developing) bourgeois societies, and its success can be measured by the extent to which it establishes a dominant sense of identity and alterity, order and change. Such a political achievement depends on establishing a philosophical world-view capable of mediating moments of relative stability between relations of social forces.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Bourgeois is used in the most general sense possible, and does not refer to any specific bourgeoisie.

<sup>18</sup> Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, (trans. David Fernbach), Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1980.

<sup>19</sup> On the 'master noun' of political theory, see Quentin Skinner's *Visions of Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> This basic idea was taken up by Althusser and Poulantzas and is now regarded as a distinguishing feature of what became known as 'structural' Marxism.

The imperatives of Hegemony demand that philosophy is turned to the task of world making. The problems of philosophy, on the other hand, arise from the problems generated on the terrain of hegemony. Modern European philosophy and the problem of sustain order social order in processes of modern social formation merge into one another. Together they delineate the horizons of Eurocentrism. The most significant form they produce is the 'ethical economy'.

Moving on to the ethical economy and the 'Modern Imaginary'. Charles Taylor's considerations on the place of modern political theory in modern society have close affinities with those of both Durkheim and Gramsci who have argued, in their different ways, that theory or philosophy must be understood as an essential modern social mediation. Taylor, for instance, has spoken of modernity as 'theory saturated,' meaning that political theory is one of the chief intellectual means by which modern societies constitute themselves. That is, the political practices, institutions and relationships required for the ongoing reproduction and transformations of modernity depend on this intellectual tradition. Collective and institutional practices need to be informed, coordinated and guided by political visions which, while perhaps intimated by practice, are only crystallized by more or less specialised theoretical work.

Taylor develops this idea in his work on the 'modern imaginary' where he advances a concept of a common core for the modern tradition. The modern imaginary is a specifically modern vision of the nature of social life, significantly contrasting with those of non-modern societies. This vision 'enables, through making sense of,' the practices of modern society, and thereby serves to give a general definition to modern social formation.<sup>21</sup>

Prior to the rise of the modern, moral orders were bounded by a strong sense of fixed moral horizons. These were of two kinds. Some were conceptions of natural justice based on timeless, given, laws. Such a shared sense of the just would bind together a given community and provide the standards of justice by which unequal relations could be judged and, if need be, forced to conform. Where this first kind of vision could

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<sup>21</sup> Taylor, 'Modern Social Imaginaries' in *Public Culture*, 14(1), 2002, pp. 91-124. p.91.

inspire the active restitution of a just order, the other kind of moral vision conceived the world as an integrated and self-regulating socio-cosmic order. Disturbances to social relations were understood to ripple out through the natural order as a whole, which would then be expected to reassert itself in no uncertain manner.

For present purposes, it is useful to introduce the term 'ethical economy' to describe the modern vision of sociality as outlined by Taylor. The term 'ethical' is useful here because it suggests kinship with conceptions of pre-modern 'moral economies' whilst also clearly distinguishing the modern imaginary from them. The term 'moral economy' has been used by Edward Thompson and James C. Scott to describe pre- or non-modern social visions, and their distinctive forms of commutative justice.<sup>22</sup> Moral economies are predicated on ties of personal interdependence within hierarchies of wealth, power and social standing. The justice of exchanges between unequal individuals is assessed in terms of the highly differentiated obligations and duties attached to relative power and wealth. This provides a fertile ground for competition over relative moral standing. Scott, for instance, provides vivid accounts of poorer members of communities attempting to diminish the moral standing of its stronger members by playing up discrepancies between the means the wealthy have at their disposal and their failure to use them to meet the obligations they have to others. At the same time they play down their own means and stress their own worthiness as recipients of largess. The rich, meanwhile, do exactly the same – enhancing their own status by emphasising their own good conduct and playing down their means. They too stress how well off and unworthy those making claims on them really are. The 'moral' quality of this discourse is inseparable from the concrete and interpersonal characteristics of the disputes.

Taylor speaks of the modern social imaginary as 'a new conception of the moral order of society.'<sup>23</sup> Since Grotius and Locke, this modern view has been displacing pre-modern visions of moral orders grounded in the nature of things. With the new conception of moral order comes a new meaning of commutative justice.

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<sup>22</sup> Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1980; James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, Yale University Press, London, 1976.

<sup>23</sup> *Idem.* p.92.

It is a commonplace to assert that modern theory revolves around asocial, abstract, individuals, and that it lacks any sense of the social.<sup>24</sup> Emile Durkheim, in 'Intellectuals and Individualism', for instance, argued the necessity for just such an abstract subject of ethics.<sup>25</sup> Prevailing conditions, because they engender such a high degree of substantive social differentiation, demand an abstract, rather than substantive subject. So varied are concrete conditions of modern life that no ethics can be derived from any substantive conception of persons or the ties between. The ethical quality of modern relations must begin from the premise that individual circumstances were wholly accidental: The individual as such, stripped of the specificities of substantive identity and status, became the only stable point upon which a widely applicable ethical language could be developed. Taylor though, argues that modern ethics requires more than this, that some sense of the sociality of such an abstract individual is required. Indeed, he argues, it is already present in the fabric of modern social theory.<sup>26</sup> In effect, what Taylor adds to Durkheim's account is the need for modern ethics to have an abstract social context, i.e. a sense of society in the abstract. "The flip side of the new understanding of the individual is a new understanding of sociality: the society of mutual benefit, whose functional differentiations are ultimately contingent and whose members are fundamentally equal."<sup>27</sup>

The most significant distinguishing feature of the modern vision of moral order, the 'ethical economy' is that it is no longer grounded in a view of natural law, justice or hierarchy. Instead, the modern view, Taylor argues, derives the boundaries of moral order from the nature of human sociality itself. The modern view entails (i) consenting or contractual association and exchange for mutual benefit, (ii) regulation by natural rights between (iii) equal individuals. This sense of sociality provides the otherwise missing ontic limitations on possible moral order which were previously provided by either natural law or cosmic hierarchy.

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<sup>24</sup> Taylor makes this point himself, with great force, in 'Overcoming Epistemology.' This can be found in *After Philosophy*, Baynes et al (eds.), MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1987.

<sup>25</sup> Durkheim, 'Individualism and the Intellectuals' [1898] (trans. S. and J. Lukes), *Political Studies* 17(1): 19-30, 1969.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor, 'Modern Social Imaginaries'. Unlike Durkheim, Taylor does not attempt any explanation for the necessity of such abstractions. Taylor, in what can appear as a rather one sided rejection of functionalism, tends to see modernity as having been produced by a particular kind of Imaginary.

<sup>27</sup> Taylor, *Ibid*, p. 99.

Another distinctive feature of this vision of sociality is that the parts are integrated into a system of mutually beneficial efficient causation.<sup>28</sup> We might say that the parts of the whole are conceived as being mutually functional. In drawing attention to this, Taylor is actually showing how the idea of mutuality in relations between individuals has its sociological corollary in various kinds of impersonal relations, regardless of personal intentions. That is to say, the idea of interpersonal relations is projected onto the impersonal organisation of society “The crucial thing in the new conception is that our purposes mesh, however divergent they may be in the consciousness of each of us. They involve us in an exchange of advantages.”<sup>29</sup>

To bring this point home, Taylor not only refers to Adam Smith’s ‘hidden hand, but also to Smith’s idea that the common attitude of respect for status distinctions helps to sustain social order. At this point the formality of ideas of equality, as expressed in concerns for mutuality and the ‘exchange of advantages’, comes into contact with the realities of substantive inequalities. Unlike pre-modern visions, the modern imaginary does not valorise any particular hierarchy.<sup>30</sup> Instead, it makes the justification of social hierarchies dependent on how they function with respect to the above form of social relations. In *A Theory of Justice*, for example, John Rawls’ develops his ‘difference principle’ precisely in order to establish a balance between functional inequalities of wealth on the one hand, and the need for such inequalities to be limited, on the other.<sup>31</sup>

The modern vision of sociality also provides a terrain on which the normative aspects of substantive issues are staged and fought out. However, struggles over the regulation of impersonal relations, with their stark separation between interpersonal exchanges and facts of relative wealth, stand in clear contrast with moral economic ones. The term ‘ethical’, with its connotations of depersonalised, abstract and generalised, normative imperatives, is more adequate to the character of modern discourse. It also relates to the abstract character of this vision of sociality which dissociates it from any particular substantive moral vision of social order.

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<sup>28</sup> Taylor, *Ibid*, p. 101.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, *Ibid*, p. 101

<sup>30</sup> Taylor emphasises the way that pre-modern visions privilege legal or natural orders over other concerns. Modern visions, by contrast, are said to subordinate all other considerations to the special character they accord to social relations.

As for 'economy', it is more appropriate to use this term in relation to the modern vision than pre-modern social forms. It is, after all, a specifically modern usage to refer to wider social relations as an economy. Specifically, Taylor notes that for Locke social relations in general are conceived as 'economic' in that they are relations of mutual service, viewed as ordered, peaceful and productive, and regarded as forms of profitable exchange. Taylor's line of argument can usefully be developed to encompass two senses in which the economic nature of the modern vision can be understood as universal. In the first place, the economic becomes the common quality of all social spheres, not only the economy as such. The 'economic' relationship, i.e. the efficient exchange of mutual benefit between consenting individuals with equal status, has become the model for all social relations, with the qualities specific to the narrowly economic sphere being projected onto other spheres. Secondly, the idea of economic relations is also projected onto relations between spheres of life, onto society as a whole. This second moment of universality is that of concrete universality, generating the vision of society as a set of interlocking and mutually functional institutions. This allows for conception of the self-equilibrating mechanism of the economy to be relocated at the more general level: the de-politicised vision of a self-stabilising society. For his part, Taylor also notes how the economy as such becomes the primary concern of modern public life, giving a kind of purpose to history and social change.

The ethical economy, it turns out, provides a multiplicity of economic forms with which to imagine modern social order and justice. It provides the basic conceptual and normative terrain on which political economy, along with other forms of modern social theory, operates. The vision of an ethical economy makes practical understandings of the various concrete realities of modern social formations possible whilst, at the same time, investing them with normative value. The ethical economy is a medium through which actual political economies become real possibilities and, at the same time, can be represented as embodiments of ethical values.

The implications of this for modern social theory, and for its Eurocentricity, cannot be understated. Firstly, the ethical economy provides a focus for the critique of how

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<sup>31</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford, OUP, 1973.

modern social theory operates, both as a body of ideas and as a mediating social relation constitutive of modern social formation. As a concept it has a somewhat broader, if more abstract, reference than political economy, belonging to a more general theory of theory. As such, it allows for a shift away from the relatively narrow critique of political economy to the more encompassing critique of the modern tradition. Secondly, ethical economy points to the intersection between modern philosophy and politics, i.e. to hegemony. Taylor's account of the Imaginary constitution of modern societies pays little attention to the political mediation of the terrain on which practical and ethical considerations are formulated and fought out. As such, the ethical economy needs to be seen as framing the formulation of competing substantive visions of the world. It is only through the mediation of party and state, through struggles to work out hegemonic projects, that the imaginary enters into reality. The institution of the modern imaginary is nothing if not political.

Given its relation to hegemony, finally, the ethical economy provides a common focus for the wide range of issues associated with Eurocentrism. The ethical economy provides the ideal towards which European societies are oriented, as well as the standards by which they judge themselves and others. This vision, however, is profoundly problematic in many ways, and it demands the manifold critique of its theoretical and real universalisation as a necessary response. Such critique provides the essential core of a critical theory of Eurocentrism.

The first step of this critique is to recognise the ethical economy as the dominant ideologue of modern social theory. In the ethical economy we have a kind of figure, or figuration: a means of lending form to various sorts of ideas. These ideas, as Taylor makes clear, are ways of making sense of the modern, of providing its modes of practical and moral reasoning with their presuppositions. It gives shape to what, in Althusser's terms, are the lived relations of ideology. In fact, the ethical economy is something like the master figure of modern ideology, the primal form around which the symbolic and ideological order of modernity is organised.

A basic function of any symbolic order, argues Fredric Jameson after Lévi-Strauss, is the formal resolution of real contradictions. That is, the dominant symbolic representation of social order tends to 'reconcile' its real antagonisms. Theoretically,

this means conceiving the parts in such a way that they can be 'taken up' and integrated into a representation of the 'whole'. What the ethical economy provides is a general conception of modern societies as a whole. It establishes the framework into which the various elements can be integrated and it also contains a general sense of how they are integrated with one another. For these reasons we can speak of the ethical economy as the meta-worldview of modernity.<sup>32</sup>

That the ethical economy does play this role has already been alluded to. For instance, the establishment of functionally supportive relations between formal equality and substantive inequalities 'resolves' the contradictions by establishing the parameters within which substantive inequalities can be deemed mutually beneficial to all concerned. The possible tensions arising from the difference between the two kinds of relation are effaced as long as they can be represented in 'ethicised' terms. More generally, to the extent the social formation 'as a whole' is represented as ethical economy, the dominant social relations and the relations between their expansion and concrete institutionalisations will be invested with a positive normative value. This can only be achieved, however, through a systematic disregard for the real nature of such relations and the real constellations of forces at work in the social formation.

In his work on the *Political Unconscious*, Jameson speaks of figures such as the ethical economy as 'ideologemes'. At first sight it might appear unlikely that ideologeme can refer to something as overarching as a meta-worldview as, initially, Jameson speaks of 'the ideologeme ... [as] the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes'.<sup>33</sup> In the present case, the relevant ideologeme would be the ideological conception of bourgeois class relations of exploitation as contractually agreed and mutually advantageous exchanges. However, Jameson subsequently refers to the 'projection' of such a minimal unit into a range of much broader figures. 'An ideologeme ... is ... a historically determinate conceptual or semic complex which can project itself variously in the form of a "value system" or "philosophical concept," or in the form of a protonarrative, a private or collective

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<sup>32</sup> For reasons I will come to, this the case for European and neo-European societies, but also for non-European societies. Even in regions where the ethical economy cannot attain the same symbolic purchase as it does on European formations, it retains its dominant structural role within a wider world system.

<sup>33</sup> *Political Unconscious*, p. 61.

narrative fantasy.<sup>34</sup> These precisely parallel the terms in which Taylor describes the emergence of the ethical economy. What we have is the reality of bourgeois class relations being progressively 'taken up' into modern theory. In the first place, the ideologeme of the class relation is established. Then, through its various 'projections', this ideologeme is transfigured into a universal imaginary. The visions generated by the imaginary encompass sociality, ethics, history and much more.

Philosophically, the ethical economy has been developed as a range of substantive positions in most areas. As discussed in Chapter 5, for instance, the case for a universal rationality, and for European modernity as its highest development, tends to be elaborated precisely in terms of the growth and development of an 'ethical economy' of knowledge developing out of mutually beneficial exchanges between formally equal individuals according to a given set of rules or procedures. For example, Jurgen Habermas's conception of the ideal speech situation as the very ground of rationality can be plausibly read in terms of 'ethical economic' exchanges between formally equally individuals.<sup>35</sup>

Taylor's account of the sense of historicity associated with the modern vision is straight-forwardly given in terms of its expansion in time and space, i.e. it possesses a strong sense of its own tendency to universalisation. Taylor, though, does not discuss the implications of the contradictions this engenders. The ideologeme is established as the universal essence of social being by projecting it into philosophy and ontology. Projecting the same ideologeme into history makes it the basis of narratives of change and development. This means that it is simultaneously an essence that is actualised and in a constant process of actualisation. Ethical economic history, indeed, is best understood as the progressive actualisation of ethical economy, with development in space and expansion through time. There are plenty of accounts of modern history as the growth and development of 'ethical economic' societies, with the ideas of Progress and Development fleshed out as historical projections of the ethical economy. This has taken many form, crystallising recently in 'structural functional' modernisation theory and then globalisation theories. More generally, this double projection produces what Foucault called the transcendental/empirical doublet of the modern episteme and

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<sup>34</sup> *Political Unconscious*, p. 102

<sup>35</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Heinemann, 1978

provides the basic most elements of the structural contradictions of European Universalism.

The ethical economic ideologeme must be given a fundamental place in any account of the emergence and development of modernity and modern social theory. As the above references to modernisation and globalisation theory indicate, the ethical economy ideologeme can also be projected into other disciplines, such as sociology. The dominant tendency within sociology is to code modernity in terms of the ethical economy: it is seen either as its actualisation, or else judged as having failed to achieve its immanent potential. The default position is a conception of society as a functionally integrated organic matrix, in which the characteristic processes of modernity, and their concrete institutionalisations, form a system of mutually sustaining and regulating parts.

Classically, the sociological tradition has privileged four principle processes of social transformation, whose concrete institutionalisations have emerged within the three distinct spheres of state, economy and civil society. Each of these four processes involve tendencies to the universal mediation of the whole of society by a social relation: state formation and social mediation by law and bureaucracy; capital formation and social mediation by the value relation; democratisation or the individuation of social subjects as a consequence of their being disembedded from relatively stable hierarchies and/or collectivities and mediated by the new universals; secularisation, in Taylor's sense of the new imaginary, with social mediation by novel forms of 'conscience collective'. These four processes are most closely associated, respectively, with Weber and Foucault, Marx, de Tocqueville, Durkheim and Gramsci.

The integration of these processes within a vision of ethical economy gives rise to a conception of these processes and their concrete institutionalisation as an interlocking cluster characterised by mutual functionality. Their development is synchronic, with the development of each providing the conditions for the development of all. Within the whole, equilibrium is maintained as each simultaneously sustains and constrains the others as it develops and adapts to their needs. The process of expansion, i.e. of the

universalisation of the ethical economy, can be thought of as the *integrated and even* universalisation of modern social mediations.<sup>36</sup>

Given its centrality, this ideologeme is also the primary focus of critique: the sense of sociality and historicity belonging to the ethical economy must be confronted by the realities they represent. As these realities cannot be forced into conformity with the requirements of the ethical economy, this confrontation sparks off a series of critiques. Immanent, omissive and explanatory critiques disclose of a set of conceptual difficulties which are simply insurmountable within the horizons of the ideologeme. Amongst the areas most vulnerable to critique are conceptions of socio-historical temporality and conceptions of the nature of universal relations. Critiques disclose the need for a far more complicated sense of the spatio-temporalities of universalisation along the lines of Trotsky's '*combined and uneven* development', or Althusser's recognition that social science must abandon its 'simple' concept for a complex and differential spatio-temporality. As far as the social relations of modernity are concerned, their various critiques show how these universals are essentially contradictory: Marx discloses the categorial structure of the value relation; Althusser and Bhaskar disclose the categorial structures of reason and the conscience collective, with implications for theoretical humanism and theoretical universalism. Drawing together these critiques of spatio-temporality and mediating relations generates features of an alternative conceptual framework: '*combined and uneven dialectical universalisation*'.

A further step in the critique of the ethical economy takes us back to the discussion in the previous chapter about the representational logic of the public sphere. The 'resolution' of political problems is represented as the establishment, or reestablishment, of ethical economic relations. Problems, that is features of the world which have been negatively coded as 'unethical or as 'uneconomic' in the sense of being dysfunctional, are dealt with through a combination of social transformation and new ways of representing the changed world in terms of the ethical economy. In other

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<sup>36</sup> The translation of this vision from core to periphery, though, has always been a problem. For example, Samuel Huntington's account of political modernisation is readily understood in terms of the dangers of dysfunctional uneven development, and the need for modern processes to be contained through political action. Samuel Huntington, 'Political Development and Political Decay', *World Politics*, 17.2, 1965 and *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1968.

words, the negative is externalised. The critique of this follows from one of the problems of theoretical humanism Marx addresses in the *German Ideology*. Althusser takes this up as follows: “Marx commented that the idea of human nature, or the essence of man, concealed a *coupled value judgement*, to be precise, the couple human/inhuman: and he wrote ‘the “inhuman” as much as the “human” is a product of the present conditions; it is their negative side’.”<sup>37</sup> That is to say, the institution of the ethical economy is, at one and the same time, the institution of the unethical: its ‘negative side’ is really internally related to it. There are, though, two meanings this has. The first belongs to the discourse of ethical economy, which is where the relations between the two sides appear in the form of the antinomial, external, relation: the second concerns the contradictions internal to the reality of the institution of the ethical economy and is disclosed by showing how the uneconomic is internal to the economic.

Ethical economic discourse deploys the terminology of the couple economic/uneconomic in a markedly asymmetrical way. The language of the economic is deontological, combining ontic and normative facts: it represents the world in terms of a definite conception of social order and, simultaneously, invests it with positive value. Ethical economic representations are centred on forms of civil society, which are either universal or, where they are not, all other elements are functionally related to it. To represent the social in this way implies it is the actualisation of its own essence, that it is the achievement of an essence-actuality identity.

By contrast, the categories of the non-ethical or the uneconomic, like those of the inhuman, lack any definite ontic dimension. To represent the world as uneconomic is, initially, strictly evaluative. The ‘uneconomic’ registers only the most general kind of ontic alterity, the absence of the economic, stripping the actual of even the most abstract form. What characterises such ‘uneconomic’ regions is that they appear to embody a split between their real essence and their actuality. What we find is only the absence of true actualisation – a failure of self-realisation. Suffering from the absence of appropriate form at this level, uneconomic zones are ‘de-ethicised’: they are negatively invested with a lack of ethical value.

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<sup>37</sup> Althusser, ‘Marxism and Humanism’, p. 236-7.

Unlike the language of the positive dimension of the ethical economy, then, the negative language of the 'uneconomic' cannot by itself project a vision of actual or possible sociality. It cannot function independently as a way of 'enabling' social practice or of 'making sense' of those parts of the world to which it refers, except by marking them out as the site of a problem. Negatively ethicised regions become candidates for political, cultural, transformation. Their ontic lack translates into an ethical imperative for the actualisation of the 'economic' – through politically formulated projects of universalisation.

When the value couple of ethical economy is projected into the realms of history and politics it tends to appear as a core-periphery antinomy. The limited sense of historicity internal to the ethical economy requires that the process of universalisation extend from core zones into the peripheries. This allows the world to be represented, at any given moment, as zones of synchronic development, of peace and stability, surrounded by zones of dysfunction, chaos and instability. Examples include British Imperial policy of the late nineteenth century and, more recently, the liberal peace thesis associated with the contemporary Imperial role of the United States of America. What is interesting about this is that the peripheries enter the picture not just as locations of intrinsic difficulties, but as posing problems for, even threats to, the core regions. At this point, the peripheries are no longer posited primarily as a moral problem, but as practical problems emerging out of the expansion of core regions into the peripheries.<sup>38</sup>

Once this occurs, the first sense of negativity, as externality, turns into its second, the negative as internal. Now, the 'negative' sense of the uneconomic is no longer an analytic antinomy, but has developed along the lines identified by Marx: the uneconomic appears as the negative effects produced by the very development of the economic. This is significant because the antinomies of ethical economy are not simply discursive but are features of the symbolic order of the modern, its lived relations. The

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<sup>38</sup> Henry Maine's work is an interesting case in point here. Maine rejected the analytic universalism of utilitarian liberalism in favour of a universal, evolutionary, history. For Maine, the Indian Mutiny was symptomatic of social dissolution generated by the Imperial rupturing of pre-modern organic functionality. What was to become institutionalised under the Dual Mandate was a universalising project designed to cope with differential stages of social evolution being brought under the single umbrella of Empire. 'Henry Maine and the Transformation of British Imperial Ideology' Unpublished paper by Karuna Mantena, presented to the Institute of Historical Research, March 15, 2006.

experience of modern subjects is mediated and constituted by these categories, and by investing the world with the category of the negative the symbolic order generates a powerful ethical impulse for the negation of the negative.

This production of the inhuman by the present, i.e. the internality of the uneconomic to economic universalisation and the ethical drive to its abolition, has a number of implications, of which the following are only the most important. Firstly, the negative is subject to political contestation. While the ethical economy defines the parameters of modern worldviews, it is also the common terrain of diverse representations of core-periphery geographies and histories. The production and articulation of different accounts of the negative, and the struggle to invest some part of the world with it, is related, above all, to the consolidation of hegemonic projects and is the very stuff of hegemonic struggles.

Secondly, the negative categories of the uneconomic cannot necessarily be negated by practices informed by specific visions of the ethical economy. Rather, the intensive dynamics of universalisation tend to transform the conditions under which any particular institution of this kind of symbolic order secures its own relative stability. Undermined by the very processes they seek to manage, particular visions tend to overreach themselves, ultimately becoming dysfunctional to the reproduction of an ethical economic order. Inadequate responses to the uneconomic generated at the margins develop through the disclosure of their own internal negativity, and provoke their own negation.

Likewise, thirdly, the uneconomic is produced by the extensive dynamics of universalisation. The peripheries, constitutionally uneconomic, are a necessary consequence of the expansion of modern social formation. These regions of cultural alterity are necessarily resistant to formal and real subsumption under the forms of the ethical economy.

Finally, the universal relations of the ethical economy contain within themselves the uneconomic – as Marx's critique of the wage relation testifies. The modern principle of commutative justice, premised on fair and mutually beneficial exchange between formally equal individuals, is necessarily abrogated by relations of domination,

exploitation and alienation. Given all of this, what is internal to the 'whole' represented by the ethical economy must be represented as external to it in time or space in order to sustain its basic principles of just social relations and their synchronic and functional universalisation. Rephrasing Althusser, it can be said that 'the couple economic/uneconomic is the hidden principle of all ethical economy which is, no more than a way of living-sustaining-resolving this contradiction'.<sup>39</sup>

Gramsci's work does much to bring out the conceptual inadequacy of notions of synchronically developing ethical economies for understanding the realities of modern social formation while, at the same time, revealing their practical significance.<sup>40</sup> Gramsci's critique of the constitutional and instrumental conceptions of the state developed into his account of the 'integral state': a structured and institutionalised complex of relations between the universalising processes of the modern, but one in which the appearance of synchronic development and the actuality of a strictly temporary period of only limited mutual functionality are both revealed to be the political achievements of hegemonic projects within a bourgeois order. That is to say, for Gramsci, the integral state is not the product of the synchronic development of modern relations. It is instead the defining goal of political projects and the emergent terrain on which such projects are fought out.

Gramsci's work on the state not only affirms its essentially political character, but also undermines the antinomies of ethical economic representation which make it possible to effectively depoliticise it. Modern politics encompasses struggles over the form of hegemony and struggles over establishing its conditions of possibility. It is on the terrain of hegemony that philosophy and theory become irreducibly political. It is here that they are developed and deployed as solutions to political questions of identity and alterity, order and change. Gramsci illustrates this with his account of how Croce's philosophy provided a comprehensive worldview which, when mediated by a 'party', provided one of the contending factions within the leading strata with its coherent sense of social order and political purpose. Social parties, whose sense of common purpose is

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<sup>39</sup> Althusser wrote: "The couple human/inhuman is the hidden principle of all humanism which is, no more than a way of living-sustaining-resolving this contradiction. Ibid, p. 237.

cemented by their particular ethical economic vision, can occupy strategically significant locations in the 'integral state', and use their position in an attempt to bring the organs of state and civil society into a relative degree of mutual functionality. To become such a vehicle of cultural leadership, an ethical economic vision depends on the capacity it affords for formulating a social project which realises dominant interests whilst representing them as integral to universal concerns. The ethical economy tends towards universality by encompassing broad sections of the population and articulating differentiated interests within a negotiated hierarchy of mutual benefit. Those that cannot be represented within the whole in this way cannot but appear on the peripheries.<sup>41</sup>

The general contexts in which Gramsci locates philosophies and parties are the historical conjunctures of relations between the universalising social mediations of the modern and their concrete institutionalisations. Rejecting the a priori relations prescribed by the ethical economy, Gramsci shows how the hegemonic moment is achieved by bringing about a more or less unstable equilibrium between them. These historical relations between social forces must be understood in terms akin to Trotsky's conception of combined and uneven development. The geographical spaces straddled by states, both national and imperial, encompass tremendously disparate permutations of social mediation by law, capital, democratisation and ethical economic worldview. The social geographic extent, and the historical and structural orders, of these relations are all the products of specific histories which have produced specific conjunctures. This historical openness contains the potential for catastrophic contradictions to emerge, generating a powerful political imperative to forge some form of equilibrium between the various forces. The achievement of the hegemonic moment spatio-temporally displaces the tensions and contradictions between them, and in so doing creates the

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<sup>40</sup> *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, (ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971: Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*

<sup>41</sup> Gramsci is primarily concerned with the production of the universal plane as the terrain which simultaneously fosters and resolves antagonistic class interests. That is, it fosters the dualism of constitutionalism and interests, and the containment of the latter by the former. The philosophical world view draws the two together, articulating conceptions of the interests of capital in general with those of particular capitals, as well as bourgeois and proletarian interests. I have deliberately used a more general language here, though not in order to obscure capital or class.

conditions under which their development can appear as synchronic and/or mutually functional.<sup>42</sup>

Equally, the peripheral zones generated through universalisation can be understood in terms of their relations to hegemony. Ranajit Guha's term, 'dominance without hegemony', is most apposite here.<sup>43</sup> These are regions at the margins of hegemony in two senses. They are subaltern, in the sense of being subject to the would-be hegemonic power, but on the more or less ragged margins of integral state formation. Uneven development here has a different significance to that in the core, for these zones are disproportionately subject to the effects of dysfunctional and disequilibrating modernisation. Lacking, and/or deprived of, the local capacities to secure the political regulation of modernisation, these are zones of concentrated negativity. Peripheries can therefore also be understood as zones in which the possibilities for localised hegemony to emerge are relatively more distant. The exercise of power over them actually *prevents* the emergence of moments of unstable equilibrium.<sup>44</sup>

#### IV: The Emergence of Critical-Theoretical anti-Eurocentrism

All of this provokes a range of questions concerning the emergence of the categories and forms of critical-theoretical anti-Eurocentrism. Under the force of Marxian critiques, to date, the forms of the ethical economy have been subject to a radical transformation at a number of levels. The essentially problematic character of these forms arises from the structural location and function of ethical economy and of the relations it informs. These forms provide something like a 'fixed point' around which social change revolves. They are the 'essence' or 'substance' of modern social

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<sup>42</sup> For more on the spatio-temporal fixes related to the contradictions of capital, see David Harvey, *Limits of Capital*, London, Verso, 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without hegemony: History and Power in colonial India*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1997.

<sup>44</sup> The persistence of an aura of crisis surrounding India's democracy testifies to the absence of the conditions needed before it can be convincingly represented in terms of actualised ethical economy. Partha Chatterjee's introduction of the concept of 'political society' is probably the most sophisticated attempt to theorise this. Interestingly, his assertion that forms of political society must be relatively limited in their geographical scope, in contrast to the universality of India's civil society, gives a significant clue as to why the chronic 'failure' to institute ethical economy has not produced a general crisis for the Indian state to date. See 'On Civil and Political Society in Post-colonial Democracies' in

mediations around which their concrete forms congeal and from which they acquire their epoch specific character. They provide a 'centre': a resolutely un-dialectical point of reference in an otherwise changing world. The Marxian, dialectical, critical, realist response to these forms rejects the a priori structure they impose on the world. It dissolves the appearances of their necessity, coherence and completion. It breaks up these given forms and reinscribes their constituent elements within a radical conception of the socio-historical.

At the level of sociology, Gramsci's work on the state affirms the displacement of the ethical economy from its position as a framework of sociological thought into the realm of ideology. This move requires the development of a distinctive sociology of modernity which, in turn, demands a distinctive philosophical anthropology and ontology – what I earlier described as new sense of reality. That new sense of reality was already present in Marx's critique of political economy, having emerged from his conception of the value relation, and has been elaborated by both Althusser and Bhaskar. The really distinctive features of this critical perspective are its emphatic avowal of the extension of reality beyond the level of appearances and its emphasis on the internality of the negative.<sup>45</sup> This sense of reality highlights ontological depth and orients research towards social structures, their contradictory forms, their tendencies and their effects. It also foregrounds the significance of new categories and forms, i.e. depth and structure, absence and contradiction. These categories are constitutive of radically historicised realities. They are internal to the conceptions and realities of both the social formation and its constituent relations.

These categories further reinforce the distinctive character of the sociology of uneven and combined dialectical universalisation as against that of the antinomies of synchronic development, of which the most basic is that between identity and alterity based on civil society. The latter generates the antinomial conception of an ethicised, depoliticised, core and politicised peripheries which, in turn, generates a conception of social change in which core areas are driven to eliminate, displace or contain the absences constituting the peripheries. It also establishes the antinomial forms of the modern social relations as

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Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (eds.) *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, Roy Bhaskar's *Dialectic*.

universals: it sets up a split between essence and actuality; and it becomes locked into the perpetual project of closing that gap.

The critical sociology of modernity as uneven and combined dialectical universalisation, on the other hand, puts the problem of hegemony, and its conditions of possibility, to the fore. It treats hegemony as being both constituted by, and as an ethico-political response to, the problems arising within and between modern social relations. It shows how hegemony is reconstituted in a succession of attempts to 'resolve' the peculiar negativities generated by the universalisation of these relations and to establish moments of order amid the ongoing flux of modernisation. It locates hegemony at the core of the project of Eurocentrism and its critique as the basis of theoretical anti-Eurocentrism.

### Chapter 3 - Eurocentrism: The Universal Ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism must be reckoned an aspect of the social imaginary, a part of how a given social order is imagined and instituted. It can also, therefore, become a focus of critique and a stepping off point for critical theory: something that is especially so when it comes to Eurocentrism.

The term 'ethnocentrism', when originally coined, drew attention to ways in which social or collective forms of life are partially constituted.<sup>1</sup> The ethnocentric imaginary privileges some distinctive features of a given form, lending a degree of structure to the symbolic order which feeds back into its reproduction and development. The ethnocentric dimension of a social imaginary patterns the ways in which people invest meaning and purpose in the world they inhabit, and mediates the way they order their social relations. An ethnocentric worldview places the given culture at the centre of things, establishing it as a general explanation for how and why the world is the way it is. Also, by investing this order with a hierarchy of values, it provides its inhabitants with their primary orientation. It may also impute this orientation to other peoples and even parts of the natural and/or supernatural world.

Ethnocentrism also has implications of a more philosophical character. A strictly logical consequence of ethnocentrism is an implicit universalism. Simply by establishing values by which to judge other cultures, and by informing a worldview which incorporates other cultures, ethnocentrism implicitly presupposes that the forms and categories of self-representation have some measure of universal validity.

To the extent that ethnocentrism is a feature of all cultural existence, disclosing the nature of Eurocentrism means drawing out the peculiarities of this particular form of ethnocentrism. At its most basic, this means identifying European beliefs about its own distinctiveness and superiority, and examining the ways in which these beliefs have fed back into reproducing what really is distinctive about it and its forms of political and social domination. One clearly distinctive feature of Eurocentrism is its explicit

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<sup>1</sup> William Graham Sumner, *Folkways: a study of the sociological importance of usages, manners, customs, mores, and morals*, Ginn and Co., Boston, 1911.

universalism: its claims for the universal validity of the abstract forms and categories of ethical economy.

However, few actual uses of the term 'Eurocentrism' pursue the implications of this. As a result, it is a term of social criticism, but not of critical theory. The conventional and, by far, dominant uses of the term, rest on an underlying Eurocentrism located in the forms and categories of modern theoretical practice and social relations. Conventional theory both reproduces and obscures this more profound sense of Eurocentrism, while the project of critical theory is to disclose it.

This chapter will review some of the literature on Eurocentrism in the light of this contention. It will discuss various positions and related problems and plot a way forward, but it will also do two other things: it will locate the various, and somewhat disparate, strands of the putative discourse on Eurocentrism in their historical context, and it will draw attention to a fundamental aspect of the above distinction between ways of approaching Eurocentrism. Of the two approaches, the first can only generate Eurocentric accounts of Eurocentrism, while the second is a crucial move in the development of a theoretical anti-Eurocentrism. These two approaches differ in one fundamental respect: they treat the relations between ethnocentrism, universalism and Eurocentrism in very different ways.

Accounts of Eurocentrism can be divided according to the status they attribute to 'ethnocentrism', treating it as either strictly circumstantial or as a universal category. Eurocentric approaches regard ethnocentrism as a mere possibility, allowing for its European forms to be treated as historically contingent and therefore amenable to social criticism and reform. The corollary of not recognising ethnocentrism as a universal is that Eurocentrism institutes an illicit universality in its place, and institutes it in theory, practice and reality. By contrast, recognition that ethnocentrism is a necessity, i.e. an inescapable, universal, category of cultural life, means that its modern European forms are, in turn, recognised as being essential to and constitutive of modern forms of culture. Critical theoretical anti-Eurocentrism begins from the universality of ethnocentrism and is concerned with understanding Eurocentrism in terms of its constitutive forms of illicit universality.

The chapter explores conventional uses of the term and how they relate to matters of representation in public spaces, in the arts as well as politically. It begins by setting out the 'logic' of conventional debates over Eurocentrism with an analysis of Charles Dickens' rendition of Mr. Podsnap's ethnocentric worldview. The initial perspective on this works up the theme of presences and absences in representations of the world, with 'Eurocentrism' being understood as a demand for (greater) public recognition of the marginalised or absent. The subsequent section examines the historical emergence of 'Eurocentrism' in relation to three dimensions of twentieth century socio-political change: decolonisation, post-colonialism and multiculturalism. The third part takes up the more philosophical issues connecting Eurocentrism with universalism and realism, where the problem of universality, and by implication that of Eurocentrism, can be shown to be a central feature of the modern philosophical tradition. The final section goes into further detail about peculiarity of modern ethnocentrism and its forms of universality.

#### I. Absence, Universal Realism and Historical Change in Eurocentrism.

Compared to its reality, the term Eurocentrism is relatively recent. Below is a quotation from *Our Mutual Friend* in which Charles Dickens lays before us the contours of Mr. Podsnap's world, a world immediately recognisable as ethnocentric and as Eurocentric *avant la lettre*. Like many such terms, the word has come into use under specific conditions, but for varied, if more or less related purposes. It has not figured as the key term of a sustained discourse in the way that, say, 'globalisation' has recently, but it has nevertheless achieved widespread currency.<sup>2</sup> Like 'globalisation', a term with which it has a certain affinity, 'Eurocentrism' emerged during a period of historical transition, and the controversies over it were integral to some of the political and social struggles which occurred during this period. Unlike 'globalisation,' which gained ideological purchase in the immediate post-Soviet phase of the neo-liberal project, the discourse on 'Eurocentrism' developed in a less well defined period, and it seems somewhat less bound to its immediate context. There is some justification for a broader application,

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the debates over the meaning of 'globalisation' see 'What is Happening?', chapter 1 of Jan Aart Scholte's, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2000. For a critical analysis of the debates see Justin Rosenberg, especially his 'Globalisation Theory: A post-mortem', *International Politics*, Vol. 42, Issue 1, March 2005.

and it may well achieve greater longevity for, unlike the more recent term, it has a tremendous untapped theoretical potential as it refers to an enduring, essential aspect of modern forms of life.

Dickens' wonderful caricature of ethnocentrism, Podsnappery, provides a good place from which to begin. It demonstrates three important features of Eurocentrism as a matter of intellectual, political and social controversy: it embodies a characteristic set of absences; it indicates different senses in which a given reality is universal; it intimates something of the instability of both the reality, and the reality principle, of Eurocentrism.

Mr. Podsnap's world was not a very large world, morally; no, nor even geographically: seeing that although his business was sustained upon commerce with other countries, he considered other countries, with that important reservation, a mistake, and of their manners and customs would conclusively observe, "Not English!" when, PRESTO! With flourish of the arm and a flush of the face, they were swept away. Elsewise, the world got up at eight, shaved close at a quarter-past, breakfasted at nine, went to the City at ten, came home at half-past five, and dined at seven.<sup>3</sup>

The passage continues: "Mr. Podsnap's notions of the Arts in their integrity" was that they should do no more than represent this world of rising, shaving, breakfasting, the City, returning home and dining. "Nothing else to be permitted ... on pain of excommunication. Nothing else To Be—anywhere!"

The first feature to note about Podsnap's horizons is that they are defined by absences of various kinds, each of which renders his outlook partial and distorted. There are the absences of many concrete aspects of the world; there are also the absences of abstractions, of the forms needed for a more realistic representation of the world; and there are the absences of the really abstract qualities of this world.

Secondly, Podsnap expresses a sense in which a certain reality appears universal, at the same time as he inhabits a reality which is genuinely becoming universal. On the one hand, there is the striking sense that this particular culture, despite its constitutive absences, is being identified with culture in general and is held to possess universal significance. Contrasted with this insistent sense of reality is the apparently feeble

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, chapter 11, Podsnappery.

reality principle of alterity, whose geographical distance is so compounded by seeming insignificance that it cannot make its presence in the world felt in the City of London. On the other hand, Podsnap's daily round in this city is at the very centre of a historically universal culture, or at least a universalising one, whose essential political and economic relations are expanding and extending far and deep into the world beyond the City's walls.

Lastly, Dickens points to the fact that the sense of a real identity and of the unreality of alterity is located in specific conditions. This opens up the theme of change in the existing differential strength of relative reality principles. Important sources of change are the processes of universalisation in which they are embedded, and the struggles over them which lend them their particular shape. Dickens' own literary realist practice is one such struggle, playing on the absences embodied in this vision so as to undermine its sense of reality and its appearance of universality.

Turning first to the concrete and abstract absences of Eurocentrism. All of these kinds of absences are characteristic of the Eurocentric worldview: There are persistent failures to represent the concrete, such as "other countries". There is inadequate representation of the relations between Europe and other countries, not to speak of the internal relations of other forms of life. Nor is there any rounded appreciation of the impact on others of the tendentially universalising relations of modern forms of life.<sup>4</sup>

Concrete reality encompasses the people, places and things of the world we inhabit: our organic and inorganic bodies. It is the sphere of existence which is amenable to our sensibilities in their full sense, with its inner as well as outer dimensions. It is our lived world, and can be more or less understood, well or poorly described, entered into with a higher or meaner sense of purpose, worked on with greater or lesser degrees of satisfaction, etc.<sup>5</sup> To speak of the absence of the concrete, then, is just to make the

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<sup>4</sup> In his account of Orientalism, Edward Said makes much the same point. *Orientalism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978.

<sup>5</sup> "True great realism thus depicts man and society as complete entities, instead of showing merely one or the other of their aspects. Measured by the criterion, artistic trends determined by either exclusive introspection or exclusive extraversion equally impoverish and distort reality. Thus realism means a three-dimensionality, an all-roundness, that endows with independent life characters and human relationships. It by no means involves a rejection of the emotional and intellectual dynamism which necessarily develops together with the modern

straight forward point that some significant aspect of our world is not present in some depiction of it. It is to say that an author has not presented it to the reader, or that the text does not represent it. When such absences become apparent it means that important aspects of the lifeworld have not been accorded their due significance, and it implies that some ill is being perpetuated as a result.

Concrete absences are at the very heart of Dickens' literary practice. When he says of Podsnap's world that "it was not a very large world", he identifies a failure of perception: there is scope for far greater recognition; horizons could embrace wider difference and diversity. Nor is this simply a matter of narrow-mindedness. It is a matter of active exclusion. With a 'Presto!' and a flourish, in the manner of an illusionist, Podsnap conjures up the absences of his world. Its incompleteness is deliberately generated and reproduced through particular kinds of performative utterances. For Dickens, alternative, superior, forms of representational production are both necessary and possible. Literature is a moralising, and through that a politicising, form of action in the public sphere. It is a vital mediation of both public morality and state intervention. The activity of the author is akin to that of the journalist working for a radical press. It puts concrete realities before the public, and it engages in a process in which absences of concrete reality are absented, so that concrete ills might be absented in their turn.

This dynamic of reform is by no means confined to literature. Much the same may be said of the social sciences. More overtly political, at least in the sense that their express purpose is to mediate legal and institutional interventions in social life, the social sciences, with their own patterns of absences and presences, are at least as efficacious as literature in shaping the world. The social sciences, though, have some very different resources available to them. For instance, not all states of affairs or aspects of reality can be represented figuratively. Other, more abstract, forms are called on to stand in to relate qualities such as scale or complexity, which might otherwise defy concrete representation. Abstractions are also needed for dealing with aspects of the world which lay beyond the realm of the sensual or the concrete. Using various kinds of abstraction, the natural, as well as some social, sciences have advanced statistical and theoretical

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world. All it opposes is the destruction of the completeness of the human personality and of the objective typicality of men and situations through an excessive cult of the momentary mood."

forms of representation as the basis of various kinds of realism. Equally, abstractions are needed in order to refer to the forms assumed by the concrete, i.e. its relations, structures and forms of organisation. Indeed, the absence of these necessary abstractions from an account of the world will usually mean that the structures of modernity are either not represented or that they are misrepresented. Consequently, the internal relations of the modern lifeworld are represented in a more or less problematic way.

In representing the world, the requirements of adequacy demand the use of abstract as well as concrete references. Nevertheless, controversies over the status of abstractions, of terms which make non-empirical references, have been a persistent feature of the modern epistemological tradition. Much of the fruitful humanist dialogue between the value of literature, in a struggle with romanticism, and of science, in its struggle against rationalism, revolves around the value and status of these different forms of representation.<sup>6</sup>

It is not surprising, though, that questions as to what constitutes realism remain highly contentious, for these questions are symptomatic of the defining feature of the modern: the mediation and constitution of concrete forms of life by abstract relations. What Lukács refers to as the artistic struggle for realism against 'the destruction of the completeness of the human personality and of the objective typicality of men and situations' to be found in forms of literature can be understood as a consequence of its practical corollary: the struggle against the destruction of concrete completeness by the forms of modern social relations. Given this context, the humanist quest for literary and/or scientific realism is indissolubly bound to political radicalism, but, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, relations between realism and radicalism are deeply problematic.

The second significant aspect of this worldview is that it has a range of philosophical implications. Considerations of the philosophical implications of Podsnap's worldview also bring questions of realism to the fore, as it has ontological and epistemological implications for both universality and realism. In common with all visions of life, this

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George Lukacs, *Studies in European Realism*, Merlin Press, London, 1978. p. 6.

one can be subjected to philosophical interrogations, as if it were making philosophical arguments, or otherwise implying a philosophical position. As such it, along with its philosophical presuppositions, is open to critiques, including explanatory critiques which can explain the structure of the absences and presences it embodies.

The most immediate consequence of Podsnap's efforts to police his own horizons is that they sustain a distorted sense of the universality of his experienced world. This world is complete, true and good. The real world is identified with this one: it is as Podsnap is, does as Podsnap does. Illicitly asserting the universality of any particularity, however, has many consequences. For instance, to the extent the world is really other, to the extent it is not identical to his and does not do identically as his does, it has a profoundly ambiguous status conferred upon it. By universalising his own world, Podsnap makes it the very essence of all worlds. Where other worlds are actually different from his it cannot be because they are essentially other. Rather, they are at odds with what has become their own essence. If that condition is temporary it may be because alterity is simply a moment in the process of becoming identical, of realising the true essence. If it is permanent, then we are dealing with some ontological flaw. Podsnap, of course, takes the second option: alterity is simply an erroneous mode of existence. He declares 'Nothing Else To Be!' and who is there to argue? Who is there to make a case for existential autonomy, significance or representation? This universe is populated by a host of anomalies at its outer limits, but ones which lack the capacity to make themselves felt. The fairly robust 'hard core' of this universe seems unaffected by them.<sup>7</sup>

There is a sense in which something akin to Freud's reality and pleasure principles are at work here, in a socio-political rather than psycho-analytic context. Freud describes infant maturation in terms of a transition between a life dominated by the pleasure principle, and characterised by the free play of fantasy and polymorphous perversity, to one dominated by the reality principle, in which one's needs and desires are more

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance, Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: the Rise of Sociology*, R.J. Hollingdale (trans.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Imre Lakatos uses 'hard core' and 'anomalies' in his account of research programmes. See 'Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes' in Lakatos and Musgrove, *Criticism and the growth of knowledge*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1970.

closely aligned to the structured demands of family and social life. The psyche is disciplined into an accommodation with reality, in a process mediated by the authority invested in adults. For Freud, this was especially true of the figure of the father, the representative of the demands of the real world and of the possibilities of the mature pleasures of adult life.

Without making any strictly psycho-analytic comments about Podsnap's world, this same language can be used to give a sociological account of how it, and real visions of the world similar to it, are organised. This outlook has both realistic and fantastic aspects. It plainly draws on the realities of daily life at home and at work; it is disciplined and organised. It is also adequate for practical purposes, and serves as a means of channelling pleasures and satisfactions. There can be little doubt that a reality principle is at work in its construction. There is an imaginary at work here, an order in which a stable identity has come to an accommodation with social reality. It gives rise to a powerful sense of reality, one grounded in durable political and cultural structures.

The sense of reality produced by this principle, though, also contains elements of fantasy. This is most clearly evident in the dismissal of alterity at the horizons where the claims of otherness to be accepted as an integral part of reality are so weak that they can simply be wished away. The political and social mediations at work here are of a quite different character. They generate only the most feeble of reality principles, making few demands on the imagination to accommodate itself to reality, allowing instead for its easy assimilation into the realm of fantasy. The appearance of a very partial worldview as a complete and coherent universe brings the real and the fantastic together in an unstable, 'irrealist', compromise formation.<sup>8</sup> These forms of appearance are supported by a complex and differential reality principle: what could be called an 'irreality principle.'

The irreality principle sustaining this imagined universe is an effect of its basic structures, i.e. the realities of universalisation. The political, economic and cultural relations in which this sense of reality is grounded not only extended from the City

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<sup>8</sup> 'Irrealism' is used by Roy Bhaskar to describe philosophical ontologies, implicit or explicit, which are constituted by absences and contradictions, just as Podsnap's is. Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, passim.

across the globe, but were also expanding and intensifying. Other countries were also pushing these processes forward in more or less intense competition. Modern European culture was staking a claim to a universal reality: it was, and indeed remains, intent on being the first truly world culture. European expansion generated pressures that made themselves felt in no uncertain terms, requiring others to accommodate themselves to its various demands, while also offering certain benefits to those who would cooperate. The City of London had been instrumental in enlarging the circuits and encouraging the flows of capital, for instance, around the world since the Glorious Revolution of 1688, if not before.<sup>9</sup> The political projects of domestic, and foreign, state formation and colonialism were inseparable from that of securing the conditions of capital accumulation, even if the different aspects of colonialism were not always entirely mutually supportive. This, then, is the reality in which Podsnap's universalism is located: a world centred on and mediated by London; a complex of universalising processes; subject to more or less intense social struggles world-wide. Podsnap's world rests on the processual penetration, mediation and transformation of 'other countries', and it relies entirely on their tendencies to subsume cultural alterity under these universal relations, tendencies which often put such others under intolerable strain.

However, both the compromise formations of universalism and the irreality principle generated by complex and differential modes of universalisation are inherently unstable. Both are more or less precarious, conjunctural equilibria whose internal differentiation and complexity work against their coherence and stability. As a result, both the compromise formations of imagined universalism and the unstable social formations produced by universalisation are in continual need of repair and reconfiguration. There is a 'logic', for instance, to the playing out of the claims for identity and universality. They have ever to be reasserted against those of alterities which resist eradication. Indeed, the recognition of alterity implied in its active denial is a somewhat back-handed acknowledgement of its real significance. The assertion of universality immediately establishes a master-slave dialectic in which claims for complete superiority can never be realised. This form of irrealist universalism is constituted by a potentially fatal contradiction, but one whose disruptive capacities are held in check by the irreality principle operating through its historical context. The irreality principle

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<sup>9</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, Longman, London, 1993.

works to limit the cognitive and practical significance of internal contradictions, allowing instead for universalising processes to occur, and for struggles over them to take place, in such a way the both reality and its appearances are changed. In the course of such change the differential efficacy of the reality principle is redistributed; the co-presence of universalisation and the struggles that take place over it generate new conditions in which it is experienced and represented.<sup>10</sup>

Dickens, social critic and reformer, ranks amongst the finest exponents of artistic struggle over representation and universality. He shows a keen awareness of the practical significance of partial outlooks on the world. When others are put out of sight and out of mind, excluded from public consideration by a responsible citizenry, their suffering has no prospect of alleviation. For Dickens, literature is more than a strictly aesthetic form of representation, as social realism is a deliberate means of politicising social issues, of forcing them to become matters of concern in the public sphere. He uses literature to remedy absences in dominant modes of representation, demanding recognition for those on the margins.<sup>11</sup> The realist novel, in this context, is a challenge to the complacent Podsnaps of the world. It confers a new political significance on its subjects as it represents them in the public sphere.

The dynamics of universalism and universalisation, then, encompass difference and change. Their substantive content is not at all fixed. Of course, Dickens, in common with most critics of Eurocentrism, only partially remedies these kinds of problems. Literary realism is confronted by the same general conditions as the forms of representation it criticises. It too is subject to differential reality/irreality principles; it too is engaged in struggles over universalism; it too is involved in the transformational reproduction of the processes of universalisation.

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<sup>10</sup> The key texts here include Gramsci's work on hegemonic struggle and Jurgen Habermas's account of the evolution of the public sphere. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971; Jurgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Polity, Cambridge, 1989.

<sup>11</sup> Dickens is what Rorty would call an 'agent of love', one who is instrumental in extending political and legal recognition to those who would otherwise remain outside the scope of 'agents of justice', i.e. subject to the ethical considerations of the state. Rorty, 'On Ethnocentrism: A Reply to Clifford Geertz', in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991. p.206.

Political and social theory should be understood in similar terms. Modern theory is a vehicle of universalism, as well as a means of producing 'realist' critiques. At least since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the modern theoretical tradition has been more or less self-consciously grappling with the implications and contradictions of its universalism for social and political order.<sup>12</sup> These forms of symbolic representation are subject to the same opposing tendencies: to defend universalism in the face of absences and anomalies; to play on these flaws and criticise claims for universal representation; to reconstitute and reconfigure universalist representations. However, it is one thing to be entangled in the Eurocentric dynamics of universalism and universalisation, but it is quite another to properly comprehend things in these terms and come to terms with their full implications. Such ignorance, indeed, is a defining characteristic of the Eurocentric universalist imaginary.

## II. Emerging fragments of a discourse on Eurocentrism.

Modern political and social theory have developed as an integral part of these processes of universalisation, and ideas about 'Eurocentrism' emerged from within them in a particular period: namely that during which continental European dominance was displaced by that of the European settler state, the United States of America. The term is generally used in response to perceived failures of universalism, and in attempts to address the many and varied absences of political representation, absences which acquired greater salience during the long migration of the major centre of the world system across the Atlantic.<sup>13</sup> Controversies over Eurocentrism have been integral to the contests over the democratisation of political and cultural forms of representation, and closely related to the tendencies to level social status distinctions, one of the distinctively modern processes of social transformation.<sup>14</sup> The issues politicised as Eurocentric fall under three broad headings: the anti-colonial; the post-colonial; the multi-cultural. The first of these concerns international structures of political and cultural representation; the second relates to structures of representation within

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<sup>12</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood, *A Trumpet of Sedition: political theory and the rise of capitalism, 1509-1688*, Pluto, London, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> This sense of failed universalism is most clearly expressed in Said's *Orientalism*.

<sup>14</sup> See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1954. Charles Taylor's 'Politics of Recognition' also contains a useful discussion of this process. 'The Politics of Recognition,' in *Multiculturalism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1994.

previously colonised, or otherwise peripheral countries; the last deals with problems of representation within the countries of the core regions, often related to migration from the peripheries.

'Eurocentrism' has a range of meanings, each of which is related to a different context of contestation. What they have in common is a decidedly negative connotation, invoking some bias, or deliberate distortion, which systematically favours the European. Substantive accounts differ as to what such biases consists of, how they should be understood, what their significance is and how they should be countered or remedied. The diversity of uses is symptomatic of the complex and differential spatio-temporalities of history and theory. The relevant political conflicts have been of very different kinds and are dispersed across time and space. Developments in social theory, on the other hand, occur along a number of crosscutting axes, the most significant of which are its disciplinary distinctions, its range of theoretical orientations, and its various philosophical presuppositions.

Some of the intellectual battles related to the politics of decolonisation, independence and neo-colonialism have taken place in those academic disciplines with global scope, such as International Relations and World history, and approaches like modernisation theory, world systems theory and dependency theory. 'Eurocentrism' has been a significant term in debates within each of these and over the relative merits of rival approaches.<sup>15</sup> At stake in all of these debates has been the nature and consequences of the evolution of the global political economy. Charges of 'Eurocentrism,' encapsulated in such figures as 'core and periphery,' identify conflictual and unequal relations between the West and the rest, and regard existing political practices as the institution and reproduction of systemic injustices.

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<sup>15</sup> Some key works of interest in the area of global political economy are Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, Russell Moore (Trans.), Zed Books, London, 1989; Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism*, Verso, London, 1983. In world history there is J. M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History*, The Guilford Press, New York / London, 1993; B. J. Avari and G. G. Joseph 'An ethnocentric history of the world; the case of Paul Johnson' in *History Workshop Journal* (Vol. 23, 1987), pp. 112-21; Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, Routledge, London, 1990.

Opposition to such charges rests on a different account of relations between power and justice and tends to support the ethical character of substantive inequalities. The defence of inequalities in wealth portrays economic exchange relations as consensual and mutual, while the defence of power inequalities emphasises the benefits of colonial investments and institutions in laying the basis of future economic growth, peace, and stability. Generally, where 'Eurocentrism' envisions a denial of autonomy and the shaping of peripheral development in the interests of the core, i.e. as underdevelopment, this denial presupposes that the peripheries are necessarily actual or potential sites of autonomous development. Debates over Cambridge School Indian historiography exemplify these kinds of disputes, with Cambridge historians stressing the cooperative dimensions of Anglo-Indian relations, while their detractors emphasise the role of colonial interests and exercise of force.<sup>16</sup>

More closely associated with social formation under post-colonial, peripheral and 'late' conditions are various contests over the nature and status of area studies. These range across issues in political and economic development, including the status of modernisation theory; the role of anthropology; the various questions raised about intercultural historiography and sociology by *Subaltern Studies* and, more broadly, 'post-colonial theory'.<sup>17</sup> Parallel disputes to those above are found here too. However,

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<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the most trenchant of all works dealing with the use of force and the lack of moral constraint in modern European dealings with the rest of the world is Rajani Kanth's *Against Eurocentrism*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Works raising these questions from a comparative perspective within area studies include Peter Gran, *Beyond Eurocentrism: A New View Of Modern World History*, Syracuse University Press, New York, 1996. In development economics: J. Brohmann, 'Universalism, Eurocentrism and Ideological Bias in Development Studies: from Modernisation to neo-liberalism', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1995; Ozay Mehmet, *Westernizing the Third World: the Eurocentricity of Economic Development Theories*, Routledge, London, 1995; P. Hill, *Development Economics on Trial: the anthropological case for prosecution*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986; There are many works in cultural studies, the most important of which has been Edward Said's *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Penguin, London, 1978 and *Culture and Imperialism*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1993. Works on anthropology include Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, Ithaca Press, New York, 1973; Ronald Inden 'Orientalist Construction of India' *Modern Asian Studies*, No. 20, 1986, pp. 401-46; M. Searle-Chatterjee, 'Anthropology exposed' in *Anthropology Today*, August 1987. Addressing issues of cross-cultural interpretation is Charles Taylor, 'Social Theory as Practice' and 'Understanding and Ethnocentricity', in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985. See also the series of *Subaltern Studies*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1982-. On post colonial theory see Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993; Uma Kothari,

they were often located on different terrain, with a stronger emphasis having been put on relations between power and knowledge. This meant taking up the themes foregrounded by Edward Said's use of Gramsci's conception of hegemony and Foucault's account of discourse and, relatedly, pursuing the radicalisation of representation, inspired by Gramsci's use of the 'subaltern' and E. P. Thompson's 'history from below'. However, exporting European theory, even in its more critical forms, has given rise to other kinds of consideration. The organisation of power/knowledge, and the possible forms of hegemony and domination differ between core and peripheral zones. The result is that relations between theory, practice and context are necessarily more awkward in the periphery.<sup>18</sup> So while the need for critical disclosure of the illiberal dimensions of modernity has at least as much relevance in the peripheries as it does in the core, translations of Foucault, for instance, from the latter to the former are no less problematic than, say, Bentham. Despite such problems, attempts to adapt modern theory to local conditions still face charges of 'nativism' etc., pressuring intellectuals into a more perverse strain of Eurocentrism than is found in the core.<sup>19</sup>

In relation to 'multiculturalism', issues arose in connection to first world social movements, which tend to be distinguished from 'traditional' class-based politics, and are vehicles for alternative forms of struggle such as the politics of ethnic and gender identity. Such movements have by no means been exclusively confined to the west.<sup>20</sup> In

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*Development Studies and Post-colonial Theory*, Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester, Manchester, 1996; Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffin, *After Europe: critical theory and post-colonial theory*, Dangaroo Press, Sydney 1989; Gayatri Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic*, Routledge, London, 1990.

<sup>18</sup> There are many, many different kinds of account of the kinds of awkwardnesses that are generated by the attempted universalisation of modern theory, practice, institutions and relations. Even if not all presented as post-colonial theory, common ideas, such as Quasi-statehood, highlight theory-practice inconsistencies. By and large, modern theory is concerned with explaining these recalcitrant realities, and reforming them, i.e. bringing them into greater conforming with visions of modernity.

<sup>19</sup> This antinomy has also been investigated by John Game in a paper to the Department of Political Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, May 2005.

<sup>20</sup> For instance, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Routledge, London, 1994. Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition' in *Multiculturalism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1994. Richard Rorty, *Objectivism, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, especially 'Antirepresentationalism, ethnocentrism, and liberalism' and 'On ethnocentrism:

this area too, the structured distortions of forms of cultural and political representation were the object of social criticism. Equality of access to public spaces or public spheres has been questioned and claims of authority to adequately represent diversity came under sustained attack. In the United States in particular, established canons and other institutions have been subject to intense criticism for their failures to adhere to avowed universalist norms. Here, perhaps more than elsewhere, charges of Eurocentrism have been countered by accusations of relativism. Disputes over multiculturalism, no less than others, have frequently drawn on philosophical resources or taken on a decidedly philosophical cast, with the dichotomy between universalism and relativism very much to the fore.

This period also saw a remarkable transformatory dialogue in philosophy.<sup>21</sup> By the 1980s the emergent field of philosophical positions could be mapped out by reference to hermeneutics, deconstruction and realism.<sup>22</sup> One of the principal areas within which relevant issues have been raised has been the ongoing 'rationality debates' conducted between philosophers and anthropologists, which have drawn on analytical and linguistic developments and are concerned with general epistemological and ontological questions facing intercultural social sciences.<sup>23</sup> These debates necessarily raise questions about the universality of philosophical concepts and the ethnocentrism of the philosophical tradition.

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a reply to Clifford Geertz'. Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1996.

<sup>21</sup> For an account of this history from a contemporary hermeneutic perspective see Paul Ricoeur, 'On Interpretation', in *After Philosophy*, Baynes et al (eds.), MIT Press, London, 1987 and Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 'Philosophy or Theory of Science?', in *Reason in the Age of Science*, Frederick G. Lawrence (trans.), MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981. For a partial account from Bhaskar's perspective see 'Feyerabend and Bachelard: Two Philosophies of Science', in *Reclaiming Reality*, Verso, London, 1989.

<sup>22</sup> See William Outhwaite, *New Philosophies of Social Science: realism, hermeneutics and critical theory*, MacMillan, Basingstoke, 1987. Also, a collection covering many of the most significant developments in this area is *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman and Thomas McCarthy (eds.), MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1987. Alain Badiou offers a concise summary of this shift within twentieth century French philosophy. 'The Adventure of French Philosophy', *New Left Review*, No. 35, September-October, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Three important collections of material are Bryan Wilson (ed.), *Rationality*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1970; Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and Relativism*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1982; Joanna Overing (ed.), *Reason and Morality*, ASA Monographs 24, Tavistock, London, 1985.

The figure of Heidegger looms large behind a new found interest in philosophical anthropology, inspiring, from an interpretive direction, Gadamer and Ricoeur in hermeneutics and Derrida in deconstruction and, from the perspective of the philosophy of science, Roy Bhaskar's dialectical realism.<sup>24</sup> This post-Heideggerian field developed around critiques of traditional conceptions of the philosophical subject, a central figure since long before Kant, and with it the social and historical character of reason debated since the Enlightenment.<sup>25</sup> In the course of this progressive conversation the nature of both the subjectivistic and objectivistic poles, which have been such stable features of the last two hundred years of philosophical thought, have undergone such a level of revision that it is not difficult to accept Bernstein's account of this process moving philosophy off its traditional terrain and going 'beyond objectivism and relativism'.<sup>26</sup>

These developments have reinforced tendencies towards historical and sociological accounts of knowledge. For some this has meant a repudiation of virtually all claims to knowledge, given that positivistic verification and Popperian falsification have both been rendered unsustainable.<sup>27</sup> As a result, relativist positions appear to have greater philosophical justification. The difficulty here though is that 'relativism' now covers such a wide range of positions that simply referring to any one of them as relativistic is no longer very helpful: the linguistic turn means that we are all relativists now and it makes no sense not to be one.<sup>28</sup> Simply identifying the production of knowledges as a social process, the minimum condition of a relativistic position, does not, however,

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<sup>24</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (second, revised edition by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall), Sheed and Ward, London, 1993; *Reason in the Age of Science*, Fredrick Lawrence (trans.), MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981; Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, John B. Thompson (ed. and trans.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981; *The Conflict of Interpretations*, North West University Press, Evanston, 1974; Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, Verso, London, 1994; *Plato etc.*, Verso, 1994; *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1991; *The Possibility of Naturalism*, third edition, Routledge, London, 1998; *A Realist Theory of Science*, Verso Classics, London, 1997.

<sup>25</sup> A historical overview is to be found in *Understanding and Social Inquiry*, Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy (eds.), University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1977. Other relevant works include Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1983; Richard Rorty *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1980.

<sup>26</sup> Bernstein, Richard, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1983

<sup>27</sup> See Roy Bhaskar's 'Feyerabend and Bachelard: Two Philosophies of Science' in *Reclaiming Reality*, Verso, London, 1989.

<sup>28</sup> See for instance Barry Barnes and David Bloor, 'Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge' in *Rationality and Relativism*, Hollis and Lukes eds.,

necessarily entail the collapse of all epistemology. Indeed, one challenge facing philosophy has been the development of a philosophical position which can sustain a self-consistent sociology of knowledge, i.e. one which is simultaneously realist and relativist.

The different accounts of Eurocentrism, then, can be understood against the political and disciplinary background of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Social theorists engaged with past and present political events. They drew on philosophy for help with technical and conceptual issues, while new philosophical claims about the nature of social being and social inquiry also give rise to new schools of thought within existing disciplines.<sup>29</sup> The issue of Eurocentrism was at the centre of disputes within and over the social sciences.<sup>30</sup> Driven by both philosophical insights and practical interests, social science and social theory have staked out a range of what might be called oppositional positions. The complex temporalities of social thought mean that not all of these attempts to conceptualise Eurocentrism draw equally on contemporary philosophical developments. Working within disciplinary boundaries means relying on varying degrees of institutional mediation between developments elsewhere, which can result in there being considerable lags in time before social theory registers the significance of changes in the meaning of science for disciplinary practices. These lags can, to some extent, be ironed out by bringing these two areas together in more deliberate way.

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and Paul Hirst, 'Is it rational to reject relativism?' in *Reason and Morality*, Overing ed.

<sup>29</sup> A historical overview is to be found in *Understanding and Social Inquiry*, Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy (eds.), University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1977. Other relevant works include *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Richard Bernstein, Blackwell, Oxford, 1983; Richard Rorty *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1980.

<sup>30</sup> An examples of one debate of a more philosophical character is that between Immanuel Wallerstein and Gregor McLennan in the pages of the *New Left Review*: Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Eurocentrism and its Avatars: The Dilemmas of Social Science', *New Left Review*, 226, November/December 1997, pp. 93-107; McLennan, Gregor, 'The Question of Eurocentrism: A Comment on Immanuel Wallerstein', *New Left Review* 231, pp. 153-158; Wallerstein, Immanuel, 'Questioning Eurocentrism: A Reply to Gregor McLennan', *New Left Review* 231, pp. 159-160. Gregor McLennan, 'Post-Marxism and the "Four Sins" of Modernist Theorizing', *New Left Review*, 218, July/August, 1996, pp. 53-74. Other works include Immanuel Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science: The limits of a nineteenth-century paradigm*, Polity, Cambridge, 1991; George Gheverghese Joseph, Vasu Reddy and Mary Searle-Chatterjee, 'Eurocentrism in the Social Sciences', *Race and Class*, Vol. 31, no. 4, 1990.

Taking these philosophical developments forward is directly related to problems of knowledge and evaluation confronting the issue of Eurocentrism. Superseding the effects of contemporary philosophical problems on the social sciences and overcoming the problems of Eurocentrism within the social sciences coincide at this point. Their resolution requires the kinds of sustainable realism suggested above and also needs a rejection of any presupposition that present conditions, especially western ones, are an instantiation of the good life. The most promising efforts to combine work in these areas emerges out of the Marxian tradition as it is here one finds the combination of both critical normative and critical realist tendencies.

### III. Foregrounding ethnocentrism.

One point of departure for developing an adequate conception of Eurocentrism can be opened up through an investigation of its relation to ideas of ethnocentrism. There are two general uses of the term, both of which treat it as a general term encompassing Eurocentrism but differ by either regarding it as a contingent feature of social life or else as a constitutive characteristic of culture as such. In both cases, to describe some group or other as being ethnocentric is to imply that it privileges its own culture over others in some way. Implicit in most uses, however, is a sense that this self-privileging is, in principle, a departure from some more balanced self-assessment and some more reasonable practice. It suggests an illicit assertion of particularity over universality. Used in this way, the term refers to something like a potential to deviate from a norm. The alternative, less common, usage is to regard ethnocentrism as an anthropological condition: a genuinely universal feature of human cultural existence, but one which is realised in particular ways by each form of life. In this case, ethnocentrism is the assertion of one particularity over other particularities. Far from being a deviation from the norm, it is the realisation of the norm, though in its own particular way.

This distinction between conceptions of ethnocentrism illuminates approaches to Eurocentrism. Uses of the first kind contrast Eurocentric imbalances with some more balanced state of affairs; uses of the second kind are more concerned with systemic European self valorisation and the various forms it takes. Each of these is related to very different conceptions of scientific practice and rationality, as they map directly onto

accounts of ideological biases of social science as either contingent or necessary.<sup>31</sup> The implication of contingency theories of ideological bias is that there are general criteria of scientific inquiry and that departure from them can usually be explained in terms of a failure to adopt the appropriate level of disinterest. The necessity of ideology, meanwhile, can be accounted for in terms of the forms and functions of the modes of thought relative to a given culture.

Approaches to Eurocentrism favouring contingency tend to be epistemically optimistic. Joseph et. al., for instance, are typical of many others concerned with multiculturalism.<sup>32</sup> They begin with a standard dictionary definition of ethnocentrism: 'the tendency to view ones own ethnic group and its social standards as the basis for evaluative judgements concerning the practices of others - with the implication that one views one's own standards as superior'. Having stressed the sense of an evaluative bias they then attempt to accomplish two tasks. The first of these is to show how Eurocentrism, a term originally coined precisely to capture the idea of a specifically European ethnocentrism, conforms to this general conception. The second is to show that other, less culturally biased, ways of approaching the world can be adopted. The contrast here is between a self-regarding bias and the possibility of adopting an objective attitude to the world, i.e. The View from Nowhere.<sup>33</sup>

The same approach can be found in the quite different work of writers such as Samir Amin and James Blaut. They begin with what at first appears as a much stronger conception of Eurocentrism by insisting that Eurocentrism cannot be reduced to 'another banal ethnocentrism'.<sup>34</sup> Eurocentrism may be a form of ethnocentrism, but unlike most others it has world historical significance, having been a crucial feature of a half-millennium development of the world system. This form of ethnocentrism is in a class of its own. In addition, Blaut, in particular, raises epistemological/ideological issues when he identifies a 'colonialist view of the world' running through large swathes of Western thought. It follows from this that some deeper account of the distinctive ethnocentricity of Europeans is needed: what are its *differentia specifica*?

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<sup>31</sup> See for example Ryan, A., *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Macmillan, London, 1970, ff. 220.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph, George Gheverghese, Vasu Reddy and Mary Searle-Chatterjee, 'Eurocentrism in the Social Sciences', *Race and Class*, Vol. 31, no. 4, 1990.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986.

However, even in writings such as these, there remains a sense in which the biases within the world system brought about by Eurocentrism are contingent on a set of political accidents – such as Columbus blundering into the Caribbean. In the absence of these contingencies, capitalism would still have developed across the world, but in a more even, just, manner. Even when Eurocentrism is regarded as constitutive of the present world, as either political relations or intellectual representation, it can still be explained in terms of historical accidents, and remedied through changes to political and cultural representation and participation.

Despite according it some significance, then, these accounts of Eurocentrism also render it relatively superficial. It is seen as being on the wane, challenged by forms of artistic and political representation which displace old assumptions and institute new, more democratic, relations. Such trends are real enough, and these kinds of account clearly give voice to a range of domestic and international changes, but they do not inquire sufficiently deeply into the nature of the social formation. This elevates certain short-term trends, wrongly, into long term, fundamental, transformations. The problem here is that these approaches are limited in one important and common respect: they do not entertain the possibility of identifying ethnocentrism with cultural universality.

One prominent alternative to this (standing in here to represent the position that ideological bias is a necessity) is typified by Richard Rorty and advocates of deconstruction. Broadly speaking, these approaches highlight the nature of language and meaning as social relations. They argue that, in mediating between the social and itself or nature, it is always-already structured in ways which rule it out as objective and/or universal. Instead the form and functions of meaning are related to their role in the construction of consensus and/or struggles and conflict. Deconstruction, in exposing naturalistic epistemology, in terms of the metaphysics of presence and immediacy, regards linguistic mediation as simultaneously the condition of both the possibility and impossibility of knowing the world.<sup>35</sup>

Rorty is of special interest here because of his explicit identification of the human condition as ethnocentric. Although making an explicit challenge to universalism, he

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<sup>34</sup> Amin, *Eurocentrism*, p. ix.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, R. Young, *White Mythologies*, Routledge, London, 1990.

effectively affirms ethnocentrism as a human universal. That is, Rorty is using 'ethnocentrism' as an essential category of philosophical anthropology. It is, in effect, a principle of social existence. The anthropology he develops also makes much of the principle of pragmatism, prioritising the practical worth of ideas over any possible abstract truth. The pragmatic nature of ideas means that modes of thought and meaning are embedded in specific social relations, such that they are both of and for the forms of life to which they belong.<sup>36</sup> Ideas are expressive of a given culture, but their real value is that they are functional to its reproduction. The essential ethnocentrism of ideas means that they are instrumental to their culture, and/or that they should be judged with respect to how instrumental they are.

Rorty's understanding of ethnocentrism draws on his critique of epistemological naturalism.<sup>37</sup> While philosophical and epistemological investigations appear to be abstracted from their social conditions, he argues that they should be regarded as a somewhat misconstrued form of sociological inquiry: investigations into logic or reason, for instance, need to be seen as reflections on the solidaristic foundations of communal intellectual life.<sup>38</sup> It follows that cultural biases, or deviations from absolute standards of scientific neutrality, are not mere contingencies.<sup>39</sup> To the contrary, the very idea of such a standard is an expression of a particular cultural bias.

At the same time, though, Rorty does not regard the universalism of modern, liberal, culture as essential. Universalism might have been functional in the past, but to insist on it under contemporary conditions is to impose unnecessary, and ultimately dysfunctional, constraints on intellectual and institutional adaptation and development. The liberal tradition, exemplified by John Stuart Mill, Rorty insists, is open to immanent critique. So, in works such *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, he challenges traditional philosophical claims for objectivity, detachment and cultural

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<sup>36</sup> Richard Rorty, *Objectivism, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991. See the pieces on 'Antirepresentationalism, ethnocentrism, and liberalism' and 'On ethnocentrism: a reply to Clifford Geertz'. Rorty's use of ethnocentrism means that his anthropology bears close comparison to Peter Winch's, inasmuch as Winch speaks of the internal relation of meaning to forms of life. Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1958.

<sup>37</sup> Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

<sup>38</sup> See 'Solidarity or Objectivity?' and 'Science as solidarity' in *Objectivism, Relativism and Truth*.

<sup>39</sup> See Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

disinterest by arguing that they make no sense. However, Rorty is not interested in a strictly rationalistic critique of traditional philosophy. Rather, he argues that contemporary social conditions generate practical, political and institutional problems which cannot be resolved on the basis of a universalist tradition. The new realities of multiculturalism mean that self-understanding in terms of universalism has become inadequate to the task of providing a framework for contemporary social solidarity. The solution Rorty advances is to show how liberalism can inform an encompassing framework for cultural diversity. Liberalism's validity does not rest on its ahistorical claims to a desocialised truth, but on its capacity to inform much needed institutional solutions to the historically specific problems of contemporary cultural cohabitation within a unitary state.

There is much to commend in Rorty's work as it sheds light on the Eurocentric dynamics of universalism and universalisation. His intellectual practice is to play, like Dickens and other social critics, on the absences and contradictions of existing universalism. He recognises its historicity and invokes the need to reconstitute it in response to changing circumstances. There are intimations here that the sense, or appearance, of universality is historically conditioned, and that processes of universalisation alter these conditions. However, fundamental problems remain, for once Eurocentrism is identified with projects for the construction and reconstruction of modern cultural solidarity there arises a host of sociological questions which cannot be adequately addressed within the intellectual horizons of liberal theory. That is, the problems of the self-understanding of civil society are irreducible to its tendencies to ahistorical thinking, important though these are.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Gramsci's work, in particular, stands out as a critique of ahistorical liberal theory. See Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, (trans. David Fernbach), Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1980. Rorty dismisses the intellectual content of Marxian critiques of civil society on the rigorously consistent grounds that this kind of critical theory is neither reformist nor revolutionary, i.e. it is not functional to the development of civil society, nor, with the apparent collapse of any prospect of revolution, to any other form of life. Against this it might be argued that while critical theory does not intimate any specific alternative form of life, it does issue from a profound concern with the prospects for social solidarity under modern conditions. Indeed, what critical theory discloses is the structural contradiction with this form of life between solidarity and its conditions of possibility.

There is, though, a fundamental difficulty of this account of the anthropological principle of ethnocentrism. It maintains, in effect, that there can be no significant gap between the vision of the self which informs the institution of the modern and the possible forms of self-understanding available to modern subjects. The validity of any theory of society rests on its (ethnocentric) capacity to inform the reproduction of that same society. This involves a de facto insistence that justification and operationalisation are the criteria of theoretical validity. It also means that the historical necessity of ideological bias becomes an intellectual prison. The cost of freeing theory from the constraints of a stifling philosophical universalism that obscured its own ethnocentrism is that in becoming aware of its ethnocentrism theory is reduced to the ideological and praxiological. What happens here is that the critique of illicit universalism, perversely, becomes the justification for closing down political and historical horizons. It becomes a call to assert a collective will for self-reproduction over any immanent tendencies there might be for self-transformation. This critique of ahistorical self-understanding is, at the same time, a profound denial of real historicity.

Rorty's call for the philosophical-universal mode of self-understanding to be displaced by a historical and sociological one collapses under the weight of its particularist commitments. The shift in idiom has two consequences typical of Eurocentrism. First, the shift in register from the philosophical to the historical is not accompanied by any appreciable move to a concern with sociological realities. Specifically, the critique of universalism in philosophy has no parallel critique of political economic universalisation. This leaves plenty of scope for enriching the idea of Eurocentrism with historical and sociological material. On the other hand, the stated orientation towards the concrete is at the expense of necessary further philosophical considerations. While Rorty invokes ethnocentrism as a general category of philosophical anthropology, he eschews any need for a broader exploration and elaboration of such categories. Rorty's conservative, anti-rationalist valorisation of the concrete over the abstract works as an alternative mode of ideological obfuscation, both hiding real abstractions and blocking off inquiry into the philosophical abstractions needed to inform an adequate sociology.

Rorty's attempt to make ethnocentrism an essential category of sociology, then, fails both philosophical and sociologically. An alternative is needed: one which takes the full

range of its locations seriously and one which, rather than being reduced to defending the ethnocentrism of the modern, delves more deeply into what makes it special.

IV. Eurocentrism as a very special kind of ethnocentrism.

Eurocentrism is one form of ethnocentrism amongst many others, but not just another 'banal' instance. Eurocentrism, rather, is a limit case of ethnocentrism. It takes a problem common to all forms of ethnocentrism and develops it to the limits: the problem of illicit universalism. As far as most forms of ethnocentrism are concerned, both their universalism and its illicit character remain largely implicit. What distinguishes Eurocentrism from other forms of ethnocentrism is that its universalism is, by contrast, very much explicit: universals, and its own sense of universality, are an essential and abiding aspect of its self-understanding.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the illicit character of Eurocentric universalism either remains largely concealed, or else the full extent of its implications tend to be contained, so in this respect it remains characteristically ethnocentric.<sup>42</sup>

The most general account of Ethnocentrism includes two dimensions: a) a given culture or group is placed at the centre of the world; b) all other cultures are scaled or ranked in relation to the given culture or group.<sup>43</sup> The first part, (a) is what should properly be called ethnocentrism, as it places the culture at the heart of the world. In the ethnocentric imagination everything that happens in the world does so because of the one culture. Other cultures, in as much as they have any significance at all, do not exist for themselves but really only exist for the one. What others are and what they do is understood and explained in terms of how they affect and are affected by the group at the centre. The ethnocentric dimension of any world view produces an idea of others who do not really exist or act in their own right; cultural alterity is acknowledged, only to be causally or functionally reduced to the central culture. The cosmos imagined by ethnocentrism is therefore profoundly ambiguous about the ontological status of others: it grants them an existence whilst, at the same time, taking away existential autonomy.

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<sup>41</sup> Rorty's successful questioning of a specific form of modern universalism does not mean that he has successfully denied the essential internal relation of universalism to the modern. He deals with an actuality but does not deal with the deeper reality.

<sup>42</sup> The limitations of accounts of Eurocentrism are usually a consequence of their limited critique of universals. So while historical and sociological critiques usually lack a philosophical one, Rorty's philosophical critique, for instance, is not only incomplete, but also lacks the necessary historical and sociological equivalents.

<sup>43</sup> Sumner *Folkways: a study of the sociological importance of usages, manners, customs, mores, and morals*, Ginn and Co., Boston, 1911.

With the effective elimination of autonomous alterity, ethnocentrism generates its first mode of illicit universality: the concrete universalisation of the ethnocentric culture. The world, in the ethnocentric cosmos, is effectively reduced to the central culture. It is universalised in the sense that it can be everything, or that it can be the reason or explanation for everything.

The concrete universal is commonly contrasted with a second mode of universality: the abstract universal. The abstract universal is some feature of the world which belongs to many different individuals. For example, one might say that the colour red is an abstract universal. Many different individuals can be red, but there is no such 'thing' as red. Red is a predicate, a quality, which can belong to a thing, a subject. Another kind of example is species terms, such as dog. The general term 'dog' is a reference to a type and does not have an individual concrete existence, whereas individual dogs do. There is no creature 'dog' which stands alongside dogs. In the present context one of the most significant abstract universals is Man, or human being. Again, these terms do not indicate the existence of a particular. Only individual humans can exist. Universals do though have a concrete existence where they are the concrete universal, i.e. where they exist as that which binds many individuals together. The pack of dogs unites a number of individual dogs, so a given pack is a concrete universal. Likewise, a given society unites many humans, so that it too is a concrete universal. It should be noted that 'society', like 'red', is another abstract universal, and as such it does not have a concrete existence. Rather, each society or culture binds individuals together with specific ties, uniting them through specific kinds of relationships. So, the pack of dogs is not just a disorganised mass of dogs. It is organised, with characteristic features such as hierarchy. Within societies, people are bound together by the relationships they have inherited and on which they work. The concrete universal, then, exists as the relationships binding individuals together and is, therefore, the condition of existence of those individuals. The concrete universal exists as that which mediates individuals, giving rise to their individuality and their being a part of a greater unity.

A concrete universal is a reality which can explain other realities: it may be attributed with causal powers which can be the reason for things. The ethnocentric imagination establishes a given culture as the concrete universality of all cultures, representing itself as that which binds all cultures together, or even as that which binds the individuals of

other cultures together. It makes itself the reason for being and activity, in various ways. It could be as an efficient cause, seeing its own activity as bringing about the existence or activity of others; it could be as a final cause, seeing others only in terms of their functionality for the central group. Either way, it imposes a kind of unity on the world and, at the same time, makes itself the reason for that unity. The ethnocentric concrete universal is a form of mediation which grounds its own existence, and that of its surrounding world, in itself.<sup>44</sup>

The second aspect of ethnocentrism, (b) establishes the self as the standard against which others are scaled and ranked. In contrast to (a), this should properly be called 'ethnomorphism'. As opposed to the problems of illicit concrete universals, the problems of ethnomorphism are those of illicit *abstract* universalisation. Where ethnocentrism engenders an illicit concrete identification of self and other, ethnomorphism presupposes an underlying identity between apparently different cultures which are actually conceived as being essentially or potentially alike. This essential or ideal identity is presupposed by the application of a given set of ethical predicates to others, for such a move implicitly assumes that others are proper subjects of such predicates. Ethnomorphism, in this respect, is like anthropomorphism. The bears in the Goldilocks fairy tale, for instance, live in a house in the forest, make porridge, go out for walks, use bowls, chairs and beds and enjoy the powers of speech, etc. These are all abstract universals belonging to people from many societies, but here they are projected onto the bears. Now, these qualities are in fact co-produced by interactions between social and biological mechanisms. Projecting them onto the bears suggests that the same mechanisms are at work, producing an illicit identity with people. In order for human categories to be applied in this way, two, apparently different kinds of being have to be treated as if they were identical, i.e. (some of) the differences between them are effaced. The philosophical implication of anthropomorphism is that real differences between humans and non-humans are erased with (some of) the reality of alterity subsumed into that of being human: it generates an ontic identity between the two. Affirming the specific ontic character of the one entails a dismissal of the others.

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<sup>44</sup> Moishe Postone argues that self-grounding is what defines a 'substance'. While Marx rejects substance as a philosophical category, he nevertheless uses it to

Precisely the same kind of illicit identification occurs where one society deems that its specific qualities are applicable to others as a means of scaling or rating them: despite their different appearances, others are treated as if they were essentially identical to the group making the judgement. The Ethnomorphic imagination transforms cultural specificities into illicit abstract universals through the inappropriate application of its own predicates to other subjects. The application of its own qualities to others illicitly generalises them and, implicitly at least, also generalises its own ontic character. The other is ontically identical to the self. Such acts of judgement posit the given culture as an abstract universal. This is cultural ethnomorphism: the establishment of the self as the embodiment of the standards by which all are to be judged. The self becomes the ideal of culture, what it means to really be a culture.

Through its self-positing as the ideal of human culture, the ethnomorphic imagination generates an essential ambiguity about the meaning of cultural distinctiveness: differences are reduced to being no more than greater or lesser degrees of approximation to the ideal. Where the one culture is true to itself, others are untrue to the one. From this perspective, other cultures are characterised less by the qualities they actually have than by those they lack. Of course, what they really lack is the quality of being like the exemplary culture. Others, then, are essentially identical with, but actually different from, the self. This difference between essence and actuality, however, is projected into others as an internal contradiction. The condition of alterity becomes the absence of self-realisation. So, just as ethnocentrism engenders equivocations over other's autonomy, ethnomorphism gives rise to equivocation over their distinctive being.

Having introduced this distinction between ethnocentrism and ethnomorphism, by giving a specific meaning to each, a third term is now needed to denote this pair and allow for 'ethnocentrism' to be used in its more restricted sense. This third term is 'ethnicism'. It encompasses both ethnocentric concrete universalisation and ethnomorphic abstract universalisation.

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describe the realities of capital and the value relation. See *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996,

This discussion has so far been concerned with the imaginary or the symbolic, i.e. with ways of representing the world. However, there are practical counterparts to both ethnocentrism and ethnomorphism. That is, these forms of universalisation can be understood as real, as opposed to imaginary, relations. Any implications of this, however, will depend on the specific forms universals take. So, while the symbolic orders of all forms of culture appear to have a significant ethnicist dimension, the implications of each illicit self-universalisation for both their social imaginaries and social relations are enormously varied. Eurocentrism, for instance, is not only distinguished from others by its explicit universalism, it is also peculiar in that its tendencies to universalisation are oriented to totalisation.<sup>45</sup>

Universalism and universalisation are cultural tendencies amongst many others, and they will be of greater or lesser significance depending on the wider structures of cultural formation in which they are embedded. Ethnicist tendencies to universality are, by and large, checked by countervailing trends emanating from both within and beyond cultural boundaries. Consequently, few if any forms of life have been implicated in the construction of a real concrete universal centred on themselves: they have not engaged in a project of global transformation. Things are very different when it comes to Eurocentrism, or what will from now on be called Europism.

The term 'ethnicism' was just introduced above, to allow for a distinction between the two most significant uses 'ethnocentrism'. For the same reasons, the term 'Europism' will be used here to encompass both Eurocentrism and Euromorphism. The Europic Imaginary encompasses those forms of ethnicism which take Europe as their primal subject. Eurocentrism illicitly projects Europe onto the world as a concrete universal. This can take many forms: the European can appear as that which creates an overarching unity of other cultures by binding them together into a single social formation; it can mediate relations between other cultures; it can be the reason that other cultures have their being, even the very grounds for their existence and for their activities. Such visions of the world include all those in which cultural development

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<sup>45</sup> The terms 'totality' and 'totalisation' have several meanings, some of which will be considered in greater detail below. It should be noted at this point, though, that while totality must be understood to imply a form of unity, the precise nature of that form is of the highest significance. Althusser's suggestion that the

throughout the world is an effect of the European, characterised as what James Blaut has called 'diffusionism'.<sup>46</sup> The 'opposite' view, where other cultures are understood to be functionally related to the centre, is also Eurocentric, such as any vision of a global hierarchy of master-slave relations with Europe at the pinnacle.

By contrast, Euromorphism illicitly elevates European categories into abstract universals: European categories can become transcendent, invested with meaning far surpassing their real horizons of applicability. The European may be valorised as the very definition of what it means to be a culture; its categories can be established as those by which all cultures are understood and judged. Take, for example, political theories of natural law and rights, or economic theories of value, or world history given in terms of economic development. To the extent they impose an ahistorical frame on their subject, these intellectual traditions presuppose that their categories either do or should apply to any society. Any such ahistorical treatment of European categories is Euromorphic. Equally, any attempt to render European categories as ontological, rather than culturally specific, is similarly Euromorphic.<sup>47</sup>

Europism, at its most simple, is just European ethnicism, the fantastic, irrealist, transformation of European categories into concrete and abstract universals. Yet this is by no means all, for Europic tendencies to know self and others in self-universalising ways have their powerful practical, world transforming, counterparts. The Europic imaginary is deeply entwined with the totalising processes of modernity. Not only are Eurocentrism and Euromorphism expressed in terms of universals, they are embedded in social structures whose tendencies are to concretely and abstractly universalise the European.

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moments of modernity move together with 'teeth-gritting harmony' eloquently expresses the kind of unity intimated by 'totality' here.

<sup>46</sup> James Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: geographical diffusionism and Eurocentric history*, Guilford Press, New York and London, 1993.

<sup>47</sup> Georg Lukacs insists that Marx's critical theory was always an ontological critique. That is, according to Lukacs, Marx is continually engaged in disclosing and undoing the implicit ontological claims of traditional theory. Lukacs *Ontology*, Merlin, London, 1978 Also, see João Lonardo Meiros and Mário Duayer, 'Lukács' critical ontology and critical realism' in *Journal of Critical Realism*, Vol.4, No.2, 2005.

As discussed above, actual concrete universals mediate the parts of the whole, binding them together and constituting them as moments of a greater totality. The European really does develop as the concrete universal of the modern to the extent it mediates and constitutes the existence and activities of others. The European has achieved a real universality to the extent it has come to be established as the grounds of the existence and activities of others. For instance, concrete universalisation is the extension of powers and capacities across cultural (and natural) boundaries. Centres of modern politico-economic power are implicated in such universalisation as they project their capacities for legal regulation, economic extraction, military domination, hegemonic subordination, governmental and disciplinary subjectification, ideological mystification, etc.<sup>48</sup> Contemporary power relations not only stretch across the globe, but they are increasingly integrated into a global system. Such powers take many forms: direct influence over decisions others make; direct and indirect influence, only some of which comes about through decisions, over the kinds of decisions that others can make; deeper influence over beliefs, structures, practices. Above all it means the institution of abstract, impersonal imperatives in the forms of value and law. As such, the evolution of modernity constitutes an overarching context which constrains and transforms all forms of life and their activities.

One consequence of the exercise of specifically modern forms of power is that abstract universals derived from European experience become increasingly relevant to other societies. To the extent other societies become like European ones those categories acquire increasing purchase. The language of modern states and markets, with the distinctions between polity, economy and society, has an ever increasing relevance for non-European societies. That is, the pragmatic, praxiological validity of Euromorphic thought develops to the extent that really Euromorphic change actually takes place.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, some kinds of social transformation are simultaneously Eurocentric and Euromorphic. The global extension of capital, for instance, emanating from Europe, is a

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<sup>48</sup> There are many accounts of this. An especially clear example is Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital*, Verso London, 2002.

<sup>49</sup> It is worth reiterating that universalisation is neither simple nor linear. Modernisation engenders tensions between theory and practice, and those tensions are often greatest in peripheral regions where the socially disruptive tendencies of modernity tend to be displaced. See the next chapter for some further consideration of this in relation to 'hegemony'.

means of European and neo-European domination, subordinating others to European interests and, tendentially, reducing them to mere means to that end. It also means that other societies are constitutively mediated by the same social relation as that constituting European societies. From this limited perspective, capital establishes a universal identity between Europe and others. In addition, there are many other forms of modern social relation, such as law and modes of communication, which have also developed as significant dimensions of a globally integrated social formation. From the perspective of Eurocentrism, though, capital is the most significant instance of a concrete universal emanating from Europe. It binds societies together in unprecedented ways. In terms of Euromorphism, the development of these relations entails a degree of real identity between the various regions of this global social formation. As the concrete universal develops, so its social categories are universalised.

#### V. Europic Universalisation and its contradictions

Stated in these terms it might appear that Europic universalisation could be spoken of in fairly straightforward terms as a linear or logical process of development. This would be misleading. While it remains entirely appropriate to retain the language of universalism to discuss Europism and modernity, that language has to be significantly transformed. As the introductory chapter indicated, both the forms of Europic Universalism and of Europic Universalisation are essentially and systematically contradictory. Europism needs to be understood as the theory, practice and institution of specific forms of contradictions. In particular, it is the institution of a real contradiction between the abstract and concrete dimensions of cultural existence.

The dominant constitutive relation of civil society, capital, is inherently contradictory. So too is the kind of social unity to which it gives rise. Marx's account of these contradictions, developed as a part of the critique of civil society, provides a vital resource for understanding the dialectics of Europic universals. Capital, of course, is a tendentially universal social mediation with abstract and concrete dimensions. Its fundamental contradiction is between developments in these two dimensions, and is manifest in the tendency to domination by the abstract. What is permanent about capital is not this or that site of production, this or that product, or even this or that pole of accumulation. All of these concrete moments come and go in the frenetic, destructive

creativity of evolving capital. Abstract value and the impersonal social imperatives it generates are permanent. Value, an abstract and impersonal imperative, is the dominant determination of what will be produced, how, where and by whom. The universalisation of this relation means that all concrete elements of production tend to redundancy as they increasingly exist only for the sake of value. It is as a consequence of such imperatives that *all that is solid melts into air*.<sup>50</sup>

Abstracting from *Capital*, it is possible to generalise the form of this contradiction as the more general form of European universalism. This splitting of the world between the abstract and concrete, and the institution of abstract domination, can be found in modern categories other than capital. For instance, not only is this form of contradiction constitutive of the capital relation, it is also constitutive of the conceptual and perceptual forms associated with it. Further still, the same contradiction can be found in the other social relations and related theories of civil society: its political and legal forms, its theories and practices of rationality, history, literature, etc., each of which is subject to antinomial universalising tendencies.

This makes it possible to speak of Europeanism in terms of the dialectical universalisation of the categories of civil society. This encompasses the multiple contradictions and differentiations of and between its various categories, and the problematic forms in which these categories overdetermine one another and mutually reconstitute each other's conditions of existence. This reality of universalisation, contradiction and overdetermination both explains the need for critical theory and provides the real grounds for its theoretical object. It is this reality, the dialectical universalisation of civil society, which demands the identification of theoretical anti-Europeanism with the critique of civil society.

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<sup>50</sup> The phrase comes from Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*. It has become a defining motif of the modern, assisted by Berman's book of that title. Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: the experience of modernity*, Verso, London, 1983.

## **Chapter 4 - Ethical Economic Symbolic Representation: Eurocentrism and Imaginary Dialectical Universalisation.**

### I. Introduction.

Eurocentrism is a term of 'critical' theory, in as much as it exposes unwarranted privileges accruing to the European. However, the kind of criticism of existing theory and/or states of affairs made possible by this term remains limited as long as the real structures of the ethical economic imaginary and its real historical context remain untheorised. In the absence of the disclosure of real and imaginary European dialectical universalisation there can be no proper understanding of what privileging European forms of culture really means.

This chapter is devoted to an exploration of the workings of the ethical economic imaginary: Imaginary Dialectical Universalisation. This is the mode of symbolic representation capable of representing the contradictions of the modern in such a form that they can be 'resolved'. Three aspects of this will be explored. The first section explores universalism by examining some thoughts of Paul Ricoeur. Universalism is shown to be a complex discourse providing a complex of related perspectival locations from which to generate symbolic representations. The second part explores Karl Mannheim's account of ideology and utopia. This pair of terms can be established as the basic form of the normative and conceptual antinomies of modern universalism, mapping onto the inhuman/human dual of theoretical humanism.

Symbolic resolutions are achieved with the production of arguments or narratives in one or many perspectives. These narratives take the form of a dialectic of ideology and utopia, in which antagonistic principles substitute for social realities, and through which their resolution is 'worked out'. While the ethical economic form allows for various terms to act as bearers of the principles of inhumanity or humanity, this chapter shows how 'universality' and 'eurocentrism' are allotted these roles. As a consequence, 'Eurocentrism', far from disclosing the cultural realities of dialectical universalisation, is both internal to its political and historical reproduction and functions to obscure its real contradictions. Instead of exposing the de-moralisation of culture under modern

conditions, 'eurocentrism' belongs to the political processes of hegemony and to projects seeking to 'ethicise' the modern.

## II: Universality and Ethical-Economic symbolic representation.

Charles Taylor's account of the Modern Imaginary was discussed in Chapter Two, where the term 'ethical economy' was used to give it a greater degree of specificity: it served to highlight the dominant economic, not to say economic, quality of the modern social imaginary; it draws our attention to the foundational conceptions of impersonal exchange and commutative justice which shape idea of the good and the true form of culture.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, ethical economy is, above all, a mode of symbolic representation. The figure of the ethical economy is an ideologeme, i.e. the most fundamental unit of this mode of representation. As such it can be projected into philosophy, sociology, history and so on, where it provides the basic framework around which portrayals of the world and its problems are developed. Also, The Modern Imaginary resolves contradictions by representing the development of social antagonisms into ethical economic forms. That is, the ethical economic ideologeme is treated as the form of life from which contradictions have been removed. It provides that formal standard against which antagonisms, contradictions and problems appear as such, and it provides the standard by which they can be said to have been resolved. It is the presupposed criterion of social order and of the internal consistency of the Modern Imaginary. Thirdly, the universalist character of Eurocentrism shapes the kinds of judgement possible within the horizons of the ethical economy. Its illicit and irrealist form elevates historically specific forms into transhistorical ones; establishes its analytic forms of identity as the categorial presupposition of the problematic; specifies the form in which contradictions appear; and structures the practical task of resolving such contradictions.

Within the ethical economic problematic, universalisation appears as processes of expansion from core to periphery. There are two, related, senses of an expanding core. The primary sense of universalisation is the process of actualising a core essence. The category of the periphery covers those areas of the world in which the universal remains

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 2.

an immanent reality, a potential to be realised. Universalisation presupposes that processes of transformation are really ones of alethic self-realisation. The secondary sense of universalisation is a 'diffusionist' one: self-realisation at the periphery is dependent on the activity of core regions which have already attained self-realisation.<sup>2</sup> This kind of universalisation depends on the first, in that the potential for universalistic transformation must be present within the periphery, but is somehow blocked. Overcoming the obstacles to self-realisation cannot be self-driven but requires external purpose and activity. Ambiguities such as this are constitutive of ethical economic universalism. Their duality allows for a persistent conceptual slippage between essence and actuality, or between the transhistorical and the historically specific. In other words, the universals of the modern imaginary embody precisely the essence/actual duality which Althusser identifies as characteristic of the problematic of political economy and of theoretical-humanism in general.<sup>3</sup>

This conception of the modern imaginary as a form of symbolic representation needs to be developed as a species of dialectic whose specific form is the problematic of universal ethical economy. While the term 'Europic Dialectical Universalisation' covers the internally related symbolic and relational complex of Eurocentrism, 'Imaginary Dialectical Universalisation' shall refer to the form and dynamics of the modern imaginary. The latter dialectic is that of the imaginary relations and processes between the of core and peripheral zones of the ethical economy. One of its key characteristics is that it generates the categories of ideology and utopia as essential elements of its internal operation: these categories are presupposed by the persistent need to 'represent' and 'resolve' the antagonisms thrown up by the real contradictions of dialectical universalisation.

The conception of Dialectic developed here draws on four ideas developed by Roy Bhaskar: dialectical universalisation; what he calls the negative quadruplicity of dialectic; good and bad dialectics; the overarching of the analytic moment by the dialectical process.<sup>4</sup> In respect of the first of these, dialectical universalisation, Bhaskar uses this phrase in a way I have already said is implicit in Imaginary dialectical

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<sup>2</sup> Diffusionism is James Blaut's term. See this chapter, below.

<sup>3</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*

<sup>4</sup> Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, passim.

universalisation. That is, universalisation is a process in which the ontologically real, good and true is actualised. It is the processual realisation of eudaimonia in which humankind becomes true to the alethia of its species being.<sup>5</sup> For Bhaskar, the process through which we move from our existing state of lack to one in which we have become complete is constituted by four negative moments: (1) the removal of (2) the constraints on (3) the absencing of (4) the absence of eudaimonia. This dialectic is a good one in that it is a process motivated by the contradictions between our existing state of being and our alethia, and in that it involves the dissolution of those contradictions. This dialectic must also be understood as polyvalent, i.e. the positive and the negative, the present and the absent are co-mingled at all levels of reality and possibility. Against this, a bad dialectic is one that preserves and/or develops such contradictions, constraints, absences etc. Lastly, Bhaskar develops the distinction between analytics and dialectics in two ways. On the one hand analytics are the locus of identity thinking, as exemplified by the universals of ethical economy, entailing the absence of real change and an adequate sense of historicity. Analytics therefore stands in sharp contrast to the historicising thrust of the dialectics of critical realist and Marxian theory. On the other hand, analytical moments of identity are in fact located within historical and dialectical processes.<sup>6</sup>

As far as the present context is concerned, analytic universals embody the very contradictions which constitute it as dialectic, i.e. Europic universals are situated within Imaginary dialectical universalisation. Indeed, they are the categories through which the four negative moments of the Imaginary dialectic operate. That this is so can be seen with only a brief look at the core-periphery relations and processes of the modern imaginary. Applying the four negative moments to the transformation of the periphery in terms of the universalisation of the ethical-economic core we arrive at the following formulation of the Imaginary Dialectic: the (1) removal from the periphery of (2) the obstacles within it which block (3) the transformation of a state of disequilibrium by the (4) institution of ethical economy.

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<sup>5</sup> Bhaskar's conception of Eudaimonia is pitched at a philosophical and transhistorical level, rendering it a form of humanism revolving around a conception of human essence. Even though Bhaskar develops this form of humanism in the context of his realist ontology, there is a case to be made that this reproduces the errors of all forms of humanism precisely because it abstracts from the historically specific, and de-centred, conditions of human self-realisation.

This conception of the Imaginary Dialectical Universalisation of Ethical Economy takes us one important step beyond Charles Taylor's conception of the modern imaginary. It recognises the centrality of the ethical economic ideologeme to that imaginary, but develops an understanding of how this figure sustains its limited and contradictory sense of the historical. Within its horizons, modern history is the endlessly repeated institution of ethical economy, with its ideologeme always-already providing the point of reference from which to develop accounts of order and change; it is the pivot around which all historical and cultural developments are imagined to take place. As such, it continually provides the primary analytic moment of the overarching imaginary dialectic.

An elaboration of the inner dialectics of this imaginary emerges through a critique of some remarks of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur makes the following observations: "I would say that this concept of universality may be used in different contexts."<sup>7</sup> He then differentiates three distinct modes of universality. Firstly:

On the one hand, you may speak of universal rules of discourse - what Habermas says about rules of discussion, let us say the logic and ethics of argumentation. This is one level of universality, but it is too formal to be operative.

Ricoeur intends this first mode of universality to be a strictly philosophical one, in that he sees it remaining entirely formal. I take him to be making the Wittgensteinian point that no such 'rules' are to be found in any actual procedural codes, nor would they be 'followed' in any ideal speech situation. Rather, such a situation would come into being through participants conforming to these 'rules'. However, the implications of the formal character of this kind of universal were examined in the previous chapter, where such forms were discussed as projections of the ethical economic ideologeme. There is no need to say much more about it here, though one point worth reiterating is that calling this form universal is to make, or at least to imply, a certain kind of philosophical claim about the proper form of reason. The assertion of the universality of

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<sup>6</sup> See chapter 7 for more on this.

<sup>7</sup> All of the quotations used here are from Paul Ricoeur, 'Universality and the power of difference', in Richard Kearney, (ed.) *States of Mind: Dialogues with*

this form is, at the same time, an ontological assertion about the nature of reason. In this light, the philosophical function of Ricoeur's first form of universality can be clarified as being ontological.

Secondly, you have a universalist claim within our own culture. For example, we may claim that some rights to free speech are universal, in spite of the fact that for the time being they cannot be included in other cultures. But it's a claim, and remains only a claim as long as it not recognised by the others. So we bring to the discussion not only procedures of universality but also claims of universality. The project of universality is central to the whole debate about human rights. Take the example of the mutilation of women. I am sure we are right to say that there is something universal in our assertion that women have a right to pleasure, to physical integrity and so on, even if it is not recognised. But we have to bring that into the discussion. It's only discussion with the other which may finally convince the other that it's universal.

Once again, the assertion of universality conflates the transhistorical and the historically specific. This is typical of the categorial structures of the Eurocentric problematic. In this case, the two are conjoined when a particular idiom, that of human rights, is used to assert the moral worth of 'physical integrity and so on.' The category of rights is an essentially legal and contractual one which presupposes modern social relations. Its practical presupposition is social mediation by the legal-bureaucratic state. That these two idioms of moral worth and human rights can be run together with such apparent ease is, in part, due to the ambiguity of the term 'right'. Physical integrity can be said to be the right condition for human creatures, as it allows for the possible development and exercise of potential physical capacities, such as sexual pleasure. Saying this, however, does not help to resolve any conflicts there might be between this good and any others. It does not follow from affirming something is right in principle that any particular hierarchy of goods can be established, or that the social conditions for realising that good can be realised without fundamentally changing existing conditions.

The right to bodily integrity, on the other hand, presupposes a certain kind of political-legal institution, the social imaginary required to make sense of that institution, and agents with the powers to ensure that this particular human good will not be sacrificed to others. The actual universalisation of rights, therefore, involves a great deal more than just convincing others of the worth of physical integrity and persuading them to

change their ways. Asserting human rights in any context means intervening in pre-existing social arrangements and engaging in social struggles, but not on terms which derive from those arrangements. Rather, it means bringing the entire problematic of rights, i.e. its discourse, institutions and forms of agency, to bear on their transformation, albeit unevenly. What can appear as the 'simple' moral issue of the wrongness of mutilation is really the far more complicated business of drawing a particular social antagonism away from its context and onto the terrain of global hegemonic struggles.

For Ricoeur the philosopher, however, relating the modern state form to the universal moral status of bodily integrity is accomplished quite unproblematically. This move is significant not only because it is a category error, for it also reveals some of the consequences of such errors. Running the legal and moral together by-passes entire sets of problems related to the institution of possessive individualism through modern processes which disrupt psycho-physical integrity.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it is possible to speak of the institution of modern culture as engendering a structural contradiction: it is a form of consensually mediated disintegration brought about through the very mechanisms said to preserve both social and individual integrity.

The ideological function of such categories, then, is to naturalise the historical and sociological realities of ethical economic forms. What we have with this second mode of universal is an investment of human worth in some version of a naturalised ethical economy. The philosophical function of this second mode of universality, then, is deontological.

And thirdly, I would say that you have a kind of eschatological universalism - the universal as an ultimate project or goal as in Kant's *Essay on Perpetual Peace*.

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<sup>8</sup> The psychological consequences of rationalisation and other modes of modern universalisation have been an abiding theme of modern sociology. Christopher Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism* captures the sense in which Fordism engendered states of underdevelopment. More recently, Kathryn Dean has examined the contradictions between commodification and citizenship in terms of the impact of the former on the psychological maturity required for the latter. Kathryn Dean, *Capitalism and Citizenship: The impossible Partnership*, Critical Realism: Interventions, Routledge, London, 2003; Christopher Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism*, Norton, New York, 1979.

Kant's conception of universal peace is plainly a projection of an ethical economic ideologeme onto a future global state of affairs. However, what is interesting about Ricoeur's formulation here is this account of universality as a goal or project. The ideological function of this third form of universal is teleological. It is also a form of utopianism, and as this category will be taken up in the rest of this chapter, I will say no more about it here. Instead, it just remains to re-establish the connections between these three differentiated modes of universality.

Ricoeur's own account suggests, when invoking 'the project of universalism,' that these universals are distinct yet internally related moments of an overarching imaginary. While each mode is distinct, or at the very least different contexts demand different functions, these three modes of universality are interdependent. Firstly, any vision of realising deontological universality must be firmly grounded ontologically. For example, within this discourse it makes sense to speak of the possession of non-actualised rights. Actualising such rights, in the sense that being human means realising self-worth, implies an individual telos which is both real and immanent. Also, when Ricoeur says 'It's only discussion with the other which may finally convince the other that it's universal', he implies that the universal form of discursive relations is functionally related to the actualisation of deontological universals, and at the same time implying the value of such forms. The grander vision of the eschatological process, meanwhile, imagines the global actualisation of both ontological and deontological universals.

Recall, too, that Ricoeur said that 'this concept of universality may be used in different contexts.' This point can be put in somewhat different terms to those intended by Ricoeur: these universal categories are ideologemes which can be deployed in various discursive contexts. The universal itself does not change with context, for it remains a categorial presupposition of the problematic. It is an analytic category which retains its identity throughout, so that meaning, at this level at least, is not context dependent. What happens instead is that contexts have the effect of triggering one of the different philosophical functions of the category. So, according to context, the universal appears in one or other of its philosophical guises, the ontological, deontological or teleological.

In each case contexts can generate positive or negative effects. That is, any state of affairs can be represented as embodying, or as not embodying, the right form. It may possess the universal essence, or it may be a wholly pathological form of being; the universal may have been actualised, or not; the universal may be a potentiality, or not. This gives six formal possibilities. The problematic can now be seen to operate through the production of a series, or ensemble, of contexts, in which the ideologeme is triggered to produce one or more of these effects.

The formal range of contexts available for the deployment of universals is provided by the four negative moments of the imaginary dialectics of core-periphery universalisation and their transcendence. That is, the imaginary dialectic provides what amounts to a kind of narrative structure comprised of what might be called scenarios. Each moment lays the basis of a possible scenario within which the ideologeme can be made to play a determinate role. Finally, the formal narrative structure can be properly understood as the terrain on which symbolic antagonisms of universalism are generated and on which the symbolic resolution of such antagonisms can be brought about.

These rather formal points can be made a little more substantial with reference to disputes over the Eurocentrism of colonialism and some comments on Weber's inquiry into the obstacles facing the emergence of capitalism in India.

The dominant use of Eurocentrism in relation to colonialism is to provide an account of the failure of ethical economic forms to emerge in peripheral zones by evoking the distorting character of centre-periphery relations: colonialism, far from contributing to the emergence of ethical economic forms has instead instituted obstacles to development. Dependency theory, post-colonialism, unequal terms of trade, Orientalism: all of these relate the contradiction between core and periphery to the dominance of core regions over peripheral ones. In addition, they also deny the centre's claim to be an actualisation of ethical economy. Neither its internal nor external relations meet such standards. The realisation of ethical economic potential in the periphery requires the (negative) dismantling of colonial institutions and relations and a concomitant (positive) development of transformational capacities in the periphery itself

– Revolutionary and nationalist anti-colonialism having been conceived in precisely these terms.<sup>9</sup>

The opposite case is the familiar one that the expansion of European political economic institutions has been the diffusion of ethical economic relations, or is otherwise a necessary condition of ethical economic universalisation.<sup>10</sup> On such a view, imperialism appears as the pioneer of capitalism because the capacities of Empire are precisely those needed for both the removal of non-modern cultural obstacles and for the development of modern social forms (where removing constraints does not appear adequate). The defence of the ethical economic centre means that contradictions between core and periphery are located within the colonial periphery, where they appear as resolutely particularistic cultural elements, absences or pathologies. Critically, the form of symbolic representation determines the significance of peripheral forms of culture in terms of their relation to the universality of the core.

Within the tradition of classical sociology, Weber's work on India is a prominent expression of this latter position. To be sure, Weber does not shy away from addressing the inner tensions of European modernity, so his work as a whole is no straight forward exercise in externalising contradictions.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Weber's work conforms to the universalist problematic of ethical economy when he poses the strictly ahistorical question as to why capitalism had not developed in India when it had in Europe. For Weber, both Europe and India had developed the possibility of capitalism, but only in Europe was the possibility realised via Protestantism. The reformation generated a new form of religion which became the vehicle for the dissemination of the psycho-cultural qualities required to bring about a capitalist transformation. By contrast, the absence of any parallel reformation in the Indian context meant that capitalism would remain a latent possibility.

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<sup>9</sup> Wallerstein, 'Revolts Against the System'.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Bill Warren's *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*, Verso, London, 1980.

<sup>11</sup> Weber developed an account of the modern which is recognisable in terms of the differentiation of spheres and their mediation by specific forms of rationality. He can be readily seen as a forerunner to Habermas, in that he foregrounds a concern with the susceptibility of modern cultural spheres to penetration by inappropriate, distorting, forms of rationality.

That the universalist problematic is at work in Weber's writings on India can be shown by drawing out the ambiguity of the context in which he locates religion in India. On the one hand, religion is treated as an organic component of Indian civilisation, playing an essential role in giving shape to a form of life and to its immanent structure of historical possibilities. From this perspective, religion appears as a necessary and positive dimension of the cultural formation. On the other hand, the same religion is seen from the quite different perspective of emergent capitalism. It is now an obstacle, and it appears as a wholly negative aspect of the culture. Both perspectives are brought to bear by Weber in the production of a scenario which represents the historical horizons of Indian development within the universalist problematic.

The price to be paid for the construction of this scenario is a radical transfiguring of the real historical context. That is, the production of the scenario involves a kind of fusion of historical horizons which both adds and subtracts to Indian realities. The addition comes with the projection of European historical possibilities into the Indian context; the subtraction with the elimination of the colonial context. The problems confronting the development of capital in India had become real enough, a genuine practical problem, but this was a consequence of colonialism and the emerging dominance of this specific social relation within a changing world system. As we shall see below, Marx's writings on India were based on the quite distinct premise that British Imperialism and its capitalist competitors made this question, and others related to it, unavoidable. The nature of the obstacles to the expansion of capital had become a universal question, but it was not one that arose organically from within non-European cultures. Rather, just as Weber's question has been posed against the grain of the particular history of South Asia, so the actual answers provided by the real processes of universalisation tear at the fabric of this cultural zone as they unfold.

Weber's work clearly shows how quasi-historical antagonisms can be generated through the construction of a scenario which belongs to the formal structure of imaginary dialectical universalisation. Weber's scenario triggers multiple philosophical effects of the universal, the most obviously apparent of which is the absence from actuality of capital. However, without being located within the narrative structures of the realisation of ethical economic forms, the absence has the same kind of significance of the absence of wings on a cow. This absence only acquires the significance Weber attributes to it in

relation to a context in which capital is a potential to be actualised and/or an immanent telos. This is where the real work of the scenario is done. It transforms a species of historical category error into a 'rational' contradiction. The real historical contradiction, the one between forms of life, is transfigured into an antagonism within Indian culture. This, in turn, opens up the possibility for the equally 'rational' resolution of the antagonism: the transformation of religion into the medium of psycho-cultural transmission required for the development of capital.

### III: Humanism, Ideology and Utopia

Examples such as the one above disclose the way that the categories of imaginary dialectical universalisation provide the presuppositions of modern social and political theory, how they constitute the context within which a Eurocentric rationality takes shape. The categories examined so far, however, are by no means exhaustive, and before turning to the way in which the problematic determines the rationality of the term 'eurocentrism' and invests it with meaning, it is necessary to look at how imaginary dialectical universalisation generates the categories of ideology and utopia.

In his account of utopianism, Fredrick Jameson points out its two forms: wish fulfilment and constructive fantasy.<sup>12</sup> The utopian imaginings of wish fulfilment project desires from the present into the future wholly unconstrained by any strong sense of reality and its limitations. Constructive fantasies, on the other hand, take shape under the influence of a more efficacious irreality principle, with a sense that reality offers both resistance to desire and affords it creative possibilities. Now, there is a sense in which utopianism implies the very opposite of ethnocentrism, in that it articulates a visions of a form of life which transcends the present. The nowhere of utopia is no longer of the here and now. However, Jameson suggests, expressions of utopia are ideologically overdetermined, restraining the imagination within the confines of the given, blocking off the impulse to transcendence. More specifically, it draws utopianism and idealisation together, with idealisation sublimating utopian impulses. This amounts to a significant ideological success, as it means otherwise threatening moral impulses are contained within the imaginative horizons of the existing social order.

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<sup>12</sup> Fredrick Jameson, 'The Politics of Utopia', *New Left Review* 25, January and February 2004, pp. 35-54.

Modern social and political discourse has its expressly utopian tradition of course, and Jameson points to the four genres 'with which utopia seems closely related: the manifesto; the constitution; the "mirror for princes"; and great prophecy'.<sup>13</sup> However, I am less interested in genre than in the necessary utopian dimension of all forms of humanism and universalism which seek to extend and develop modern social institutions and forms of social relations. These discourses are characteristically utopian in the sense that they are not simply idealisations of present actualities, but are oriented towards absencing the gap between the ideal and the actual. Jameson indicates as much when he describes utopianism as offering 'the spectacle of one those rare phenomena whose concept is indistinguishable from its reality, whose ontology coincides with its representation'.<sup>14</sup> I.e. the symbolic representation of that form of life which instantiates the universal.

Rather than pursue Jameson's own discussion any further, I shall adopt his critical theoretical approach to ideology and utopia in order to show how a critique of Mannheim's account of these categories illuminates the operation of imaginary dialectical universalisation. In *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim first makes a distinction between those ideas which are 'congruent' and 'incongruent' with a given state of affairs.

Ideas which correspond to the concretely existing and *de facto* order are designated as 'adequate' and situationally congruous. These are relatively rare and only a state of mind that has been sociologically fully clarified operates with situationally congruous ideas and motives. Contrasted with situationally congruous and adequate ideas are the two main categories of ideas which transcend the situation - ideologies and utopias.<sup>15</sup>

Given the preponderance of the European problematic and irrealist humanism, however, even the 'mind that has been sociologically fully clarified' will be a rarity (unless Mannheim can be taken to be referring to critical-theoretical anti-Eurocentrism). In any case, epistemic incongruity, in itself, is no bar to functionality, and Mannheim's work can be read as differentiating between two ways of relating ideas, practices and reality, with the two modes of transcendence primarily defined in terms of their relations to the

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<sup>13</sup> Jameson, p. 41

<sup>14</sup> Jameson, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1960. p. 175.

limitations implied by the existing order: the ideological emphasises the need for symbolic work; the utopian emphasising the need to change the existing situation.

Mannheim understands an existing situation as “that which is ‘concretely effective’, i.e. a functioning social order, which does not exist only in the imagination of certain individuals but according to which people really act.”<sup>16</sup> Some conceptions “... are to be designated as ‘transcendent’ or ‘unreal’ because their contents can never be realized in the societies in which they exist, and because one could not live and act according to them within the limits of the existing social order.”<sup>17</sup> That is, transcendent ideas stand in irresolvable contradictions with the existing order. What distinguishes ideology from utopia is the locus in which pursuit of the conceptions is most keenly felt: ideologically motivated practice distorts meaning, whilst acting under a utopian impulse brings about deep change in social relations.

“Ideologies,” Mannheim writes, “are the situationally transcendent ideas which never succeed *de facto* in the realization of their projected contents”.<sup>18</sup> While such ideas can be sustained within the structure of possibility of the existing order, they never develop a practical challenge to it. A price has to be paid, however. “Though [ideologies] often become the good-intentioned motives for the subjective conduct of the individual, when they are actually embodied in practice their meanings are most frequently distorted.”<sup>19</sup> This implies the need for ongoing ideological repair work: resolving imaginary antagonisms whilst reproducing real ones. By contrast, “... those orientations transcending reality will be referred to as utopian which, when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time.”<sup>20</sup> Unlike ideological unreality, the utopian unreal is a real possibility, but one whose condition of possibility is the transformation of the existing order. “Utopias ... are not ideologies, i.e. they are not ideologies in the measure and in so far as they succeed through counteractivity in transforming the existing historical reality into one more in accord with their own conceptions.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Mannheim, p. 174.

<sup>17</sup> Mannheim, p. 175.

<sup>18</sup> Mannheim, p. 175.

<sup>19</sup> Mannheim, p. 175.

<sup>20</sup> Mannheim, p. 173.

Mannheim's own account suggests, though, that the distinctions between ideology and utopia, and between existing situations and their transformations, can all be readily located with an account of imaginary dialectical universalisation. That is, the implications of sharp conceptual and historical breaks between ideology and utopia can be significantly mitigated, by recognising that the utopian impulse actually contains a self-negating tendency towards becoming ideology. As another world is brought into being, as the gap between existence and transcendence is narrowed, the utopian character of the conception increasingly shades over into the ideological. Mannheim's own account of the fate of the utopian in the modern period, indeed, suggests an overarching narrative in which the two categories converge. "The historical process itself shows us a gradual descent and a closer approximation to real life of a utopia that at one time completely transcended history."<sup>22</sup> Utopias within the modern period have arisen as modes of 'counteractivity' which have fallen short of genuinely revolutionary transformation. Mannheim's characterisation of socialism can be extended to cover other forms of utopian thought: This idea "... in its interaction with 'actual' events, operates not as a purely formal and transcendent principle which regulates the event from the outside, but rather as a 'tendency' within the matrix of this reality which continuously corrects itself with reference to this context."<sup>23</sup> Modernist utopianism informs historical tendencies which have been successfully contained within essentially modern constraints.

Mannheim reinforces this view with an account of liberal-humanist utopianism. Writing on the Liberal Humanitarian Idea, Mannheim says: "In its characteristic form it also establishes a 'correct' rational conception to be set against evil reality."<sup>24</sup> As such it is a standard against which any existing social arrangements can be measured.

The utopia of the liberal-humanitarian mentality is the 'idea'. This, however, is not the static platonic idea of the Greek tradition, which was a concrete archetype, a primal model of things; but here the idea is rather conceived of as a formal goal projected into the infinite future whose function is to act as a regulative device in mundane affairs.<sup>25</sup>

While the gap between the ideal and the mundane is never bridged, the two do come together in practice. The ideal informs the ongoing reproduction and transformation of

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<sup>21</sup> Mannheim, p. 176.

<sup>22</sup> Mannheim, p. 222.

<sup>23</sup> Mannheim, p. 221.

<sup>24</sup> Mannheim, p. 197.

<sup>25</sup> Mannheim, p. 197.

the mundane, as political and social practice are nothing other than ongoing attempts to subsume the world under one or other instantiation of the Modern Imaginary. Utopianism is not 'transcendent' in the sense of an unreality beyond the horizons of the modern, after all. Rather, utopianism is the production of scenarios within imaginary dialectical universalisation which trigger the teleological potential of the ethical economic universal. It identifies antagonisms in the actual and informs their practical transformation with a view to the institution of a potential, non-antagonistic, state of affairs.

Aspects of imaginary dialectical universalisation can now be restated in terms of a 'dialectic' of ideology and utopia. Ideology works to produce scenarios which trigger the actualisation of the universal and to resolve antagonisms within them. Utopianism, meanwhile, produces scenarios which trigger the absence of actualised universality, one effect of which is to reveal the former scenarios as ideological. Utopianism also sets out to inform the practices which will practically resolve the antagonisms its own scenarios of the present have identified. Initially, at least, utopianism is untroubled by its own internal problems, but as its scenarios of the future are tested by political practice it has to become increasingly ideological as it is forced to come to terms with its own increasingly apparent unreality.

#### IV: Eurocentrism and Ideology, Utopia and Universalism

A common feature of accounts of Eurocentrism is that they remain confined within these horizons of Imaginary Dialectical Universalisation, reproducing the dialectic of ideology and utopia of ethical economy. Within the European problematic, 'Eurocentrism' is deployed as a critical term from a utopian perspective. A 'Eurocentric' scenario is of some structural disequilibrium, usually combining both structural and discursive dysfunctions, but 'ideologically' represented as an actualised ethical economy. Of course, these dysfunctions are imagined in ways which also allow their resolutions to be imagined as well. The utopian scenario therefore implies a certain narrative in which the identification of the Eurocentric historical moment prefigures its subsequent transcendence. Emerging out of it, and motivated by its self-knowledge as Eurocentric, is the actualisation of the ethical economy. Its historical sensibility

anticipates and looks back on the processes which resolve the antagonisms of the ideological scenario, as seen from the utopian perspective.

Two accounts of Eurocentrism, Ozay Mehmet's *Westernizing the Third World* and James Blaut's *The Colonizer's Model of the World*, will illustrate this.<sup>26</sup> These writers exemplify the way that identifying Eurocentrism is the exposure of ideology, i.e. the pointing out of theory-practice inconsistencies within processes of universalisation. Meanwhile, from the standpoint of utopian anti-Eurocentrism, existing states of affairs are shown to be represented as either having achieved universality or progressing towards it, whilst its form of universalism in fact obscures and mediates the reproduction of Eurocentric social relations. They also show how utopian responses to their diagnoses are produced, responses which, more or less thinly, project the four negative moments of the emergence of an ethical economy. Within the ethical-economic, humanist, problematic, the solution to these theory-practice inconsistencies is simply a temporal displacement of the actualisation of universality from the present into a different future.

Ozay Mehmet, in *Westernizing the Third World: the Eurocentricity of Economic Development*, provides a typical example of ideology critique as it appears within Imaginary Dialectical Universalisation. His work on economics reveals a gap between the claims of orthodox economics that existing market relations are actualisations of ethical economy, on the one hand, and the centre-periphery relations which those claims inform and obscure, on the other. His utopian response to this problem is to argue for a form of developmental economics which would adequately guide the reform process needed for the actualisation of genuinely ethical economic relations. Mehmet discusses nearly two-hundred years of classical and neo-classical economic thought. His core argument is that the central tenet of this tradition, that trade is intrinsically mutually beneficial to those involved, renders that tradition Eurocentric. For Mehmet, the essential normative appeal of international trade, that it embodies the modern form of commutative justice, is a Eurocentric fraud.

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<sup>26</sup> Ozay Mehmet, *Westernizing the Third World: the Eurocentricity of Economic Development Theories*, Routledge, London, 1995.

The dominant tradition represents economic development as the processual universalisation of exchange relations. The latter are conceived in terms of inter-cultural neutrality – i.e. the impersonal, mutually beneficial, exchange relations idealised by ethical economic imaginary. Mehmet, however, points to a number of problems translating the Imagined economy into reality. Firstly,

At [the] deeper level of analysis the fundamental flaws [of that tradition] are identified as the behavioural and subjective assumptions on which rests mainstream economics. In static terms, this ensures that the market forces of supply and demand clear. Market clearance is no more than a fleeting moment; it may be efficient at the point of equilibrium ensuring profit-maximizing output. But in the more normal state of disequilibrium, neither efficiency nor equity conditions hold in income distribution.<sup>27</sup>

Economic theory recognises the possibility of disequilibria, but instead of treating this as the ‘normal state’ develops its account of market relations on the basis of the ‘fleeting moments’ of equilibria. The consequence of treating the exceptional as the normal is that economics is effectively oriented towards preserving, rather than rectifying, a state of disequilibrium. Also:

Eurocentric economics presents a further problem: it is necessary to question the assumption of rational self-interested economic man, narrowly defined within an objective function as a utility maximiser subject only to his own taste and budget constraint. Such behaviour encourages selfishness and rejects the ethics of altruism or reciprocity, i.e. interdependent utilities in a family or community.... The sole significant fact is that individualism clears the market.<sup>28</sup>

The doctrine of the equilibrium, i.e. of the actualised ethical economy, implies that the existence of the market is sufficient to meet the conditions of commutative justice. This is not so much apolitical as anti-political. It means that the role of the state is to preserve the existing conditions, ruling out the political construction of the conditions of just exchange. Finally,

Self-interested utility maximization looks like a fair competition; a game played on ‘a level playing field’, in which market forces objectively determine not only resource allocation, but distribution of reward according to productivity. However, distribution and productivity are in fact, subjectively determined by initial inequalities which the Pareto Optimality theorem ignores. In pragmatic policy terms, Western capitalism does not have an objective theory of distribution; it merely rewards the stronger.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mehmet, p. 136.

<sup>28</sup> Mehmet, pp. 136-7.

What Mehmet calls 'the absence of a theory of distribution' is the lack of a conception of how substantive inequalities need to be limited if formal exchange on the basis of equality are to meet the criterion of commutative justice. Mehmet can be read as addressing a problem that arises within narrowly economic thought as a consequence of the absence of any explicit considerations of the political and ethical issues which are at the heart of John Rawls' account of justice as fairness.<sup>30</sup> Unlike economic theory, Rawls' version of contract theory directly confronts the possibility of antagonisms arising between formal equality and substantive inequality. In contrast to Rousseau, for instance, whose contractarian vision of a resolution to this problem was premised on a high degree of substantive equality, Rawls argues for establishing a functional equilibrium between the two. In the absence of such a theory of distribution, the ethical component of the economic is severed from its substantive conditions of possibilities. That is, Rawls effects a displacement of the problem of justice from the sphere of direct exchange onto a sociological scenario in which substantive inequalities become functionally beneficial to the worst off.

Mainstream economics, then, is especially vulnerable to becoming ideological in the sense that it is likely to represent a state of dysfunctional inequality as consistent with commutative justice. Mehmet follows this logic through by constructing an ideological scenario which relates this form of economic thought to the reproduction of structurally dysfunctional distribution. Within this scenario, trade relations are in fact characterised by the coerced institution of market distortions which systematically bias the flows of revenues so that accumulation occurs in the European core. Drawing on Pierro Sraffa, Mehmet effectively identifies Eurocentrism with 'capitalisation'. He calls this the 'inner logic of mercantilism old and new'.<sup>31</sup> The term describes the process of transforming any and all resources into capital. All available resources are rendered as capital and then returns accrue to this form of property which can be traded on markets. This form of property, he argues, only survives through conformity to the law of compound rates of return. Under this compulsion:

Historically, capitalization has existed as long as capitalism itself because its inner logic is mercantilism, the pursuit of trade balances by all means necessary. Thus, in the age of colonialism, vacant lands in North America, Australia, New

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<sup>29</sup> Mehmet, p.137.

<sup>30</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Mass. ; London : Belknap Press, 1971.

<sup>31</sup> Mehmet, p. 22.

Zealand, mines in South Africa, plantations in Southeast Asia and the Caribbean were capitalized by colonial entrepreneurs as the indigenous inhabitants were pushed out or eliminated to make room for European interests operating as monopoly or oligopoly and extracting windfall profits.<sup>32</sup>

Eurocentrism, for Mehmet, must be understood as the terms of trade internal to capitalisation. He says: "Underpricing of Third World resources by Western interests has been the most systemic and widespread technique of capitalization".<sup>33</sup>

While not discussed by Mehmet, the principal rival to what he calls 'mainstream' economics, i.e. the classical and neo-classical traditions, has been the overtly mercantilist or neo-mercantilist rival tradition of 'national economics', which has come down to us through such figures as Friedrich List. Unlike the market-centred Anglo-Saxon tradition, national economics has fore-grounded the role of the state as an agent of accumulation in its own right and its role in producing and sustaining the conditions of capital accumulation. Mehmet's criticism of the mainstream can be summarised as its failure to acknowledge either its own mercantilism or to recognise that economic realities are, in part, a consequence of this mercantilism.

Having generated this ideological scenario, Mehmet turns to his utopian moment. He argues that 'The Eurocentric Mindset', the us-them structure of economic thought, took a blow with the rise of the NICs and the 'end of the third world'.<sup>34</sup> Mehmet treats this as an example of development "achieved independently and out of policy pragmatism. It was shaped by indigenous or national necessity reflecting internal cultural values and choices, despite, rather than because of, western mainstream theorizing". He argues that this path "suggests a pro-labour, people-focused development that empowers local cultures and places the individual in a community".<sup>35</sup> Economic development in the periphery is represented as taking place with neither 'Western theorizing' nor its mercantile political economy. There is, instead, autonomous indigenous development which realises domestic conditions of commutative justice, and mutual self-realisation. This is accompanied by the institution of a sufficient degree of international substantive equality to ground commutative justice in this sphere as well. True forms of

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<sup>32</sup> Mehmet, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> Mehmet, p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> The reference is to Nigel Harris, *The end of the Third World: newly industrializing countries and the decline of an ideology*, Tauris, London, 1986.

development are those which realise the universal humanist promise of capitalist modernity.

Mehmet's work conforms to the dialectics of ideology and utopia of ethical economy. Eurocentrism is fleshed out in terms of an ideological scenario which is then represented as being transcended by a scenario of utopian development. However, as Alice Amsden and others showed, the theory and practice of NIC development is squarely located in the tradition of national economics.<sup>36</sup> What is more, the conditions of possibility of both the strategy and its degrees of success are a consequence of its historical background and geo-political context. Japanese and American occupations radically altered agrarian class structures to favour capitalist industrialisation, and there were strong linkages between U.S. trade and finance policies, designed to strengthen South Korea relative to its neighbours, especially North Korea, and its overarching security strategy for the region. Rather than representing this as a contradiction between development and mercantilism, as Mehmet does, it would be more consistent to move on to yet another dialectic of ideology and utopia. This would represent the articulation of global and local mercantilist-developmental strategies, each guided by their own ideologies and instituting their particular forms of distortion, as the ideological scenario to be transcended by a further utopian one.<sup>37</sup>

James Blaut's work on Eurocentrism in history also conforms to the dialectics of ideology and utopia. His ideological scenario combines an ideology of modern civilisation, i.e. European 'diffusionism', with the structural dysfunctions implied by the global institution of colonialism. He also develops a utopian scenario which provides the ideals from which the ideological scenario is judged wanting. This provides the telos of an alternative historical narrative in which the ideology of illicit universalisation and its related dysfunctional structure, regarded as obstacles to the emergence of ethical economic relations, are absented as part of a global transformation.

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<sup>35</sup> Mehmet, p. 146.

<sup>36</sup> Alice H. Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and late industrialization*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

<sup>37</sup> Of course, the real alternative would be to shift the entire discussion onto the terrain of theoretical anti-Eurocentrism.

Blaut's ideological scenario has the usual two components. His form of illicit universalism is a general mythological framework of historiography, Eurocentric Diffusionism, in which Europeans lay claim to a monopoly of historical creativity. His structurally dysfunctional relations emerge from his discussion of colonialism, which he treats as the mechanism by which European powers were able to capture a globally emergent capitalism. This ideological scenario is in large measure a response to what Blaut sees as the problem of the non-emergence of non-European capitalism. As such it is a generalised version of Weber's problem of the non-emergence of Indian capitalism. Consequently, the scenario encounters a similar set of difficulties to those encountered by Weber's.

Blaut begins by surveying US textbooks on world history, at fifty year intervals beginning in the 1830s, all of which evince the same historical conception of cultural development. Gradually shifting from a christian influenced view to a more secular one, and lagging, often considerably, behind academic historical work, and generally ignoring controversies, these books have largely reproduced Eurocentric Diffusionism, which he characterises as follows:

It is a theory about the way cultural processes tend to move over the surface of the world as a whole. They tend to flow out of the European sector and toward the non-European sector. This is the natural, normal, logical, and ethical flow of culture, of innovation, of human causality. Europe is the source of most diffusions; non-Europe is the recipient.<sup>38</sup>

This world-view is by no means confined to the class room:

Eurocentrism is the colonizer's model of the world in a very literal sense: it is not merely a set of beliefs, a bundle of beliefs. It has evolved, through time, into a very finely sculptured model, a structured whole; in fact a single theory; in fact a super theory, a general framework for many smaller theories, historical, geographical, psychological, sociological, and philosophical. This supertheory is *diffusionism*.<sup>39</sup>

Blaut's account shows diffusionist history representing a European core as the causal agent of Euromorphic transformation of the periphery. These two moments of Europism are to be found throughout the wide range of substantive, historical and sociological work. In addition, they all have in common 'the most important tenets' of diffusionism, i.e. 'the autonomous rise of Europe' and 'the European Miracle'. That is, these tenets

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<sup>38</sup> Blaut, James, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History*, The Guilford Press, New York/London, 1993. p. 1.

provide an account of the emergence of universality in Europe in terms of spontaneous self-actualisation. Against this outlook, Blaut lays the ground for his utopian perspective by arguing that history and sociology should be developed within an alternative framework, what he calls 'uniformitarianism'.<sup>40</sup> This approach is based on alternative presuppositions concerning universality. This is intended to frame a rival mode of representation in which a rather different world would appear:

This would be a world in which the processes at work in any one sector are also expected to be at work in the other sectors. In essence this model is driven by a concept of equal capability of human beings - psychological unity - in all cultures and regions, and from this argument it demands that any spatial inequalities in matters relating to cultural evolution, and more specifically economic development, be *explained*. Stated differently: equality is the normal condition and inequalities need to be explained. Diffusionism, in contrast, expects basic inequality between the Inner and Outer sectors of the world - and of humanity. The uniformitarian principle is not one of uniformity; it is the principle of human equality.<sup>41</sup>

Blaut's utopian perspective is premised on an ontological deployment of an ethical economic ideogeme. This state of normality and equilibrium provides the rationale for the ideological scenario and for his account of the emergence of a structurally dysfunctional distribution of political power. This anti-Eurocentric utopianism tackles the claim for Europe as the sole self-actualising culture by replacing the diffusionist scenario with one in which Europe's rise to world domination is explained by its imposition of a systematically self-aggrandising appropriation of a common process of cultural evolution. In this way Blaut is able to tackle the emergence of capitalism within the world-system in a way which addresses the twin motifs of 'autonomy' and the need for 'miracles'.<sup>42</sup>

Before 1492, most of the preconditions that would be critical for the eventual rise of industrial capitalism were present not merely in parts of Europe but also in parts of Asia and Africa. After 1492, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europe acquired three additional preconditions. One was the very considerable accumulation of wealth from the mines and plantations of America

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<sup>39</sup> Blaut, *Colonizer's Model*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>40</sup> See also the following articles by James Blaut: 'Two views of diffusion' in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 67: 343-349, 1977; 'Diffusionism: A uniformitarian critique.' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77: 30-47.

<sup>41</sup> Blaut, p. 42. Emphasis in original.

<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, Blaut identifies the common feature of liberal, Marxist and Weberian accounts of the European 'miracle' as attempts to isolate the elusive 'factor' which will explain Europe's special destiny. They are all portrayed as mirror images of Weber's examination of India.

and from foreign trade in Asia and Africa. The second, closely related to the first, was the huge enlargement of markets outside of western Europe for products either produced in western Europe or imported and then re-exported. Third, and most important of all, the social sectors involved with capitalism took political power on a wide scale in western Europe, something that had not happened elsewhere except on very small terrains. This, the bourgeois revolution, allowed the emerging capitalist class-community to mobilize state power toward its further rise, such that the entire society contributed to the underwriting of colonial adventures and to the preparation of infrastructure such as cities and roads, while that state's police and military power could now be mobilized to force people off the land and into wage work, and to conscript people and resources for advantageous wars abroad. All three of these precursors, as I have argued, appeared because of - would not have appeared had it not been for - colonialism.<sup>43</sup>

In this scenario, the creative capacities, and 'most of the preconditions' necessary for capitalist development were not concentrated in any one part of the world. They were instead evolving throughout it and would, *ceteris paribus*, have continued to do so. Within this context, however, the even process of cultural development was interrupted as European powers came to dominance. Three political-economic processes caused this: primitive accumulation centred on Europe; the expansion of trade networks centred on the core; political and social transformation within the core.<sup>44</sup> Each of these was dependent on colonialism.

Colonialism, in this context, has to be understood as a mechanism for the appropriation of cultural resources, as a means of transferring control over the exercise of cultural capacities from the periphery to the core. Colonialism institutes cultural alienation. What Eurocentric diffusionism represents as a self-actualising universal, Blaut's anti-Eurocentric representation portrays as universal cultural expropriation. The utopian implications of this ideological scenario, meanwhile, logically follow: the restoration of the natural, uniformitarian, state of affairs. This entails the dissolution of diffusionist ideology and colonial institutions, paving the way for the restitution of alienated cultural capacities to peripheral communities. The narrative is of the transformation of inter-cultural relations, with their reconstitution on an ethical-economic basis, such that culturally distinct groups become engaged in mutually beneficial contractualised transactions.

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<sup>43</sup> Blaut, p. 201.

This historical revisionism raises many questions, not the least of which concern the distinctions and relations between European colonial dominance and emergent capital. In the construction of his scenario, Blaut runs together two very different kinds of argument. The first is the 'Weberian' presupposition that capital is a universal possibility whose absence in the non-European world needs to be explained no less than does its presence in Europe. The second is that colonialism was, historically, essential to the emergence of capitalism. It is, of course, entirely appropriate to investigate the significance of colonialism for the development of a capitalist world system, but this can be done without any recourse to claims that capitalism was an emergent possibility the world over. Blaut's purpose, though, is to repudiate a narrow identification of Europe with capitalism, and to emphasise instead European domination of a world capitalist system. The proper historical questions about the more or less forced integration and transformation of non-European cultural powers and capacities into the emergence of capitalism are displaced by a scenario which regards non-European lands as sites of externally imposed distortions to immanent capitalist development.

#### V. Conclusions.

The critical theory of Eurocentrism being developed here, i.e. theoretical anti-Eurocentrism, has as its theoretical objects European theory, practice and social formation. This chapter has investigated the inner workings of theoretical Eurocentrism, and the place of 'Eurocentrism' within it. It has intimated the sheer scope of the former and the highly restricted nature of the latter.

The discussion, in Chapter 2, of Althusser's account of theoretical humanism, was concerned with the overarching problematic of the modern tradition of political and social theory. That chapter drew attention to some of humanism's fundamental features, including its theoretical reduction to concepts of human essence and the consequential human/inhuman dual. This chapter should be understood as having made a contribution to the development of Althusser's account of humanism. It has specified some of the characteristics of the humanist tradition which constitute it as theoretical Eurocentrism.

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<sup>44</sup> See Blaut (ed.), *The Debate on Colonialism*, Verso, London, 1992, for an overview of these debates.

Eurocentric discourse is a humanist mode of symbolic representation which revolves around theoretical reductions to conceptions of ethical economy and which generates the ethical/unethical dual as a consequence. This inner structure was brought out through a series of critical readings of commentaries on forms of theoretical-humanist thought.

The reading of Ricoeur's account of universalism took up his account of its differentiation between its ontological, deontological and teleological dimensions. Drawing attention to some of the presuppositions of universalism not included in his account, this critical elaboration showed how each of these dimensions is internally related to the others; how the basis of intelligibility in each dimension is the ethical-economic ideologeme; and how the form of universality of its categories is illicit, generating the systematic ambiguities characteristic of irrealism.

The ethical-economic ideologeme is the theoretical complement to humanist accounts of human essence, providing a conception of a mode of sociality. The critique of Ricoeur revealed how the projection of the ideologeme into the various dimensions of universalism is, at the same time, the projection of the ethical/unethical dual into them. The overall effect of these multiple duals is the complex of interlocking and mutually reinforcing discourses capable of symbolically representing the modern and processes of modernisation.

The subsequent critique of Mannheim built on these insights to reveal the operation of the ethical/unethical dual as the narrative form in which real contradictions are represented and resolved. This was shown to take the form of the dialectics of ideological and utopian scenarios. Drawing, more or less implicitly, on all three of Ricoeur's dimensions, liberal humanist discourse is engaged in generating ethical economic utopias as political and social teleologies, and doing so in response to perceived dysfunctions and tensions created by processes of universalisation. Given the contradictions inherent in this form of universalism, theoretical Eurocentrism can be properly called Imaginary Dialectical Universalism.

Finally, the two critiques of 'Eurocentrism' showed how the term was deployed for the construction of ideological scenarios in the disciplines of economics and history.

'Eurocentrism' was shown to be not simply a limited or partial term of social criticism. While it is a term used to make negative evaluations, and it is used to represent Eurocentric states of affairs, its real use is to contribute to transitions from one Eurocentric configuration to another. Precisely because the term operates on the terrain of theoretical Eurocentrism, and it posits the emergence of an ethicised social formation, it is instrumental in the transformative reproduction of Real Eurocentrism. As such it is but one moment in the Dialectical Universalisation of Europic categories and relations.

In that interesting and fertile remark, Immanuel Wallerstein refers to a widespread position he calls eurocentric anti-eurocentrism: systems of values which are actually derived from the European experience, but are not conceived as belonging to it.<sup>45</sup> In so saying he intimates the deontological dimension of universalism. This form of discourse valorises modern institutions, divorces them from their original historical context, and establishes them as the proper aspirations of all the nations of the world. The ubiquity of such Euromorphic universalism is itself an indication of the depth of social transformation brought about through dialectical universalisation, and of the organisation of the terrain on which hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggles are fought out. It is as a consequence of European dominance that many advocates for non-European cultural traditions are forced into the position of having to lay claim to forms of modernity which substantively diverge from the trajectories followed by Europeans, and to do so by maintaining the fiction of an organic continuity between the past and the present. The dialectics of ideology and utopia of the ethical economy provides the general narrative form in which the contradictions of these and other histories are represented, contained and resolved or anticipated.

In the absence of a theoretical anti-Eurocentrism, these kinds of intellectual constraints will remain in place. The possibility for the further development of critical theory, however, is embedded in the very processes of Dialectical Universalisation, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>45</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, "Eurocentrism and its Avatars: The Dilemmas of Social Science", *New Left Review*, 226, November/December 1997, pp. 93-107.

## **Chapter 5 - The Dual Dialectics of the Ethical Economic Imaginary.**

### I. Introduction: Historicising modern categories

Questions concerning the Europic problematic are inseparable from those relating to the critical theoretical anti-Eurocentrism needed to understand it. The Europic problematic, in the expanded sense discussed in Chapter 2, encompasses the theory, practice and social relations of modern European universalisation. Theoretical anti-Eurocentrism is the critical theory of this problematic. There are a number of senses in which the latter is anti-Eurocentric, with this chapter examining the way that theoretical anti-Eurocentrism emerges out of and against theoretical Eurocentrism.

The relationship between the two modes of theory is a mutually constituting antagonism. Critical theoretical anti-Eurocentrism is in a continuous process of theoretical development. It is motivated by the ensemble of contradictions constituting the Europic problematic. These contradictions are internal to roles, functions and effects of the ethical economic ideologeme, and it is the intellectual reproduction of this ideologeme which generates the problem, raised in the opening chapter, of the historical reflexivity of the modern tradition. This is because, when it comes to the historical status of modern categories, the ideologenic practices of the modern tradition generate a systematic ambiguity. The categories of this and other ideologemes are treated as both transhistorical universals, when they are deployed as essence, and they are treated as historically specific, when they appear as actualities. As a result of this ambiguity, the modern tradition of political and social theory runs into systemic difficulties when it comes to developing an adequate sense of its own historicity. Nevertheless, these very ambiguities also drive tendencies towards critical theoretical anti-Eurocentrism: they provoke fundamental questions about the nature of the tradition, and ground attempts to secure the properly historical status of the modern categories of the Europic problematic, both discursive and non-discursive.

The broad argument presented here elaborates some of the implications of this internally contradictory structure of theoretical Eurocentrism. The ethical economic ideologeme, with its structural ramifications, should be understood in terms of a complex mechanism which generates opposing tendencies towards both traditional and critical theory, with

the former manifest as the defence and reproduction of the dialectics of ideology and utopia, and the latter engaged in its critical theoretical structural transformation. These conflicting tendencies can be illustrated with reference to debates over the universality of rationality and some of the arguments for relativism. For the sake of the argument, universalism will be primarily represented by Steven Lukes, with Charles Taylor as the main advocate of relativism.

The pursuit of relativism has two distinct, but related, orientations: the first and most clearly articulated one is a negative movement, away from the illicit universalism of the modern tradition; the more positive movement is towards a kind of social theory with a stronger sense of historicity. This latter direction tends to be more explicit at a more philosophical level, that of social forms in general, but is far less obvious when it comes to precisely how modern categories should be historicised. Anti-Eurocentric tendencies are also evident in all of the major strands of relativism to the extent that they were informed by philosophical anthropologies developed in explicit hostility to some or other version of the ethical economic ideologeme and its elevation to the status of a universal anthropology. However, critiques of universalism have tended to underestimate the complexity of the problems involved in historicising modern categories and/or to pursue the issue beyond the bounds of philosophy.

## II. The complex dynamics of the ethical economic problematic.

The previous chapter showed how critiques of Eurocentrism tended to reproduce the Europic, ethical-economic horizons, of their disciplinary problematics. Such critiques were shown to belong to traditional theory, whose primary tendency is to reproduce the dialectics of ideology and utopia. These dialectics are 'bad' ones, i.e. processes which reproduce their own structural absences and contradictions. The Europic problematic as a whole, however, is irreducible to this simple, negative, dialectic, and needs to be portrayed in a more complex light. As against that one-sided presentation, the Europic problematic is explored here in terms of the relations between two dialectics, each internally related to one another. To be sure, the dominant tendency is that of the dialectics of ideology and utopia, but this co-exists with the subordinate tendency to realist, critical theory. This tendency contrasts with the first in that it is oriented towards a 'good' dialectic, one which generates the production of theoretical anti-Eurocentrism

through the disclosure and transformation of the categorial structures of the ethical economic problematic.

Modern intellectual production is deeply marked by the effects of both tendencies. For a variety of reasons, including the sheer weight of traditional theory, the political and institutional contexts of theoretical production, the ideational effects of lived relations and the historical limitations on structures of possibility of intellectual creativity, the tendencies towards the reproduction of traditional theory are the most obvious, whilst those towards the realisation of critical theory are considerably constrained. This is as a consequence of both the discursive and non-discursive dimensions of the expanded problematic exercising powerful regulatory forces on the development of the discursive dimension. So, while a great deal of debate and controversy is symptomatic of both dialectics, it also reveals the subordination of critical to traditional tendencies.

Indeed, a great deal of traditional intellectual theoretical energy is absorbed by attempts to contain the implications of its internally generated problems, while critical, realist, efforts are channelled into the elaboration of these problems, using them as points of departure for the production of an alternative, historically reflexive, mode of intellectual production. The good dialectics of critical theory are those of the immanent disclosure of the real social and historical context of traditional, European theory.<sup>1</sup> The necessary theoretical perspective is produced through a multi-dimensional critique which can be formalised in terms of a number of distinct, internally related, issues: philosophical ontology – dealing with general questions of form; philosophical anthropology – relating to the most general questions of forms of life; philosophical epistemology – concerned with theory-reality relations; sociological questions to do with specifically modern forms and their emergence.

The interdisciplinarity of critical theory is a function of the interdependence of these four dimensions. Any sociology of modern forms, for instance, presupposes epistemological, anthropological and ontological concerns, such that any problems posed by these latter dimensions must be addressed, if only implicitly, if that sociology is not to reproduce the forms of traditional theory. Equally, there can be no account of

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<sup>1</sup> The further development of good dialectics spills over into the disclosure of real possibilities for ruptures in historical process and for real social transformations.

philosophical categories that does not relate them back to their social and historical conditions of emergence.

The 'rationality debates' raised all of these issues, if somewhat unevenly and incompletely. Epistemologically, they addressed the relations between abstract theories of rationality and different forms of life while wrestling with the status of the natural sciences; anthropologically, relativism both draws on and feeds back into critiques of the coherence and universality of ethical-economic visions of social life. Sociological concerns revolved primarily around the institution of science and technology. The most significant absence, though, was any real engagement with ontology, which meant that the case for relativism, and along with that the possibility for developing critical theoretical anti-Eurocentrism, could not be sustained.

Relativist projects, at base, are motivated by the problematic historicity of modern categories, which is generated by the antinomies of the ethical-economic ideologue, i.e. its essence/actuality ambiguity, and by its various disciplinary projections. As was seen in the previous chapter, Jameson's contention that ideologemes are figures which can be projected into various disciplines and at various levels of generality can be readily illustrated, with the rationality debates providing a highly significant example. Debates over the universality of analytic conceptions of rationality also show how the essence/actuality dual translates into a more complex set of problems, as the universalist problematic establishes categories as transhistorically necessary aspects of all forms of life, allowing these categories to appear either as constitutive determinants of those forms or as potentialities embedded within them. So, for instance, rationality can either be a real capacity, whose exercise may be prevented in some way, or else it can be a potential capacity whose realisation is blocked for some reason. In the first of these, reason can be represented as a universal reality, but one whose efficacy and scope may be distorted by circumstantial realities. Such distortions then need to be accounted for and may be dealt with in practice. The alternative is for reason to be treated as a universal potential which is only realised under certain conditions. This establishes reason as necessarily immanent within any form of life, regardless of socio-historical space-time. It appears as something that can be realised once the right conditions have been established.

These, of course, are the formal possibilities of the universalist problematic, around which the dialectics of ideology and utopia revolve. However, this very structure of possibilities engenders the problem of the historicity of these categories. These universals carry the potential to be read as transhistorical and/or historically specific. They possess an internal sense of historicity, derived from the structure of the universalist problematic, which simultaneously dehistoricises universals at the same time as it asserts their historical character. This ambiguity and ambivalence of universal categories generate pressures within the problematic to sustain a distinction between theories at different levels of generality, and/or to present these problems as having been resolved.

One of the ways this pressure manifests itself is in philosophical epistemology, for instance, in various criticisms of theoretical reification. While relativist arguments are varied, a common response to claims for the universality of rationality is to insist on the reality and efficacy of cultural and historical difference. Cultural context, the particular form of life, and historically specific conditions, are regarded as essential determinants of meaning and linguistic practices. Two broad lines of argument follow from this: If the rationality of any social practice is relative to its broader context there is either no universal theory of rationality, or if there is it must be so formal as to have no meaningful purchase on concrete practice. One of the primary moves by proponents of different strands of relativism is indeed to reject the idea that the concrete world can be represented by abstract theory. Wittgenstein's repudiation of 'philosophical pictures' must be considered to be one of the most important examples of this.<sup>2</sup>

The non-representational capacity of abstract theory, the failure of theoretical modelling, is often taken to imply the rejection of any inquiry into universal categories and their formal configurations. Interestingly, however, this position is very rarely maintained in practice. Indeed, advocacy of relativism is closely associated with a *de facto* advocacy of philosophical-anthropological alternatives to those which dominate traditional theory. This is no mere accident, as arguments for relativism must encompass, or at the very least must imply, some alternative conception of the formal universalities of human existence.

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<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1967.

The other issues raised by the relativist critique arise when the general argument that rationality needs to be understood in context is turned back on universalism and, indeed, on arguments for relativism. That is, the modern dialogic field constituted by its form of universalism needs to be understood in relation to its own context. What is striking, however, about debates over rationality is their intellectualism, their tendency to reduce the idea of context to the sphere of meaning, rather than seeking to relate European universalism to its broader, non-discursive context. Unless universalist discourse is to be completely identified with and collapsed into itself as its own context, some account of the specificity of modern 'universal' social relations is needed. This places a significant demand on advocates of relativism, one which has been responded to in terms of the strong programme of the sociology of knowledge. However, the success of such a programme requires a non-universalist sociology of modern social relations which can sustain a conception of those relations as historically specific. It also needs a conception of the relations between these discursive and non-discursive dimensions of the modern form of life and its modes of universalisation.

Unfortunately, the development of arguments for relativism has not resulted in the production of a critical-theoretical anti-Eurocentrism. These intellectual trends have been unable to realise the realist potential of the discursive field. What happened instead was that the antinomies between universalism and relativism were established as two poles around which the discursive field was organised. Outcomes to date represent compromises between the rival tendencies animating this field, demonstrating the effective force of traditional theory in containing the immanent potential for its own radical transformation.

To illustrate this more complex conception of the European problematic at work, the rest of this chapter stages a confrontation between two positions. The universalist position here is organised around the defence of the universal actualisation of rationality. The concept of rationality it uses will be shown to presuppose ethical economic forms, while related conceptions of social change are instances of the core-periphery dynamic. Modernity is distinguished from other forms of life in that the common core rationality is here both systematised and extended into various areas of life, most notably in the shape of science and technology, but also more generally. The relativist alternative

discussed here reproduces the essence/actual dual. Instead of reproducing the core-periphery model of universalisation, however, this model treats scientific and technical rationality as a universal potential, realised under modern conditions, thereby reproducing the illicit universality of the European problematic.

### III. On the Universality and Universalisation of rationality.

Naturalism has provided one of the major defences of the universality of culturally specific forms and conceptions of rationality. From this perspective, rationality has been characterised as an element common to all social life, as indeed it must be at some level of generality. But while this idea does allow for a culturally non-specific account of reason naturalism tends not to make abstract, general claims, but treats the universality of rationality as an empirical, concrete, fact. The result is that theories of rationality tend to simply become an elaboration of (the rules) of certain, privileged, existing social practices.

The most prominent of the naturalist positions supports the idea of an intercultural bridgehead.<sup>3</sup> This position sets out the contents of the common rational core possessed by all cultures. Amongst the arguments for such a core is the fact of successful intercultural translation, or at least the absence of total failure. The argument holds that at least some of the activities of people on opposing sides of any cultural boundaries can readily be made intelligible to those on the other side. Such trans-ethnic communication is taken to imply a universal mode of interaction, with others and with the world around them, which any functioning member of any culture can and does successfully engage in as a matter of course. It is this mode of interaction that defines the extent of the bridgehead, and where people are operating in this way, they are acting in accordance with a common, universal, rationality.

For instance, Steven Lukes argued

[...] that some criteria of rationality are universal, i.e. relevantly applicable to all beliefs, in any context, while others are context dependent, i.e. are to be discovered by investigating the context and are only relevantly applicable to beliefs in that context. [...] and that] beliefs are not only to be evaluated by the criteria that are to be discovered in the context in which they are held; they must

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Richard Hollis, 'The Limits of Irrationality' in *Rationality*. pp. 214-220.

also be evaluated by criteria of rationality that simply *are* criteria of rationality, as opposed to criteria of rationality in context. In what follows universal criteria will be called 'rational (1) criteria' and context-dependent criteria 'rational (2) criteria'.<sup>4</sup>

However, this could not simply be a matter of formal criteria. Intercultural communication presupposes that people on either side of a cultural boundary are able to make their substantive beliefs about the world understood. So, argued Lukes:

[...] in the very identification of beliefs and *a fortiori* of belief systems we must presuppose commonly shared standards of truth and of inference, and ... we must further presuppose a commonly shared core of beliefs whose content or meaning is fixed by application of the standards.<sup>5</sup>

The bridgehead, then, is a universal sphere of culture involving both criteria of judgement and a set of beliefs which are held in place through the use of those criteria. Lukes' argument is naturalistic in that it locates these criteria within the very nature of social practices. They are non-contextually specific criteria, which should not be considered as existing externally to any context to which they are applicable. Rather, they are internal to the very idea of a social context: "[any society's] language must have operable logical rules and not all of these can be pure matters of convention."

Given this kind of naturalism, it might be thought that arguments of this kind would be subject to empirical testing of some kind. However, Martin Hollis argues that what has just been outlined cannot be a testable hypothesis: "Mr Lukes' 'rational (1) criteria' are not so much universal as necessary and that his 'rational (2) criteria' are not so much context-dependent as optional. [...] If anthropology is to be possible [...] the natives must share our concepts of truth, coherence and rational interdependence of beliefs."<sup>6</sup>

The bridgehead argument is, in effect, an extension of familiar conceptions of language. Firstly, language use is taken to imply distinctions between signifier, signified and referent, i.e. between the words used, the meaning the words have, and the things or states of affairs which the words are about.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, successful language use depends

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<sup>4</sup> Steven Lukes, 'Some Problems about Rationality', in *Rationality*, pp. 194-213, p. 208.

<sup>5</sup> Lukes, 'Relativism in its Place', in *Rationality and Relativism* pp. 261-305, p. 262.

<sup>6</sup> Hollis, 'The Limits of Irrationality'.

<sup>7</sup> The following points are made in the two pieces by Lukes and Hollis cited in the previous two footnotes.

on a necessary set of grammatical and logical rules. The existence of a zone of ready communicative possibility presupposes that all of these elements are identical on either side of any linguistic boundary, with the sole exception of the signifiers, the stock of actual words used. Otherwise there must be a common referent: a unitary environment within which all cultures operate, and whose character is independent of any particular culture. There must also be common human relations to that environment, relations grounded in common natural capacities such as the ability to see and to experience the colour spectrum and acquire language etc. There must, in addition, be a common set of grammatical and logical rules by which language users abide when speaking about that world and that experience. These rules must facilitate the accurate descriptions of things, their empirical features and their spatial, temporal and (some) causal relations to allow for prediction of and control over the natural world. Finally, the efficacy of language as a means of guiding practices which regulate the natural environment depends on its meeting criteria of correspondence between signifiers and referents and consistency or coherence within and between discrete accounts of the experienced world.<sup>8</sup>

Turning briefly now to modernity and the universalisation of rationality. In order to account for the peculiarity of the modern relation between rationality and culture, some sense of the historical is required. The development of the natural sciences is clearly a historical phenomenon: a process of cultural transformation with global reach. It is, equally, a process indissociable from modern science and technology. “[Some communities] possess enormous and indeed growing cognitive wealth, which is so speak validated by works as well as faith: its implementation leads to a very powerful technology. There is a near-universal consensus about this, in deeds rather than in words: those who do not possess this knowledge and technology endeavour to emulate and acquire it.”<sup>9</sup> Ahistorical universality has a special link with historical universalisation. The core is constituted by that “massive central core of human thinking

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<sup>8</sup> These criteria are, in effect, the philosophical presuppositions of empiricism and positivism, a tradition whose naturalism must be read as an illicit desocialisation of modern epistemic conditions. Written into this account of universality, then, are the philosophical presuppositions of the dominant tradition in the philosophy of science. For more on this see Section IV below.

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Gellner, ‘Relativism and Universals’ in *Rationality and Relativism*, pp. 181-200.

that has no history”<sup>10</sup>. Modern science, on the other hand, is predicated on methods that successfully expand the domain of true beliefs far beyond this core. It is, therefore culturally particular in one sense, but is premised on the prior existence of transhistorical conditions of reason and truth. The threshold to modernity can therefore be characterised as the permanent institution of the means by which the rationality embodied in the core is transmitted into the periphery. This takes the form of the “decisive emergence and systematic refinement and application of what has been variously described as the absolute Cartesian conception of knowledge, and the Galilean mode of reasoning, embodying the pursuit of objectivity (understood as perspective-neutrality).”<sup>11</sup>

This core-periphery model of universalism and universalisation needs to be expanded one step further with the inclusion of universalisability: the potential for universalisation. From the perspective of universal rationality, the process of universalisation is regarded as the process of extending the necessary mode of objectivity residing in the core into its wider cultural milieu. This process entails the transformation of the periphery, the realm of the ‘optional’ into the form of the ‘necessary’. Universalisation is predicated on the universalisability of universals, i.e. on the possibility that ‘accidental’ forms of culture can be subsumed under the forms belonging to the realm of cultural necessity. Any sustained realisation of this principle in practice must be mediated by the discursive, theoretical, articulation of universals, hence the importance of the role played by the Galilean-Cartesian principles. This philosophical articulation of universals has itself to feed into the process of universalisation by defining, or at least refining and defending, the forms that universalisable knowledge must take. “Unconvertible currencies are not suitable for trade, and ungeneralizable explanations are useless for a practical and cumulative body of knowledge. [...] Material not amenable to treatment within this assumption is worthless, and must either be reinterpreted or discarded.”<sup>12</sup>

In practice, however, extending this form of universality into peripheral social realities has remained problematic. Modern political history, for instance, is replete with

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<sup>10</sup> Strawson, P.F. *Individuals: An essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, Methuen, London, 1959. p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Lukes, ‘Relativism in its Place’, p. 298.

attempts from Hobbes to Rawls to rationally ground state institutions by means of a political algebra which moves off from naturalised first principles concerning human nature and logic. Lukes, though, acknowledges that disclosing 'the fact of the matter' about social life continues to run up against a seemingly insuperable set of issues in philosophical anthropology. Where the natural sciences appear to develop on the basis of either having settled or dispensed with their major ontological issues, the social sciences remain enmeshed in controversies: the real character of actors; the construction of narrative and explanatory accounts and their relation to empirical material; the influence of moral and political questions, such as the relation of institutional functions to real needs.<sup>13</sup> Lukes suggests that the principles of objectivity can be brought to bear here, but only in so far as they act as a restraining influence.

Such constraints are powerful. Their application yields perhaps the only 'objectivity' that is possible in much of social inquiry: not 'perspective-neutrality', but rather accounts that are not merely theory- but also perspective-relative, yet constrained by evidence that is as systematic and reliable as possible and relatable to other perspective-relative accounts. In applying them, one may explain from some perspective what could not be explained from no perspective.<sup>14</sup>

In the light of such difficulties, the core-periphery model has to be developed a little further. The natural/social science distinction can be mapped on to a distinction within the peripheral cultural zone itself. Universalist forms can be extended into a natural scientific zone, opening up the possibility of technically rational mediation of social practices with the technological products of the sciences. Other aspects of social life are, though, less readily universalised. They retain a degree of relative autonomy from processes of universalisation, though within 'powerful constraints'. Political life remains mediated by theory and perspective. It is necessarily a zone of irresolvable intellectual conflict, regulated rather than constituted by universal rationality.

The unfinished character of this social zone suggested by this model open up the space, indeed the need, for the dialectics of ideology and utopia. The periphery becomes a sphere of culture in which and over which the struggle to adapt to and regulate rational universalisation takes place. This model of the world which emerges from the naturalisation of rationality identifies the expansion, to universality, of rationality,

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<sup>12</sup> Gellner, 'Relativism and Universals' p. 189.

<sup>13</sup> Lukes, 'Relativism in its Place', p. 303-4.

<sup>14</sup> Lukes, 'Relativism in its Place', p. 305.

science and technology as the defining features of the modern. The peripheral zones can then be best understood in terms of the processes of subsumption and the struggles that take place over them. What regulates those struggles, or at least should in principle, is the institution of some general sense as to what counts as a rational social order. Interestingly, the most significant work on disclosing such standards has been done by critics of universalism, critics who identify the presuppositions of social and political theory and who also extend that work into the critique of universalism.

#### IV. On the presuppositions of universalism.

The universalist position asserts a qualitative identity between different cultures or forms of life. However, Peter Winch argues, judgements about qualitative identity must be related back to the theoretical perspective from which they are made:

“A regularity or uniformity is the constant recurrence of the same kind of event on the same kind of occasion; hence statements of uniformities presuppose judgements of identity. But this takes us to an argument, according to which criteria of identity are necessarily relative to some rule: with the corollary that two events which count as qualitatively similar from the point of view of one rule would count as different from the point of view of another. So to investigate the type of regularity studied in a given kind of inquiry is to examine the nature of the rule according to which judgements of identity are made in that inquiry. Such judgements are intelligible only relatively to a given mode of human behaviour, governed by its own rules.”<sup>15</sup>

Barry Barnes and David Bloor argued that the universalist perspective entails a set of commitments to some well-known problems of the modern philosophical tradition. They point out that it is a narrow concentration on three aspects of social life: the sensual, which is largely elaborated in terms of the empirical; the technical, which is largely elaborated in terms of practical techniques of survival; the rational, identified with the logical. These are the same terms which define parameters of the dominant tradition of philosophy of science. Barnes and Bloor declare that “It is not difficult, however, to perceive the [the bridgehead argument’s] origins in the received culture of the epistemologists. It is an old dualism dressed in a new garb.”<sup>16</sup> To the extent that the bridgehead argument is really little more than a thinly veiled and considerably abridged version of Kant’s arguments for the necessary preconditions of experience, its

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<sup>15</sup> Winch, ‘The Idea of a Social Science’, *Rationality*, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Barry Barnes and David Bloor, ‘Relativism, Rationalism, Sociology of Knowledge’, in *Rationality and Relativism*, pp. 21-47. p. 39.

formulations are susceptible to all of the criticisms that could be levelled at the empiricist-rationalist tradition.

That dualism, along with the antinomies and contradictions it generates, is itself grounded in a deeper problem, that of the philosophical presuppositions of the epistemological tradition. Charles Taylor, in his remarkable essay 'Overcoming Epistemology', identifies 'three anthropological beliefs' underpinning that tradition.<sup>17</sup>

The first is the picture of the subject as ideally disengaged, that is free and rational to the extent that he has fully distinguished himself from his natural and social worlds, so that his identity is no longer to be defined in terms of what lies outside him in these worlds.<sup>18</sup>

This account has to be amended slightly if it is to be applied directly to Lukes' account, but not to the extent that it loses its purchase. Some account needs to be taken of the fact that this version of naturalism seeks to shift the locus of rationality from the entirely desocialised individual person to encompass some aspects of social practice. Nevertheless, if the ideal of disengagement is taken to mean an absence of identifying entanglements in the specificities of culture, then disengagement in the naturalist context simply means participation in the core region of culture – which is itself disengaged from its surroundings. This core, after all, is only related to a non-specific identity as a language user as such, with no significance for the meaning of identity beyond that. The particularity of an individual's identity, on this score, is entirely a function of their entanglements and participation in the peripheral spheres of culture. This means that personal, individual, identity becomes entirely a matter of contingency. Given its dualism, which translates into the core-periphery distinction when the social or cultural is invoked, then, the ideal of rationality and disengagement is preserved with the shift to naturalism.

The second, which flows from [the first], is a punctual view of the self, ideally ready qua free and rational to treat these worlds – and even some features of his own character – instrumentally, as subject to change and re-ordering in the effort to secure the welfare of himself and other like subjects.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Taylor, 'Overcoming Epistemology' in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation*, Kenneth Baynes et al. (eds.), MIT Press, Massachusetts, 1987.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 471.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 471.

The idea of a core zone of rationality, with its introduction of cultural elements into a partially socialised conception of universal rationality, in the form of its theory of language and meaning, seeks to break from isolated individuals, and so it does not reduce to the punctual individual. However, it does provide for a secure base from which to approach the peripheral, contingent, zones in precisely the way Taylor describes. Selves can, as it were, withdraw into the core in order to subject peripheral contingencies to what ever changes they are able to bring about. Once again, by positing the idea of a rational core within culture, the naturalist reworking of the epistemological tradition preserves its fundamental features.

The third is the social consequences of the first two: an atomistic construal of society as constituted by, or ultimately to be explained in terms of individual purpose [... which] takes shape in seventeenth century contract theories, but continues not only in their contemporary successors but also in many of the assumptions of contemporary liberalism and mainstream social science.<sup>20</sup>

As we have seen, Lukes' conception of core rationality is not straightforwardly individualist in the sense that Taylor has in mind here. However, the affinities with contract theory remain. Take Rawls' use of the veil of ignorance, for instance.<sup>21</sup> Behind the veil, Rawls' subjects are to all intents and purposes the same as Lukes'. They are stripped of all the peculiarities of their identities, and are only able to imagine themselves as occupying entirely indeterminate locations within the social structure. Rawls' subjects are ideally disengaged and instrumental and they are involved in a project to regulate the peripheral zone of culture through contractually devised regulation.

The attempt to naturalise the universals of the epistemological tradition by projecting them into universal social relations such as language, then, is revealed as an attempt to naturalise the self-image of the age – the ethical economic ideogeme. The qualitative identity of cultures now appears as the projection of that self-image, and related ideogemes. From a certain kind of relativistic perspective, this in itself would not pose any problem. Indeed, an implication of Winch's view, and one affirmed by Lukes in the sphere of social theory, would appear to be that there is no alternative to doing this. However, while observations and qualitative assessments such as these are necessarily

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 471-2.

mediated by theoretical perspectives, those perspectives are themselves subject to critique and to change. The real strengths of the relativist challenge to universalism are precisely due to its being engaged in such a process of perspectival transformation. At the forefront of these considerations is the anthropological vision of the ethical economy and its reification.

#### V. Critique of ideologeme and reification

Charles Taylor suggests that major streams of critical thinking are all concerned with dismantling the anthropological beliefs outlined above.<sup>22</sup> What distinguishes the work of Hegel, Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein and Nietzsche from the mainstream of traditional theory is their responses to the three anthropological beliefs in which traditional theory is grounded. All of these responses can be seen as critical and realist moves. None, however, are entirely successful, and the rival accounts of the modern which have been built on them continue to be drawn back into the problematics of traditional theory.

Critical theory responds to the first of Taylor's anthropological beliefs by refusing the ideal of disengagement. Rival anthropologies stress the concrete, physio-biological and social determinations of personhood and identity. Forms of knowledge are seen as being grounded in definite relations with the social and natural environment in which persons are enmeshed or entangled. The second kind of response follows on from this. A technical-rational orientation cannot be adopted towards the world as a whole because of this conception of the embodiment of the knowing person. In the absence of a purely rational core, there is no secure base from which to approach the 'outside' world wholly instrumentally. Rather, the embodiment of rationality provides the necessary conditions under which an instrumental attitude can be adopted in relation to some limited aspects of the world. In addition, a strong sense of the internality of knowledge to forms of life means that even modes of technical rationality can only be properly understood in their wider context, and in terms of their ongoing contribution to the reproduction and transformation of that form of life. It is the broader context which confers on any form of practical or technical rationality its real social significance and which imparts an encompassing sense of rationality, or indeed irrationality, to it. The third kind of

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<sup>21</sup> Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, 'Overcoming Epistemology' p. 473.

response addresses the atomistic conception of the subject. Here, the theme of intersubjectivity comes to the fore, along with theories of language and communication. Not only have these aspects of the social been given greater prominence, linguistic theories have even been suggested as paradigms for social theory in general.

For the sake of the argument, only selected aspects of these critiques will be pursued here. What these arguments illustrate is the way that the relativist project is effectively an attempt to pursue a revised version of the naturalist project, but one which seeks to abandon the epistemological tradition so heavily implicated in the reproduction of ethical economic ideologemes. This has meant tackling the idea, central to the vision of reason dominated by the disengaged, or the effectively desocialised, individual, that the core is constituted by a more or less explicit form of proceduralism: that the social imaginary is grounded in the institutionalisation of given sets of rules and/or laws. It is precisely this idea that informs the model of language use in the core advanced by naturalism. It is also the primary object of critique for the later Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein's general complaint about philosophy was that it produced what he called 'philosophical pictures'.<sup>23</sup> Such pictures produce a curious form of misrepresentation, in which certain descriptive categories are transformed into explanatory ones. The transformation involves the abstraction of descriptive categories from their concrete milieu and their relocation in a fictitious social order (a scenario) which is then held up as an explanation for what has been described. The key to Wittgenstein's account of this process is the distinction between two idioms. The first is the explanatory one in which people's behaviour can be accounted for in terms of their following a rule, while the other is a descriptive one in which behaviour can be said to be in conformity with some rule.

The first idiom, that of rule following, presupposes that some actor knows about some rule or law and that they know how and when to follow it. This entails that the actor recognises some explicit requirement, and is able to put it into practice under the appropriate conditions. Take the example of riding a bicycle. One might say that there is a rule which goes as follows: Stop at a red light. The cyclist in question would have to

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<sup>23</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1967.

know that this rule applies under certain conditions, i.e. when riding along the road, and that the traffic lights at red imposes a requirement to come to a halt before the continuous white line drawn across the road immediately before the traffic lights. Whenever we see this happening we can say with some certainty that the rule has been followed. Now, this rule might be observed more often in the breach, nevertheless when it is followed it serves as a fairly self-contained explanation - the cyclist understood and acted so as to follow the rule.

No such implications can be inferred from any activity which only conforms to a rule. The most that can be said for it is that the activities in question embody some regularity, of which those involved may or may not be aware. In practice, there is no necessary relation between the two idioms. Following a rule does not necessarily result in behaviour which conforms to it, while conformity to some rule does not necessarily imply any intent to follow the rule. Take another example from cycling. One might say there is a rule which holds that if a cyclist leans over too far to one side they will fall off the bike altogether. This is a rule, in the familiar sense that one kind of event is preceded by another with sufficient regularity for there to be some kind of connection between the two. What is more, this rule is well known to anyone who has ridden a bike. However, when someone does fall off their bike it is only under the most unusual circumstances that they might do so as a result of following the rule. Their behaviour will conform to the rule but, by and large, the rule will not serve as an explanation for it.

In this instance, conformity to the rule explains nothing: it is simply a description of some empirical regularity. Of course, an explanation can be given, but that would be in an entirely different idiom, and it would be concerned with the conditions of possibility of such a regularity.<sup>24</sup> An adequate, explanatory, account would be couched in terms of the distribution of weight and the balance of the cyclist, the consequences of forward momentum, the effects of gravity on mass, etc. Crucially, the apparent rule would be explained with reference to the causally efficacious mechanisms at work in this context.<sup>25</sup> Wittgenstein, following Hume, was right to say that for this class of rules, the rule does not imply an explanation. As it happens, the same is true of all the laws

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<sup>24</sup> What follows here is not taken from Wittgenstein, but is the realist implication of his argument.

<sup>25</sup> Bhaskar, Roy, *A Realist Theory of Science*.

produced by the experimental sciences. It is only through the creation of the conditions under which empirical regularities are made to occur that scientists generate 'rules' to which the world can be made to conform.<sup>26</sup> This requires so controlling conditions as to shut down the existing range of possibilities and allow for only a single outcome. To speak of the rule or law as possessing any autonomous validity in the absence of this context is to abstract from all the social and natural conditions of its occurrence.

Equally, similar comments have to be made concerning the example of following a rule. While rule following can at times be a sufficient explanation for individual acts, its invocation cannot be the end of the matter. This is because accounting for an individual event in this way does not shed any light on the institution of the rule itself. That is, the rule which is followed needs to be explained in a way which is analogous to the rule which is conformed to. In order for the idea of rule following to be meaningful, the social practice must be a generalised social phenomenon. The example given above of the cyclist and the red lights involves the promulgation of the rule through the medium of the law. This in turn requires some account of the development of the modern state and of the wider social conditions under which such a rule can become a social reality.<sup>27</sup> Explaining this kind of rule following, then, involves historical and sociological accounts of the law-abiding citizen and their conditions of existence.

There are two important consequences that can be drawn from this. Firstly, invoking either kind of rule carries with it a considerable burden of implications concerning their conditions of existence. Rules, if they exist at all, have to be accounted for in terms of the social (and natural) mechanisms which generate them. Secondly, if the social world is historical all the way down, it is not rules all the way down. This qualifies Winch's contention that different forms of social activity can be adequately explained with reference to different sets of rules. Rather, the idea of different *forms* of life has to be taken with absolute seriousness. What is needed is a language of form in which social forms can be invoked as real and efficacious.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See the next chapter for a full discussion of the implications of this for a realist critique of universals.

<sup>27</sup> Similar comments were made in the previous chapter with respect to claims of the universality of human rights.

<sup>28</sup> This intimates an alternative form of naturalism to that pursued by Lukes, one more in keeping with Durkheim and pursued by Bhaskar. The next chapter will take this up more thoroughly.

All of this is clearly intimated by Winch's critique of the universalist conception of logic:

"One is inclined to think of the laws of logic as forming a *given* rigid structure to which men try, with greater or less (but never complete) success, to make what they say in their actual linguistic and social intercourse conform. One thinks of propositions as something ethereal, which just because of their ethereal, non-physical nature, can fit together more tightly than can be conceived in the case of anything so grossly material as flesh and blood men and their actions. In a sense one is right in this; for to treat of logical relations in a formal systematic way is to think at a very high level of abstraction, in which all the anomalies, imperfections and crudities which characterize men's actual intercourse which each other in society have been removed. But, like any abstraction not recognized as such, this can be misleading. It may make one forget that it is only from their roots in the actual flesh and blood intercourse that those formal systems draw such life as they have; for the whole idea of a logical relation is only possible by virtue of the sort of agreement between men in their actions which is discussed by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>29</sup>

Spelling out the implications of our 'pictures' of logic strongly reinforces Taylor's account of the way in which modern universalism embodies a series of errors. Even explicit rules, genuinely followed in the course of social activity, ought not to be abstracted from their conditions of existence. Where this has happened, where philosophical pictures and reification have taken hold, our understanding of such abstract categories and of their relations to flesh and blood existence requires a thorough-going explanation of how this has occurred, as well as the ontological restitution needed to make that explanation possible.<sup>30</sup>

Now, it was noted earlier that the relativist project has been conceived in terms of the construction of a conceptual bridge, a theoretical architecture which could span the gaps between distinct cultures without the implications of the bridgehead argument. The demands made of such a bridge are clearly considerable. In the first place, an abstract and generalisable language is needed. Pursuing precisely this line of argument Barnes and Bloor argued that social relations can be referred to at some level in terms of general categories that do not presuppose any specific relation between them:

In all cases [the sociologist] will ask, for instance, if a belief is part of the routine cognitive and technical competences handed down from generation to generation. Is it enjoined by the authorities of the society? Is it transmitted by

<sup>29</sup> Winch, 'The Idea of a Social Science', *Rationality*, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> The phrase is Fredric Jameson's *Marxism and Form* Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1972

established institutions of socialization or supported by accepted agencies of social control? Is it bound up with patterns of vested interests?<sup>31</sup>

This list of questions could be added to *ad infinitum*, with all of them couched in similarly general terms. They all use categories which, despite the specificity of their cultural origins, are held to have some kind of applicability to other societies regardless of the categorial distinctions used by members of that society. Considerations such as these are advanced as possible elements of the necessary conditions of given systems of beliefs and patterns of change. A similar position is implied in Robin Horton's generalisations concerning diverse modes of thought<sup>32</sup>. Horton argues that theoretical forms play largely similar roles in both African thought and Western Science, despite their very different contents. Both traditions have what he calls 'theoretical' aspects, i.e. conceptions of non-empirical reality: both use these entities to bring about a sense of order: both also develop on the basis of metaphorical translations of meanings from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Horton notes many other such similarities, all the while insisting on the real differences between the practices they entail. Horton explicitly uses general categories to disclose abstract similarities, implying that at this level of abstraction, a general language of human culture, thought, language and practice can be legitimately deployed without those abstractions doing violence to real cultural alterity.

The relativist case, then, can only be advanced on the basis of a general and abstract language of universals, which relates to all forms of human society. The real difficulty here is that modern social and anthropological theory is replete with highly abstract categories, e.g. 'language', 'beliefs', 'system' etc., which are applied generally but whose contents have largely been elaborated from theoretical reflection on modern forms. The relativist project, or a version of the strong sociological programme, can only be successful to the extent its general categories are, negatively, emptied of concrete contents and, positively, developed to allow a genuine openness to the diversity of forms of life. A sociology predicated on this presupposition would have to be concerned with the relations between general categories and the specificity of configurations of localised categories and relations and with investigating them as social mechanisms with their own dynamics. Where the illicit universalism of the modern

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<sup>31</sup> 'Relativism, Rationalism, Sociology of Knowledge', *Rationality and Relativism*, p. 23

<sup>32</sup> Horton, 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science', in *Rationality*

tradition has insisted on the necessity of certain forms and relations, relativism has to, and despite itself often does, propound the general categorial elements of a philosophical anthropology. Where it falls short, often deliberately so in a mistaken rejection of philosophy, is in failing to take a systematic approach to the presuppositions of the form of social life. In this spirit, Barnes and Bloor argued that

... relativism is essential to all those disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, the history of institutions and ideas, and even cognitive psychology, which account for the diversity of systems of knowledge, their distribution and the manner of their change. It is those who oppose relativism, and who grant certain forms of knowledge a privileged status, who pose the real threat to a scientific understanding of knowledge and cognition.<sup>33</sup>

Winch's work is best understood as making a contribution to the philosophical framework within which this project might be pursued by establishing a revised philosophical anthropology. At the heart of his work was an attempt to conceptualise what was specific to cultural forms, and what was so distinctive about his answer to this was the particular inflection he gave to the linguistic turn. While he recognised that there is an important distinction to be maintained between the discursive and non-discursive dimensions of any form of life, he argued that both dimensions must be brought under the categories of linguistic or quasi-linguistic activity.

"[...] there is no sharp break between behaviour which expresses discursive ideas and that which does not; and that which does is sufficiently like that which does to make it necessary to regard it as analogous to the other. So, even where it would be unnatural to say that a given kind of social relation expresses any ideas of a discursive nature, still it is closer to that general category than it is to that of the interaction of physical forces."<sup>34</sup>

Whilst making the distinction between these two dimensions, Winch retains a commitment to their being internally related aspects of a more or less unified social formation. That is to say, the realm of the cultural as a whole could be understood in its own terms, terms that derived from the sphere of meaning but were not reducible to it. In other words, Winch's work can be read as an anticipation of the development of the relativist critique. The positive side of this critique would address the ethical economic, illicitly universalist, 'pictures' and their anthropological presuppositions currently dominating social theory, and it would be developed through a theoretical elaboration of

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<sup>33</sup> Barnes and Bloor, 'Relativism, Rationalism, Sociology of Knowledge', in *Rationality and Relativism*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>34</sup> Winch, 'The Idea of a Social Science', *Rationality*, p. 12.

linguistic forms which would be able serve as a general ontology of broader social forms.

The full implications of these remarks will be taken up in the remaining chapters, which will attempt to show that Winch's hopes for social science can be borne out. Meanwhile, it remains only to say that such hopes are evidence of a strong critical realist tendency in his work but that this linguistically-based anthropology of internal relations needs to be supplemented by further ontological considerations which disclose both necessary general categories and their formally possible configurations.

Winch's assertion of the distinction between 'behaviour which expresses discursive ideas' and 'the interaction of physical forces' is part of the hermeneutic attack on the claims for a social science modelled on the nomological natural sciences to have any real purchase on the social. At this point his work completely coincides with the idea of science as developed within critical realism, which shares this repudiation of such approaches. Where critical realism really advances the relativist project is in its explicit concern with ontology. Its approach generates a sufficiently broad framework which can encompass both social and natural forms, which is sufficiently open to formal diversity, and which provides a secure intellectual space in which both the historical emergence of new forms and the interpenetration of social and natural forms can be comprehended. However, the true significance of later developments in realism here, especially Bhaskar's account of ir/realism, is that they provide precisely the hoped for general theory of linguistic and non-linguistic social forms.<sup>35</sup> This in turn opens up the intellectual space for the disclosure of specific categories and mechanisms and the determination of the character of any given term, quality, facet, etc. as it is actually woven into the fabric of a given form of being.<sup>36</sup>

#### VI. Historicity in Taylor's account of Instrumental Rationality.

The above section sought to illustrate how modern social theory is constituted by a dual dialectics. On the one hand there is the dialectics of ideology and utopia belonging to

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<sup>35</sup> See the next two chapters.

<sup>36</sup> See also Bertell Ollman on internal relations *Dialectical Investigations*, Routledge, London, 1993.

theoretical Europism, represented here by the universalist and naturalist account of rationality. On the other hand there are the persistent tendencies towards realist critique and theoretical anti-Europism generated by the essential contradictions of Europic forms, represented here by attempts to consolidate 'relativism'. What has been left out of this account, however, is any consideration of the non-discursive social forms in which this dual dialectic is embedded. This chapter will therefore be rounded off with an examination of the account of the relation between historically specific forms and transhistorical categories in Charles Taylor's discussion of technical rationality. This will serve to demonstrate the need for a philosophical ontology of form to inform philosophical anthropology, showing how the relativist project has so far stopped considerably short of its stated aims as far as reflecting on modern forms is concerned.

At issue here has been the attempt to establishing a narrow and abstract concept of rationality as an objective and universal standard, against which stand conceptions of rationality as judgmental, practical, deliberative etc., all of which are skills acquired in social context and whose successful exercise is also context relative. Taylor puts it as follows:

Rationality involves more than avoiding inconsistency. What more is involved comes out in the different judgements we make when we compare incommensurable cultures and activities. These judgements take us beyond merely formal criteria of rationality, and point us toward the human activities of articulation which give the value of rationality its sense.<sup>37</sup>

The implications of this were noted above. Even the rationality of science and technology, of the pursuit of a certain notion of objective knowledge, of the peculiar abstract forms of such knowledge and the ways in which it is translated into social practice, cannot be divorced from the wider context of the form of life in which science flourishes. An understanding of its broader setting, and of the relation between it and science, has to be much more firmly established before validity claims can be assessed. This is in sharp contrast to the position adopted by Lukes.

Lukes argued that modern science is the result of the pursuit of objectivity. For Lukes this meant that "[...] judgements of cognitive superiority of later over earlier phases of science and of scientific over pre-scientific modes of thought are not and cannot be

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<sup>37</sup> Taylor, 'Rationality', p.105.

relative to a particular conceptual or explanatory scheme.”<sup>38</sup> That is to say, Lukes cannot imagine the possibility of a particular conceptual or explanatory scheme within which the cognitive superiority of each successive phase of science would not be recognised. He could not envisage the possibility of a worldview which could even sustain the space for a concerted debate on this matter. Indeed, the status of science is such that its cognitive claims, at least when they are taken independently of its social consequences and of the translation of what pass for scientific methods into the wider social world, are rarely subject to sustained criticism. Taylor’s views on the matter would appear to lend credence to Lukes’ case, for despite his critique of epistemology, Taylor concedes the point. However, what distinguishes Taylor from Lukes is the way in which the latter grounds the claims for the superiority of science. Whereas Lukes regards science as the systematic extension of core rationality into social relations with nature, Taylor gives us an account of universalisation which does without the need for the core.

For Taylor, the emergence of science is a process of universalisation which generates the basis for its own claim to cognitive superiority. This, he insists, is because the technical payoff from modern science establishes it as a rival, and as a superior one at that, to all other social activities that encompass a technical orientation.<sup>39</sup> In a sense, Taylor side-steps the question of abstract cognitive superiority, shifting the ground of judgement to its technical operationalisation. This is both despite and because modern science has developed out of pre-modern practices through the characteristically modern processes through which institutions acquire functional specialisation. Modernisation theory, drawing on Durkheim’s account of modern social change, regarded pre-modern institutions as combining a multiplicity of given functions. The emergence of the political state and the market economy from the institutions of Feudalism, the parcelling out of the many functions of the family and household to these and other modern institutions, such as the school as site of education and the workplace as the location of production, is represented as the crystallisation of pre-existing functions and the shedding of other purposes. Modern science, on this view is not so much the emergence of a novel orientation to the world as a reduction to the narrow, technical-orientation function previously embodied in prior, poly-functional institutions.

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<sup>38</sup> Lukes, ‘Relativism in its Place’, p. 298. Lukes associates this view with Gellner.

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, Charles, ‘Rationality’.

Ordinarily, the functional dissimilarities between distinct activities means that they are, in Taylor's use, 'incommensurable', i.e. subject to judgement by different standards. While no overall judgement of superiority is possible between say, different modern institutions, or between them and pre-modern ones, there is a sufficient functional overlap which means that, in a narrower respect, some judgement about relative efficacy can be made. By virtue of its highly developed technical capacity, modern science must be judged superior. Taylor reaches this conclusion by investigating something of a paradox. On the one hand, to speak of pre-scientific practices as melding the practical and the symbolic "might not be flatly untrue, but it is putting the point in ethnocentric language": the distinction might have no meaning for different societies. However, "What we have here is not an antecedently accepted common criterion, but a facet of our activity [...] which remains implicit or unrecognized in earlier views, but which cannot be ignored once realized in practice".<sup>40</sup>

What we have here is a distinctive account of universalisation, of the concrete institutionalisation of transhistorical, universal categories. The theoretical universalism suggested by proponents of relativism involved the defence of strictly abstract categories which could be applied to many, if not all societies. As the discussions of rationality suggested, such categories could be instantiated in actual concrete forms of life, but their configuration was a strictly historical and social matter. Abstract theory could not determine in advance what these forms might be. Taylor's account of the emergence of science adds the idea of practical universalisation to that of theoretical universalism. This process is one through which the abstract categories of theoretical universalism become disentangled from the complex forms in which they would normally exist, a process which sees them newly instituted as simplified forms. The simple universal category is abstracted, as it were, from other categories, in a process of its concretisation, or what Taylor dubbed 'realisation'. As a result of such a process, the historically specific institution becomes the embodiment of a universal facet, immanent within all forms of life.

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<sup>40</sup> Taylor, Charles, 'Rationality', p. 97 and 103.

There is an interesting problem with all this, namely that Taylor appears to treat the development of science and technology as if it occurred in a realm wholly detached from the rest of the society. That is, he treats the evolution of 'purely' practical forms of knowledge as if they could have been abstracted from pre-existing institutions but not subsequently re-inscribed into new ones, or indeed into wider configurations of new institutions, relations, processes, etc. This produces a curiously one-sided vision of historical process, and an appropriate response to this would need to develop a stronger sense of the relations between science and technology and its broader social milieu. What is more, all this follows directly from Taylor's own account of the development of critical theory. There are two 'sides' to this, both of which draw on that dimension of critical theory which flows from responses to the second anthropological belief of traditional epistemology. The thrust of that response was to deny the possibility of a purely technical orientation to the world. Such an orientation was deemed possible, but in a strictly limited way, and it was held to be made possible by the organisation of the concrete social formation in which rational capacities are embodied. The evolution of a scientific and technical orientation to the world, then, cannot be properly evaluated without reference back to its wider enabling conditions.

The second side to this question, however, has far reaching implications. Having acknowledged that the superiority of modern science and technology is a function of its practical consequences, some account needs to be taken of these, for the technical mediation of modern social formations is a social fact of enormous significance: modern modes of practical rationality are increasingly constitutive of the culture as a whole. There is ever greater social mediation by technological, and technically regulated, means, such that modernity has long been defined by its capacity to incorporate one invention after another on a mass scale. The implications of this are profound. Technical rationality, it was argued, was dependent on a background of concrete and complex social relations. However, that very background is undergoing a constant process of transformation as a consequence of the institution of this particular form of 'purely' technical rationality. Emerging from that process is a social world which increasingly resembles, or at least appears as, that underpinning traditional

epistemology – the reified and regulated world of atomised and desocialised individuals.<sup>41</sup>

As a novel social institution, then, modern practical rationality cannot be viewed simply in terms of its having been abstracted from pre-existing institutions such that it now stands on its own as the realisation, the concrete embodiment, of a pre-existing principle or facet of social life. It is instead a general feature of the institutional nexus of modernity, permeating the whole of the society, i.e. it is a contemporary universal. Referring to this as the realisation of something implicit in other forms of life is simply to confuse the transhistorical and historical.

Deploying the language of the ‘realisation’ of immanent categories reproduces precisely the ambiguous historicity of universal categories which typifies the European problematic. It does so in the context of a particular conception of historical process. While the relativist insistence on the historical specificity of cultural forms is an important step forward towards realist and critical theory, the sense of the historical seen here is rather peculiar: historical processes become manifestations of difference, but lack a sense of real change. History appears here as the process whereby the abstract universals of a general anthropology assume various concrete configurations and reconfigurations. Historically specific categories appear merely as the concrete forms in which those universals are embodied. Crucially, history adds nothing to anthropology, being reduced to the constellations of anthropological categories. It can be likened to a kaleidoscope in which the categories are tumbled about, falling into different patterns with each turn.

Strikingly similar problems confronted Marx, who raises them in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*. Criticising the unreflective use of abstract universals in political economy, Marx makes two kinds of observation. The first questions the use of categories in isolation from one another by recognising that the categories of production, exchange, distribution and consumption are each moments of the other: the production of one

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<sup>41</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, Verso, London, 1981.  
Lukacs ‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat’ in *History and Class Consciousness*. Merlin, London, 1971.

thing always involves the consumption of another, and so on.<sup>42</sup> This kind of discussion, however, is not simply an affirmation of the internal relations between general categories. Rather, it establishes such generalities as distinct perspectives on the whole under consideration, and it allows for the specificity of their configuration to be examined.<sup>43</sup>

Secondly, in a discussion of 'labour', Marx deploys almost exactly the same language as does Taylor:

for the first time, the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category labour, 'labour as such', labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice. The simplest abstraction, then, which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society.<sup>44</sup>

The simple category of abstract labour, here, appears to have emerged out of the complex, organic and irrational forms of pre-capitalism. However, as Marx develops his theory of capital the 'practical truth' of transhistorical abstractions is securely grounded in a theory of appearances and ideology and historically emergence social relations, and which can be clearly distinguished from the kind of theory intimated by Taylor. In *Capital*, the capital relation, a defining relation of modernity for Marx, is indeed the institution of abstract labour, but it is in no sense at all the 'realisation' of a transhistorical category. It is, rather, a historically specific, emergent, abstract relation.<sup>45</sup> It is a strictly modern universal category. What is more, a proper understanding of this is needed in order to help account for the fact that such modern relations appear in transhistorical guise.

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<sup>42</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, Harmondsworth and New Left Books, London, 1973. p. 99.

<sup>43</sup> In other words, there is no a priori form, or rational conception, of how these categories are or should be organised. Categories acquire form and substance in the world, a world which may more or less rational and more or less complete.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 105.

## VI. Conclusions.

The movement towards relativism is clearly one motivated by the illicit universalism of the European tradition. At the very centre of such debates are the anthropological presuppositions of theoretical Eurocentrism and the reification of its analytic abstractions. What we have, in effect, is a sustained critique of (aspects of) the ethical-economic ideologue. However, the re-emergence of an illicit universalism in Taylor's account of the 'historical' emergence of practical or scientific rationality demonstrates the depth and complexity of the problems involved in pulling away from the European problematic. That problematic remains as the highly efficacious context within which a sustainable sense of historicity has to be pursued. It also remains as the background whose implications have to be more adequately disclosed if there is to be any likelihood of tackling theoretical Eurocentrism. In the end, relativist projects have been unable to acquire adequate critical momentum, largely as a result of their persistent entanglement in European presuppositions. The two dialectics are at work in the rationality debates, and far beyond. Yet the dialectics of traditional theory continually assert themselves as the more dominant force at work.

The least developed elements of the relativist project are the sociological and ontological. This leaves the pursuit of the positive dialectic of critical theory in need of both a theory of illicit universalism as a theory of the form of traditional, European discourse, and a theory of the form of modern social relations in which those discursive forms are embedded. These are the issues taken up in the final chapters. Bhaskar's dialectical critical realism will be explored for just such a theory of illicit universalism, while Marx's account of modern social forms, and his implicit ontology, can be understood as attempts to establish a sustainable sense of the socio-historical and a theory of illicit universals closely related to Bhaskar's.

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<sup>45</sup> The full discussion of the nature of this relation has been put off until Chapter 8. This is because the full discussion of the nature of this universal relation requires significant theoretical preparation. See Chapters 6 and 7.

## Chapter 6 - The Anthropic Form of Europic Universalism

### I. Critical Realist development of theoretical anti-Eurocentrism.

The demands of historical reflexivity push critical-theoretical work in the direction of relativism. Equally, as discussed in the previous chapter, the impulse towards relativism is motivated by the problems of theoretical Eurocentrism, and this takes theory in a critical, realist, direction. However, these tendencies towards critical-theoretical anti-Eurocentrism are constrained by countervailing forces. The symptomatic consequences of this include the failure to connect the critiques of philosophical anthropology to the development of philosophical ontology, and the failure to locate a strong programme of the sociology of knowledge within the sociology of modernity. The relativist programme is notoriously ill-disposed to both and, as such, is itself an obstacle to further development. In order to see how these problems can be addressed, the critical theory of Eurocentrism being developed here now turns to the emergence of philosophical realism and its capacity to disclose the real forms of the theoretical categories and social relations of modernity.

Roy Bhaskar's Critical Realism contains rich resources for critical-theoretical anti-Eurocentrism to draw on. The first, and the most obvious, is the philosophical ontology of realism, and its contrasting theory of 'irrealism'. Bhaskar develops the latter in terms of 'anthroporealism', which is taken here to provide the core elements of a theory of illicit universalism. It will be recalled that Europism was previously discussed in terms of the illicit character of European universalisation.<sup>1</sup> The two forms of Europic universalisation were given as Eurocentrism, i.e. illicit concrete universalisation, and Euromorphism, i.e. illicit abstract universalisation. Europic thought, as a whole, engenders a set of profound equivocations about the existence, identity, activity and change of other forms of society. Bhaskar's 'anthroporealism' elaborates and clarifies the full complexity of these contradictions, equivocations, ambiguities etc.

In contrast to advocates of relativism, Bhaskar affirms the need to combine epistemic relativism with ontological realism. That is to say, social relations are practical as well

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Three.

as meaningful, and that all forms of culture entail engagement with, and transformation of, natural forms of being. This is registered in Bhaskar's work in terms of a distinction between the intransitive and transitive dimensions of philosophy which relate to those aspects of the world which are unmediated by culture, and those which are, respectively. In addition to providing a metaphysical basis for thinking about reality and its differentiation, Bhaskar's ontology also grounds conceptions of real change, both natural and cultural, necessary for a genuine historical reflexivity and for a sense of the socio-historical.

In sum, critical realism provides a framework within which the insights and intimations of relativism can be sustained and taken forward as part of the project of critical-theoretical anti-Eurocentrism.

In the following account of critical realism, and critical realist dialectics, Roy Bhaskar's work will be presented as if it were a response to the problems of Eurocentric discourse and social formation. This is not to say that it was intended as such. Rather, Bhaskar's critique is directed at the Western Tradition of philosophy, including that of the classical Greeks, and has its own universalist implications for human culture. While Bhaskar's work is primarily concerned with philosophical ontology and emphasises the transhistorical dimensions of human existence, the present work places greater emphasis on the social and historical dimensions of critique, dealing with the philosophical implications of a more narrowly circumscribed modern tradition of political and social theory.

## II. Bhaskar's Critical Realism.

Summarising Bhaskar's work is no easy matter. His work is often dense and complicated. The works on dialectic, *Dialectic the Pulse of Freedom* and *Plato Etc.* can make particularly heavy demands on readers not familiar with philosophical jargon or with debates on key figures in the philosophical tradition such as Hegel or Marx. On the other hand, Bhaskar is attempting a demanding task. He is developing a kind of therapy for our troubled intellectual condition. In this he is building on the work of many before him, figures as diverse as Marx and Wittgenstein. Such therapy, if it is taken seriously, requires us to engage in the hard work of changing ourselves. It means having to

jettison a great deal of our common sense and transforming our sense of being in the world from the inside. At the very least, if we take Bhaskar seriously we will recognise that there are fundamental problems with the ways in which we ordinarily understand our world, and that our theoretical and philosophical traditions tend to reproduce, rather than resolve, those problems.

There are two points to be made here. Firstly, in relation to the present work, Bhaskar's main contribution to critical philosophy is his disclosure of the systematic *anthropism*, or *anthroporealism*, of the modern tradition of theory and philosophy. These terms are crucial for they refer to the constitutive contradictions embodied in this tradition. Bhaskar's conception of *anthroporealism*, therefore, provides an account of the essential forms constituting the modern problematic. Secondly, as far as this tradition is concerned, this critique of anthropism can be readily interpreted as a critique of its Europism: Bhaskar's concept of anthropic contradictions provides essential ingredients for a theory of Europic contradictions. There have been previous criticisms of the anthropocentrism of the Western tradition, such as Heidegger's, and Bhaskar has developed this line of thinking so that it is now possible to generalise about the modern tradition as having systematically thought of both causes and things in anthropocentric and anthropomorphic ways.

The earlier discussion of ethnocentrism, just mentioned above, drew attention to its implicit, and illicit, universalism. Similarly, in the modern context, anthropic contradictions are the contradictions of illicit universalism. That is to say, modernist anthropism is the root of its form of mis-representation. Its anthropic forms mean that it has illicitly represented itself in universalistic terms, and these forms have mediated the production of both Eurocentric concrete universals and Euromorphic abstract ones. The dialectics of critical realism provides a way of disclosing our place in the world, of decentring ourselves, and of thinking through these philosophical and theoretical problems so that we can come to a critical understanding of Eurocentrism.

The following critical realist account of Eurocentric and Euromorphic universalism will take in all three dimensions of critique: the immanent moment, which identifies the internal problems of some account of the world, usually in the form of contradictions; the omissive moment (*metacritique*<sub>1</sub>), in which those problems are related back to what

is lacking from that account; the explanatory moment (also called *metacritique*<sub>2</sub>), in which these absences are grounded in their broader social context, itself constituted by other contradictions and absences. These latter moments are called *metacritiques* because they look back on the original accounts of the world from a new metaphysical perspective, one with the resources needed to disclose the contradictions and absences of the older perspectives and the world they inhabit.<sup>2</sup>

The first moment, as presented here, has two main thrusts: one is an account of Bhaskar's critique of the notions of causality implied by the idea of causal laws; the other is his somewhat broader critique of the analytic character of the modern problematic, which presents relations between things and/or between things and their qualities, in fixed, static terms. Many others, during the twentieth century, contributed to critiques of law and analytics. Much criticism focused on positions closely associated with positivism, with its naturalisation of knowledge and its neglect of the social and creative aspects of knowledge production. The converse problem, however, which received much less attention, was that this concern with the social character of knowledge of objects of knowledge was developed at the expense of the general nature of reality, i.e. ontology. While most theory acknowledged a distinction between the natural and the social, it proved impossible to sustain it. Either the social would end up being naturalised, i.e. illicitly reduced to the natural, or the natural would end up being socialised, i.e. illicitly reduced to the social. Bhaskar's work shows that neither the social nor natural dimensions of knowledge can be adequately theorised unless both the distinctions and connections between the two dimensions can be sustained.

Whereas Bhaskar's work in the area of immanent critique draws on much work done during the last century, it is with the move to *metacritique* that his positive contribution is to be found. His work offers a comprehensive philosophical view of the kinds of problems confronted in trying to understand the world using the categories we need to negotiate it. He argues, in effect, that our lived categories, and the ideas about the world they are used to communicate, are lacking in something essential. The world, as we

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<sup>2</sup> *Metacritique*, by disclosing absences within the world, also has normative implications. To the extent that it can not only disclose absences in the world, and also identify possible ways of overcoming them, it passes a negative judgement on that world.

understand it, is troublingly incomplete. World views, as it were, are constituted by determinate absences.

Two ways of thinking about absences in knowledge can be distinguished. On the first, linear, view, absences can be recognised without having any serious implications for existing knowledge. This view treats the development of all kinds of knowledge as if it were like learning mathematics. To learn maths is to become skilled in a system by building up from its most basic units, such as ordinary numbers, and functions, such as addition and multiplication. These elements have to be mastered before more complicated functions, such as differential calculus, can be understood. Still yet more complicated functions, those of theoretical physics for instance, can be built on these, and so on. Ignorance of developments at the outer fringes of mathematical inquiry, however, does not impinge on our abilities to use core elements. We can know that there are potentially enormous holes in our knowledge without having to question the things that we do know. This kind of absence is 'external', and it means that the growth of knowledge is linear and accumulative.

The second, dialectical, view of absences regards them as 'internal'. Internal absences are constitutive of the knowledge we already have. Where this is the case, knowledge may still develop outwardly, but it will also have to develop inwardly. New knowledge will be about our existing knowledge, while acquiring new knowledge entails the transformation of what went before. Where there are internal absences, our existing language is neither necessary nor sufficient. It is not necessary because it can and does change, because it has been different and will be so again. It is not sufficient because it does not contain all that we need. For all the richness of our existing understanding, there is a debilitating poverty about it.

Bhaskar's work in philosophy, especially in ontology, transforms our language by enriching it. It seeks to do away with internal absences, to absent them through the disclosure, critique and transcendence of anthropism. For instance, it was pointed out before how Eurocentrism and Euromorphism systematically lead to equivocations and contradictions. Bhaskar discusses these problems in respect of the anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism of the modern tradition. On the one hand, there are anthropocentric, causal or functional, reductions of nature to human culture, along with their antinomy,

i.e. the causal separation of the two realms. On the other hand, there are anthropomorphic identifications of nature in terms of human being, along with its antinomious position, the quasi- or non-being of alterity. Expressions of these positions would appear as rival, directly opposing, positions in philosophical debates, but their opposition is dialectical, arising from the common internal problems of 'irrealism', being constituted by errors and contradictions. The root source of such contradictions is the absence of any sustainable conception of the internal, and dynamic, relations between nature and culture.<sup>3</sup>

Anthropic contradictions, then, are grounded in the absence of, or in a failure to sustain, necessary categories and relations. The problems of philosophy, Bhaskar argues, are due to an inability to maintain the categories of ontological depth and ontological absence. By contrast, 'realism' is the philosophical development of the full implications of these categories. The ontological status of these categories means that they relate to the most general features of our world and that they are needed so that we might speak adequately about it. They are the most general of abstract universals. In much the same way as we would say that if something exists then we must apply the categories of time and space to it, so we also have to say that if something exists we have to apply the categories of depth and absence to it. The implications of this for illicit universalism are this: illicit universals are generalities, categories and concepts constituted by the internal absence of necessary universals.

Briefly, the category of depth is used in recognition that our world extends beyond our senses. The foregoing has already been an illustration of the idea of depth. Meanings are constituted by structures, and internal absences, which are not immediately visible, but which make their effects felt as symptoms, e.g. whenever we encounter contradictions. Philosophy, however, is a form of depth inquiry, seeking to disclose what is to be found beneath the surface.

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<sup>3</sup> An analogy might be drawn between the ephemeral world of meaning and the more solid one of, say, bridges. A bridge can be built with a sufficiently strong structure for it to be viable under normal conditions. However, when tested by a high volume of traffic or unusual weather conditions underlying inadequacies might be revealed: some essential part of its structure is missing. Anthropism refers to the inner structures of meaning from which essential categories are

Now meaning is not the only reality to be like this. Rather, *all realities have depth and are therefore stratified*. For example, we know of the macroscopic and the microscopic, of realms of being quite beyond our naked eyes to see. The colours of light we see are related to different wavelengths we cannot; there are more 'colours' than we can see. We inhabit a stratified world, and scientific investigation takes us through one layer after another, ever more deeply, into the hidden depths of the natural world. Depth investigations can disclose the inner structures of things, revealing what makes them what they are, and showing how their internal organisation accounts for their powers and liabilities.

Such ontological awareness has not always made itself felt in theories of knowledge, with serious consequences. A failure to appreciate the significance of ontological depth, for instance, has sustained the framing of the dominant conception of causal laws in terms of what we can experience, i.e. the empirical. Lacking depth realism, laws have embodied a form of irrealism, i.e. empirical realism. This is a classic example of modern anthropism, as we shall see in greater detail below.

Similar implications attend the category of absence. Bhaskar's philosophical critique is relatively unusual in being self-consciously concerned with the internal absences of language and meaning.<sup>4</sup> The processes of critique, for instance, work through the contradictions of a given way of understanding some part of the world, and then develop with explanations of those contradictions in terms of the absences they embody. For instance: when some account of the world is criticised for being 'reductive' it means that some categorial or causal collapse has been identified: categorially, the account is unable to sustain some distinction and relation; causally it lacks some structure or process. These absences are epistemic, and on their own would be sufficient grounds for recognising the importance of the category of absence. Epistemic change comes about by remedying such absences and reconfiguring categories and relations

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missing. Anthropocentric conceptions can, like the bridge, be shown to have real limits beyond which they begin to fail.

<sup>4</sup> Althusser's, and Etienne Balibar's, influence over the present work was mentioned in chapter two. Their account of Marx's struggle with political economy makes it quite explicit that it entailed a process of conceptual transformation predicated on both immanent and omissive critiques. The latter presupposes the disclosure of internal absences. Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, New Left Books, London, 1971.

accordingly. That is, real epistemic change means the transformation of categorial structures at the appropriate levels of depth.

Absences, however, are by no means confined to language; they are ontological in the sense of being internal to *all* forms of being. Where epistemic absences are an important condition of epistemic change, the significance of absence as an ontological category is that it is a precondition of all real change. Bhaskar contends that the modern tradition has defended, more or less explicitly, an ontology which denies the reality of absence. Traditionally, reality can or must be reduced to what is present, at the price of excluding any potential for the emergence of new forms of reality. This implies that reality has only one mode of being, one value or valence: this is ontological *monovalence*. e.g. empirical realism. Reductionism of this kind generates antinomies, e.g. those of idealism, so that the consequences of monovalence for the broader discursive field are forms of dualism. By contrast, Bhaskar defends the ubiquity of absence on the grounds that everything necessarily embodies some absence or other: both absences and presences are necessary. What is more, they are internally related features of any reality: there is no presence without absence.<sup>5</sup> Given that reality has more than one mode of being, more than one value or valence, we have to speak of ontological *polyvalence*.

As ontological categories, absences are properties of concrete spatio-temporal processes. This means that there are two related inflections of the term needing to be kept in mind. Both abstract from ongoing change, with the first relating to some more or less hypostatized concrete state of affairs, and the other to the possibilities immanent within it.<sup>6</sup> One might say the first abstracts synchronically, while the second does so diachronically. A synchronic perspective on absence is descriptive, revealing those elements which are missing from some state of affairs: anything from a lost key to mental illness to a form of life. Such absences could be at any level or strata of reality.

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<sup>5</sup> Bhaskar does make an argument for the ontological priority of absence, and the possibility that there could be absolute absence, nothingness. *Dialectic*, section I. So while presences depend on absences, in some absolute limit case, absence does not depend on presence. This kind of philosophical argument is not relevant to the current work, except to the extent it informs aspects of Bhaskar's work with which it takes exception.

<sup>6</sup> The development of Bhaskar's later work does not always sustain the implications of this. He uses his theory of real absences, at times, in ways which seem to presuppose meaningfulness of discussing concrete absences without any reference to the structure of possibilities in which they are embedded.

The diachronic perspective on an absence tends to be more explanatory. It deals with non-occurrences, with failures to exercise some power, highlights the non-emergence of generative mechanisms, and so on. In all of these cases real absences are unrealised, blocked, possibilities. Accounting for synchronic absences entails a reference back to some diachronic, causal, absence. This will invoke either a real possibility that went unrealised, or it may invoke a deeper absence, that of the possibility itself, where a given absence will be explained in terms of the absence of its conditions of possibility.

The importance of ontological stratification and polyvalence to Bhaskar's critique of anthropism is that they establish the perspectives from which metacritique<sub>1</sub> can be developed. However, these valuable contributions to philosophy, cannot, as such, account for what is distinctive about Europism. These abstract categories lack any historical content, so tackling questions of Eurocentrism means asking more specific questions about the problems of modern theory and philosophy: why they take the forms they do; why contemporary anthropism, primarily, takes on the forms of abstractions which appear in the guise of universalism. To do this means turning to explanatory critique or metacritique<sub>2</sub>. This involves clarifying the distinction between a critical theoretical perspective on the world and traditional theory by casting the latter as 'praxiology', i.e. uncovering the way that its cognitive concerns are fundamentally shaped by, more or less explicit, concerns with reproducing existing social relations.<sup>7</sup>

The idea of a critical theory, as it is pursued here, rests on an important distinction between categories which have a primarily practical significance and those which have a primarily epistemic function. Traditional theory, as opposed to critical theory, tends to preserve and develop the terms used in everyday practice.<sup>8</sup> In building on these categories, and treating them as the essential givens of theoretical work, traditional theory produces results whose practical significance tends to be at least as great as its cognitive significance. Traditional theory therefore tends to be 'praxiological', i.e. to be theory *for* a given social practice, rather than being a theory *of* that practice and possibly for a quite different practice. Critical theory reveals the ways that traditional theory is

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<sup>7</sup> Once again, Althusser and Balibar are relevant here. Althusser discusses critique in terms of the transformation of generalities belonging to the realm of ideology, or theoretical humanism, into those of Marxian science, or theoretical anti-humanism.

entangled in the problematic categories, practices and relations of modern life. It develops through the attempt to achieve theoretical distance from the problematic forms of contemporary life by resituating them in a broader theoretical, and metaphysical, framework, i.e. 'theoretical anti-Eurocentrism'.

### III. Critical Realism and Ontology.

To begin with a problem of metaphysics: Philosophical self-consistency requires a theory of philosophy.<sup>9</sup> That is, a philosophy must both strive for a theory of itself, and to be consistent with that theory.<sup>10</sup> It was suggested above that our ideas about the world are stratified, i.e. that they have hidden depths, that our concepts have both ostensive meaning and inner structures. It was also suggested that these hermeneutic depths are one of the real objects of philosophy. On this account, realist philosophical practice entails the disclosure and transformation of the inner structure of existing forms of meaning. Also, the results of any philosophy constitute a metaphysics: a provisional metatheoretical framework for inquiry, dealing with the most general categories, relations and forms; giving shape to inquiry and providing some of the criteria by which it should be judged.<sup>11</sup>

In common with other philosophies, realism aspires to provide a metaphysics, i.e. the metaphysics for realist inquiry. To those for whom metaphysics has only negative connotations, this might seem a surprising aspiration. All the more so because realism would claim to be a philosophy developed, initially at least, on the basis of the natural sciences. After all, the dominant portrayal of the relations between modern science and metaphysics has been as an opposition. There are, though, two different reasons for hostility towards the idea of metaphysics, each of which is related to a different conception of what metaphysics is: it either makes "claims concerning the nature of being" or claims for "the adequation of its categories to being".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Horkheimer, Max, 'Traditional and Critical Theory' in *Critical Theory*, Herder and Herder, New York, 1972.

<sup>9</sup> 'Philosophies as Ideologies of Science' in *Reclaiming Reality*, Verso, London, 1989, p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> This is a necessary, though insufficient, condition of philosophical rationality.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens, 'An introduction to Badiou's Thought' in *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, Continuum, London and New York, 2003, p. 18.

The first meaning of metaphysics is of transcendental inquiry into what lies beyond either the realm of nature, or the bounds of possible experience.<sup>13</sup> This might also be thought as inquiry into ultimatata or the absolute nature of being. Outside theology, where religious experience remains, for some, a basis for speculation about the nature of god, secular thought has, by and large, readily abandoned this terrain.<sup>14</sup> Kant, for instance, distinguished between the phenomenal realm, to which we have access via our senses, and the noumenal, to which we are denied any such access.<sup>15</sup> In the absence of any connection to the empirical, arguments about any transcendental realm necessarily run into irresolvable problems.<sup>16</sup> The phenomenal realm of experience, by contrast, was amenable to rational understanding, in forms such as logic, maths and science.

The second meaning of metaphysics is the somewhat more mundane notion of an inquiry into what we mean by being or existence. It is concerned with the categories and forms we need to understand the world. 'Its subject matter is ... the most fundamental features of reality as it presents itself to us'.<sup>17</sup> Kant's transcendental idealism is just one form of inquiry into the presuppositions of empirical and theoretical knowledge, but for many, especially for the positivist tradition, the rise of the sciences was thought to do away with the need for any such inquiry. Science came to be understood as, in some sense, self-sufficient, even self-justifying, such that the rise of science meant the displacement, if not suppression, of metaphysics. The problem with this, though, is that abstaining from metaphysical inquiry only shields the presuppositions of the existing forms in which knowledge appears, including scientific knowledge, from critical scrutiny.

Bhaskar's realism reasserts the need for a critical metaphysics. In that sense it returns to the kinds of problems Kant addressed. However, it also diverges from Kant in that it shifts the focus of inquiry in one vital respect. Kant's conception of metaphysics was

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<sup>13</sup> See also Thomas Mautner, 'Metaphysics', *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1997. p. 351. Mautner's distinction is useful but is slightly different to the one I am using here.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, Archer et al, *Transcendence: Realism and God*, Routledge, London, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, MacMillan, London, 1964.

<sup>16</sup> Kant uses a form of dialectics to show up the fallacious character of such reasoning.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Carr, *Metaphysics: An introduction*, MacMillan, Basingstoke, 1987, p. 2.

not ontological but epistemological, and was conceived as inquiry into the properties and nature of cognition. He rejected inquiry into the nature of being, where being is the condition of possibility of mind and knowledge. Taking up the Aristotelian form of metaphysics, Bhaskar's philosophy of reality is ontological and is concerned with laying out the most general features of being. It is "an elaboration of what the world must be like prior to any scientific investigation of it and for any scientific attitude of behaviour to be possible."<sup>18</sup>

This expanded sense of metaphysics, away from one reduced to epistemology and towards an ontology which encompasses epistemology, has significant consequences for how the idea of a prior framework of presuppositions can be understood. Indeed, it drives inquiry towards the expanded conception of problematic discussed in earlier chapters. This is due, in part, to the different senses of the term 'presuppositions'. The first, and most common, is that of logical entailment: the search for the rational presuppositions of a line of reasoning. However, it is also rational to say that activity has non-rational, i.e. practical and real, preconditions, e.g. knowing presupposes socio-historical culture, which presupposes the natural world, which presupposes being. Presuppositions, understood as preconditions, have many different locations and have to be understood in more than one way. Crucially, the realist concern with ontology does not imply any rejection of the realm of ideas as the location of presuppositions, though it does mean that the idea of 'mind' possessing fixed qualities and projecting fixed categories onto an external world has to be dispensed with. Instead, realism demands engaging in the essentially social and historical task of categorial inquiry into prior categories in at least three distinct locations: the historically generated categories of a given mode of thought; the equally historical categories of the social conditions of that thought; the general categories of the natural conditions of existence of that society. This, in turn, means that a metaphysics must have three meta-critical dimensions: a philosophical epistemology (an account of the general categories of thought); a philosophical anthropology (an account of the general categories of human social

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<sup>18</sup> Bhaskar, 'Realism in the Natural Sciences' in *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 12. It should, though, be pointed out that ontological realism is only one of three terms which characterise critical realism. The other two are epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality. The implications of relativism in this context are to ensure that the development of all knowledge, including ontology is understood in its historical context.

existence); as well as a philosophical ontology (the account of the general categories of being).

From the perspective afforded by this expanded and differentiated sense of metaphysics, the characteristic mistake of the epistemological tradition was to collapse these three dimensions into a single one. This is a typically anthroporealist error. To the extent that knowledge is either informed by or implies such anthropism it will be constituted by the absence of a series of necessary distinctions: that between social and the natural forms of existence; between the transhistorical and the historical; between things and ideas. The result of failing to sustain either proper differentiation or a proper sense of historical dynamics is the naturalisation of 'mind'. This, in turn, means that historically particular forms of thought are, first, misrepresented and then, secondly, identified as a universal form of thought. The metaphysical neglect of ontology within the European tradition illicitly universalises it. Such is the essentially philosophical dimension of the problems of Eurocentrism.

The realist response to this problem of metaphysics is the critical development of the major responses to the disintegration of the dominant philosophical tradition, including strands of relativism. These other developments all involved metaphysical developments, but the concentration on philosophical anthropology was too one-sided, a failing Bhaskar's work is an attempt to redress.

The following account of Bhaskar's work will not be straightforward exposition, for the aim here is to approach Bhaskar's disclosure and critique of anthropism from the perspective of the critique of the illicit universalism of the modern tradition. For his part, Bhaskar makes scattered references to problems of illicit universality, but does not explicitly develop his account of anthroporealism in terms of illicit abstract and concrete universality. From the present perspective, the two moments of Bhaskar's realist response to the problem of metaphysics within the modern European tradition are the initial elaboration of a realist theory of science and its subsequent dialecticisation. The following account of Bhaskar's work, then, will be an elaboration of its implications from the perspective of Eurocentrism. As such, it will not proceed strictly chronologically, as it will treat the various moments of Bhaskar's work as distinct, but consistent, perspectives on the same set of issues. A somewhat anachronistic reading of

the earlier work, one which presupposes the later perspective, will be given here. In particular, the category of absence will be given a somewhat greater significance than it actually had in the earlier work.

Also, the take on the development of realism advanced here emphasises the twin critiques of positivism and analytics. Both positivism and analytics are limit positions of modern philosophy, and as such might be considered to be unrepresentative. What is more, both have come in for considerable criticism over the course of the last century or so, such that they might be thought to be no longer central to the contemporary problems of philosophy and social theory. However, they remain significant to the extent that large areas of contemporary thought have been developed against them, establishing them amongst the most significant points of reference and departure. More importantly, they also typify contemporary thought in that subsequent strands of thought have neither fully disclosed nor resolved the problems bequeathed to them by positivism and analytics. The modern tradition remains in thrall to these problems. From the perspective afforded by dialecticised critical realism, these problems are disclosed as irrealism, anthroporealism and illicit universalism, i.e. the defining structural features of theoretical Eurocentrism.

Turning first to the realist critique of positivism. Positivism developed as an epistemology throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Its influence was such that in the 1930s “few philosophers would have dissented from the view that science develops in a linear or monistic fashion, so as to leave meaning and truth value unchanged, on the basis provided by common experience”.<sup>19</sup> Both of these qualities of knowledge, its stability and its basis in experience, have since been the focus of distinct lines of attack on the positivist inheritance.

The unchanging character of knowledge is known as *monism*. In general, to speak of a monism is to infer a given unity. Monism in the theory of knowledge holds that knowledge has given and fixed characteristics. Pieces of knowledge are discovered in their fully developed form, while the concept of epistemic change is reduced to the accumulation of hitherto undiscovered pieces. For present purposes, this conception of

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<sup>19</sup> Bhaskar, ‘Feyerabend and Bachelard: Two Philosophies of Science’ in *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 26.

epistemic monism can be understood in terms of its treatment of absence, i.e. it has an external conception of absence. Externalising absences means that they cannot be understood as constituent of knowledge. Knowledge with no internal absences cannot be partial. Equally, it shuts the door on critical transformation.

The twentieth century saw the development of a concerted *anti-monist* strand of epistemology, with the most prominent contributors being Gaston Bachelard, Alexandre Koyré, Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, Imre Lakatos and Paul Feyerabend. These writers drew attention to the historical phenomenon of theoretical change. They showed that, far from conforming to the positivist ideal of the gradual accumulation of knowledge, scientific theories were regularly challenged and superseded. The real pattern of scientific development involved protracted clashes between rival, often incommensurable, descriptions of reality. Under pressures such as these, knowledge came to be understood less in terms of its discovery and more in terms of its having been constructed through social, historical, processes.

Anti-monism fed into the development of relativism for various reasons. For instance, the core-periphery model of rational expansion, a central element of universalism, was displaced by a radically different conception of the dynamics of epistemic change.<sup>20</sup> This can be understood in terms of the changing status of the absences belonging to the field of knowledge, which could no longer be considered external. They had become internal, giving rise to complex and changing field of internally related meanings.

The other pillar of positivism is related to another aspect of universalism: the idea of a fixed standard of rationality: positivism holds that common, empirical, experience provides the only secure foundation on which to develop knowledge. This is a form of *deductivism*: knowledge developing through valid inferences from necessary premises. Thus we have a) certain knowledge and b) valid inferences. Modern deductivism has a long history, reaching back at least as far as Descartes' early work, 'Rules for the direction of the mind,' written in the 1620s. Unlike Descartes, whose subjective *Cogito* was meant to provide foundational certainty, the positivist project involved the attempt to secure sense experiences as the unquestionable basis of all knowledge. It therefore

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<sup>20</sup> See chapter 4.

developed as a brand of empiricism: the view that all knowledge is based on or derived from sense experience. What has been known as *phenomenalism* was developed to secure the link between experience and knowledge by identifying the sense experiences of knowing subjects with the known qualities of real objects. From Berkeley in the eighteenth century to Hempel in the twentieth, phenomenologists have either argued that things just are sense experiences, or that statements about sense experiences can be simply translated into statements about things. The former is an idealist form of empiricism, while the latter implies material object empiricism.<sup>21</sup>

The second influential strand of twentieth century thought, including work by N. R. Hanson, Steven Toulmin, Mary Hesse and Rom Harré, much of it strongly influenced by Wittgenstein, showed how scientific practice could not be understood in this way. Their investigations of theoretical practice revealed scientists to be engaged in developing theoretical objects which could not be reduced to empirical statements. Explanations of the world depended on the scientific imagination having a strictly non-empirical, non-deductive, dimension, without which scientific explanations would not get off the ground.<sup>22</sup>

While these developments undermined the pillars of positivism and universalism, both strands of thought gave rise to serious problems of their own. Theories of cognitive change have a tendency to theoreticism, a form of scientific relativism. Where phenomenism identifies senses with the world, theoreticism identifies theory with it, prompting the suggestion that the world must change as theories do. The world appears to be readily subsumed under the theories of the investigators, rather than theories emerging out of the resistance encountered by investigators in their dealings with the world. Without explicitly countering this tendency, by developing a philosophical defence of the autonomy, relative endurance and stability of real objects from scientific inquiry, there could be no rational grounds for deciding against a given theory or between different ones: what, if anything, were theoretical disputes really about? "More generally, the theorists of scientific change have found it difficult to reconcile the

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<sup>21</sup> Bhaskar, 'Philosophies as ideologies of Science', in *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 55.

<sup>22</sup> Bhaskar, 'Realism in the Natural Sciences', in *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 12.

phenomena of discontinuity with the seemingly progressive, cumulative character of scientific development, in which there is growth as well as change.”<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, accounts of theoretical objects were beset by parallel difficulties concerning the status of non-empirical theoretical items. The problem here was that the abiding influence of empiricism meant that it could not be accepted that such items could both have cognitive validity and at the same time make some reference to some dimension of reality.<sup>24</sup>

These kinds of problems, internal contradictions, belong to the first moment of critique. To take matters further, however, is to move on to metacritique. Bhaskar’s initial move here was to argue that scientific discontinuity and change had seriously disturbing consequences for philosophy on the grounds that “their recognition snaps the privileged relations between subject and object which, in classical philosophy, uniquely ties thought to things.”<sup>25</sup> Once the phenomenalist tie is broken none of the forms of empiricism are able to survive.

Thought cannot now be viewed as a mechanical function of given objects (as in empiricism); nor can the activity of creating subjects be regarded as endowing the world with things (as in idealism); nor is any combination of the two possible. In short, it becomes necessary to distinguish clearly between the unchanging real objects that exist outside the scientific process and changing cognitive objects that are produced within science as a function of scientific practice. Let me call the former *intransitive* and the latter *transitive* objects: the theoretical space in which to talk about them will accordingly become the intransitive and transitive dimensions respectively of the philosophy of science.<sup>26</sup>

By way of clarification it is worth noting how Bhaskar’s non-standard use of these terms relates to their more familiar grammatical use. Transitive verbs are those which take objects, which establish some relation between a subject and an object. For instance, ‘I write a letter’, or ‘She loves him’. Intransitive verbs take no such object, e.g. ‘The bird flies,’ or ‘She suffers’. This distinction between the presence and absence of an active relation to another object can be used to distinguish between knowledge of things and their existence. The intransitive dimension of the philosophy of science

<sup>23</sup> Bhaskar, ‘Realism in the Natural Sciences’, in *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> Bhaskar, ‘Feyerabend and Bachelard’, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. pp. 26-27.

refers to the sphere of objects referred to with the intransitive verbs 'to be' or 'to exist': 'there *is* a magnetic field. The objects of natural science must, in the first instance, be understood to exist independently of the scientist who seeks to know them. Objects in the transitive dimension, on the other hand, emerge from active relations between knowing human subjects and their objects of knowledge: 'She has worked on the theory of gravity'. To speak about knowledge, then, often invokes a relation between the two dimensions: Knowledge (in the transitive dimension) is about something (in the intransitive dimension).

This distinction can be extended from philosophy of science to the more general philosophical anthropology. Thus, two dimensions are referred to when speaking of acting on the world: The intransitive dimension expresses the presupposition that there is a realm of nature which is both the condition of possibility of human action and which is subject to possible transformation by various kinds of work. As things become the objects of social activity (in the transitive dimension), so natural beings, natural processes and their outcomes (in the intransitive dimension) are altered and transformed.

Relations between the intransitive and transitive dimensions are asymmetrical: the existence of an intransitive dimension to being does not presuppose a transitive one, but the transitive dimension does presuppose the intransitive. The latter encompasses all those areas of existence which are unmediated by social existence: all those aspects of being which, in any given time or place, fall beyond the sphere of human culture. The transitive, by contrast, encompasses anything brought into being through social activity taking objects. It takes in all those things no longer wholly independent of human activity. It is the sum of the consequences of social mediation. The transitive dimension is, from the most general of perspectives, coextensive with the whole of human culture. Although Bhaskar does not use the term, one can speak of 'transitivisation' as the necessary consequence of human activity: the mediation of things, or their activities, or their effects by social activity, such that their pre-existing independence from social relations is lost. A general account of culture is 'iterative transitivisation', i.e. the

successive transformative mediation of previously intransitive things, activities and effects - including human individuals.<sup>27</sup>

This philosophical anthropological concept of transitivisation always needs to be given socio-historical content and elaborated in terms of the cultural specificities of the forms it engenders. In the present context this means substantiating it in terms of the illicit universalisations and totalisations of Eurocentrism. The extent to which different cultures are independent of one another is always an open, historical, question. However, Europic universalisation expands and intensifies the extent to which pre- or non-modern cultural forms become dependent upon and mediated by European forms. Europic expansion is a process of intercultural transitivisation. What is more, there is considerable scope for translating Bhaskar's development of the transitive/intransitive distinction in respect of the natural sciences into a more general account of modern forms of universalisation.

Bhaskar fleshes out this distinction in his account of experimental activity and theoretical creativity, in the transitive dimension, and his elaboration of the ontology of transcendental or depth realism, in the intransitive dimension.<sup>28</sup> In so doing he generates a theoretical account of a specifically modern mode of universalisation, and its accompanying form of universalism. While other modern social relations differ from those of science and technology, they nevertheless share significant formal characteristics. A realist theory of science, unintentionally, provides fundamental elements of a broader theory of modern social formation.

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<sup>27</sup> Iterative transitivisation can have serious consequences for how we understand science. On Bhaskar's account, the real objects of science are intransitive, but iterative transitivisation raises the possibility of an increasing distance between a pure science concerned with intransitive objects and techniques concerned with increasingly mediated objects. Over time the distinction between discovery and invention can become blurred. Genetic modification, for instance, is at least as much a technology for mediating structures with a view to invention than it is a science of discovery.

Alternatively, the historical mediation of human evolution by the activity of the species, such that our social being has long been a condition of our biological development, indicates the irreducibility of human being to biology. Social existence is essentially polyvalent with respect to this distinction.

How that distinction develops within forms of social life, or what forms are generated by historically specific modes of transitivisation, are questions of the utmost significance.

The development of this account of modern transitivity can be approached from many directions, including the critique of empiricism. While empiricism is explicit in its reduction of knowledge to sense experience, it also implicitly reduces being to the level of the senses as well. The success of non-empirical explanations in the sciences, however, justifies depth ontology. Not only does reality extend beyond the senses, as Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal suggests, but scientific and experimental inquiry create the conditions under which it is possible to develop theoretical knowledge of the non-empirical. The object realm of modern science is irreducible to the empirical. Rather, it encompasses non-empirical causal mechanisms embodied in enduring natural kinds. On this account, science presupposes that reality has a number of features: it is stratified, in more or less complex ways; it is structured, i.e. is not chaotic but organised; it is also differentiated, i.e. each mechanism, at each of its layers has its own specific structure.<sup>29</sup> Now, once the concept of reality is elaborated in this way, through the generation of new ontological categories, it enriches the metaphysical framework within which the history of science can be reformulated. For instance, cognitive change no longer has to struggle with the idea that reality changes as theories do. Instead, cognitive change can be understood as coming about when scientists acquire knowledge of successively deep strata of each region of this non-empirical realm.<sup>30</sup> While theoretical objects are developed or displaced (in the transitive dimension), their real objects endure (in the intransitive dimension).<sup>31</sup>

The most significant consequences of this is that neither the role ascribed to the scientific experiment by positivism in the production of knowledge, nor the form it ascribes to that knowledge, are any longer tenable. Science is not the 'discovery' of knowledge, nor does knowledge take the form of laws. Now, the positivist conception of knowledge has two aspects to it. Its theory of particular knowledge is of individual events sensed in experience. Our reception of these experiences is held to be entirely passive. The category of experience excludes any and all culturally mediated capacities, such as interpretation, theoretical creativity, or prior knowledge of any kind. Scientifically relevant experience is a strictly desocialised relation to the world. The

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<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that all general ontological categories, such as depth and structure, must be applicable to both cultural and non-cultural spheres.

<sup>29</sup> Bhaskar, 'Realism in the Natural Sciences', in *Reclaiming Reality*. pp. 15-18.

<sup>30</sup> Bhaskar, 'Realism in the Natural Sciences', in *Reclaiming Reality*. pp. 18-22.

<sup>31</sup> Of course, real changes are profoundly interesting to science.

positivist theory of general knowledge, on the other hand, is of empirical regularities, i.e. constant conjunctions of sensed events: Event A is followed by event B. This takes the form of 'laws': if A then B. Human relations to these conjunctions is merely to record their occurrence. Science, on this account, is the passive identification of naturally occurring empirical regularities.<sup>32</sup>

The realist critique of law-like empirical regularities begins with the critique that constant conjunctions, in general, do not occur spontaneously.<sup>33</sup> Rather they are co-produced by scientists intervening in the activity of natural mechanisms. This intervention comes in the shape of the experiment, which produces constant conjunctions by imposing closed systems onto the operation of natural powers. Closure, in this context, means that the range of possible effects that the natural power can produce is reduced to just one. When the same mechanism operates naturally it will usually do so in systems whose range of possibilities is open, and where constant conjunctions will not occur. In open systems the results of natural tendencies are transfactually efficacious, i.e. their activity produces different empirical effects depending on the conditions under which they operate. Constant conjunctions, therefore, cannot provide sufficient grounds on which to make general knowledge claims, because they only indicate that a given mechanism is in operation. The realist conception of general knowledge is not of empirical regularity, but is instead of the causal structures which co-produce events.

One of the most significant problems with promulgating general knowledge in the form of empirical laws is that it cannot be legitimately universalised.<sup>34</sup> In order for a regularity to be universal, the conditions of possibility it presupposes, including the closed system in which it occurs, must themselves be universal. This means that a claim for the universality of a law involves the universal projection of experimental closure into the world. The experiment is transfigured, such that it becomes the natural grounds of scientifically discovered laws. This is a striking form of anthropomorphism: the projection of culture into nature. It is a denial of transitivity, and the consequent collapse of the distinction between transitive and intransitive dimensions. So while there

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<sup>32</sup> Bhaskar, 'Philosophies as ideologies of Science', in *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 51.1

<sup>33</sup> Bhaskar, *Realist Theory of Science*, Verso, London, 1997. See chapter 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Realist Theory of Science*, chapter 3.

is an implicit conception of nature being distinct from culture, the idea of a natural law fails to sustain it.

This collapse between transitive and intransitive realms, between nature and culture is the most general form of anthropism. The additional value of a realist theory of science though is that it discloses the specific internal structure, i.e. the contradictory categorial form, of positivism's illicit universalism. Realist metacritique reveals positivism as a specific form of 'irrealism'.

Irrealism is the realist theory of its opposites, i.e. the realist theory of structures of non-realist meaning: forms of thought whose constitutive categories are characterised by internal absences, splits and collapses. From the realist perspective, the structural absences which constitute irrealist discourse are category errors, errors which come primarily in the forms of categorial fusions and fissions. Fusions arise when necessary distinctions are absent, where categorial distinctions are elided and categories are collapsed into one another. Examples include any form of reductionism, e.g. the reduction of social life to the activity of individuals at the expense of social relations and structures. Also, empirical realism, as we have seen, involves a reduction of the real to the empirical, at the expense of deeper causal structures. Each of these reductions gives rise to a discourse organised around a set of irrealist categories which, in turn, generate a set of intellectual problems. No attempts to solve the problems of that discourse will succeed unless that reduction is addressed.

Categorial fissions, on the other hand, involve splitting aspects of the world apart so that necessary connections or relations are absent. Examples here include the illicit granting of autonomy to some aspect of being. For instance, much individualistic social theory also presupposes individual autonomy.<sup>35</sup> As previously discussed, the vision of ethical economic society, which encompasses the notion of essentially desocialised sovereign, autonomous, rational individuals, informs great swathes of modern political, legal,

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<sup>35</sup> As this example suggest, categorial fissions and fusions tend to reciprocate one another. See below for a more detailed discussion of the general structure of irrealisms.

economic and social thought.<sup>36</sup> It is on this basis that the modern imaginary appears as a complex of irrealist figures, or ideologemes.

#### IV. Illicit universalism and anthroporealism.

Illicit universalism, then, is a mode of irrealism, and its internal structures can be theorised in terms of its most basic fissions and fusions, i.e. those related to the contradictions of its implicit metaphysics. Every theory secretes philosophies with ontological, anthropological and epistemological dimensions. However, irrealisms do so in contradictory ways, collapsing these dimensions into one another, thereby failing to sustain the necessary distinctions, and/or failing to make the necessary connections between them. These fissions and fusions generate the dichotomies and ambiguities of anthroporealism, accounting for the antinomies of the modern tradition. The critique of anthroporealism “involves a Copernican Revolution in the strict sense of an anti-anthropocentric shift in our philosophical conception of the place of humanity in nature”.<sup>37</sup>

The disclosure of positivism’s anthropism is important because it minutely details many of the general characteristics of the broader modern tradition. This is because, as we have already seen, the vision of the world which positivism defends shares significant features with other, more explicitly sociological, visions. This final section will show how specifically modern anthropism, i.e. theoretical Europism, generates reification and fetishism, categories long associated with the ideology and praxiology of capital. It will show how the categories and forms of the realist critique of positivism and empiricism need to be generalised to the wider modern tradition. The wider implications of these issues will be taken up again in Chapter 8, when the general structures of modern universals are related to Marx’s account of capital.

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<sup>36</sup> See the previous chapter for a discussion of the Modern Imaginary. Also, see Rajiv Bhargava’s *Individualism* for a thorough discussion of the different forms of individualism. Bhargava, Rajeev, *Individualism in Social Science: forms and limits of a methodology*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992.

<sup>37</sup> Bhaskar, ‘Realism in the Natural Sciences’, in *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 12.

For now it remains to follow up the implications of positivism's explicit denial of its own ontological presuppositions. Once it is accepted that any theoretical idiom has an internal categorial structure which constitutes its philosophical 'presuppositions', any theoretical claims to the contrary amount to a performative contradiction. The absence of any explicit conception of internal structure opens up the possibility, at the very least, of contradictions between this level of reality and that of the actuality of the idiom in which it is expressed. The realist critique of the modern tradition develops an account of the ramifications of such contradictions by disclosing their implicit ontological commitments, their implications for the structure of the tradition as a whole, and their wider effects.

Positivism's theory of particular knowledge held that it was restricted to events or states of affairs sensed in experience. The implicit ontology on which this view of knowledge depends on treating "what is apprehended in immediate sense experience as a fact constituting an atomistic event or state of affairs, existing independently of the human activity necessary for it, and hence a *reification* of facts".<sup>38</sup> To speak of reification in this context is not to say that facts should not be treated as things, for facts are indeed things. They are, however, ones produced by human activity, and they belong to the transitive world of scientific activity. This reification of facts occurs with the projection of their specifically social qualities onto the things and events of which they are accounts, i.e. the transitive-intransitive distinction collapses as transitive qualities are displaced into the intransitive dimension. Positivism achieves this by combining two reductive collapses. Firstly, sense experiences are run together with facts, and then facts are fused with empirical material objects. The first collapse occurs when the objects of science are reduced to facts stated in terms of sense of experience. The second takes place when such accounts are treated as, or as identical to, the objects to which they refer.<sup>39</sup>

The theory of general knowledge, meanwhile, is a form of fetishism, due to a parallel collapse of the transitive-intransitive distinction: the transfiguring of social causes as

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<sup>38</sup> Bhaskar, 'Philosophies as ideologies of science', in *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 52.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 52.

natural ones.<sup>40</sup> In ordinary parlance, a fetish is a medium of human interaction, the efficacy of which depends on the fetish having been invested with intrinsic powers of its own. The human interaction is effective because the powers generated by social relations are displaced onto the fetish so that the interaction itself appears only as the context in which those powers are mobilised. The positivist form of general knowledge is that of constant conjunctions of events. Such conjunctions are represented as naturally occurring, but as has already been seen, they are the results of human intervention in natural processes: A follows B as a consequence of the social mediation of natural activity and/or its conditions. Positivism, regarding them as occurring quite independently of such mediation, fetishises the closed systems produced by scientists by projecting the social mediation and causal powers involved in experiments onto the sequence of 'natural' events. So it is that fetishism parallels reification, but at a deeper level, that of the non-actual, where causal powers are displaced from the transitive to intransitive dimension, effectively eliminating transitive mediation and causality from view.

With the category errors of illicit naturalisation and illicit de-socialisation embodied in reification and fetishism we have arrived at the 'anthroporealism' implicit in positivism. This anthroporealist view of the world is generated by a series of exchanges through which social and natural qualities, powers and effects are conflated and/or hidden. The consequences of this anthroporealism are forms of symbolic representations of society and nature. Not yet using the terminology of anthropism, Bhaskar asserted:

Now positivism can sustain neither the idea of an independent reality nor the idea of a socially produced science. Rather what happens is in a way quite extraordinary - for, as in the interests of a particular conception of philosophy, it allows a particular conception of knowledge of reality to inform and implicitly define the concept of reality known by science. These ideas become crossed, so that we have a *naturalized science* purchased at the expense of a *humanized nature*. And it is in this exchange (or transference), or rather in the philosophical crucible in which it occurs, that the most fateful ideological consequences of positivism are found.<sup>41</sup>

Anthroporealism, due to its forms of illicit universalisation, deploys reification and fetishism as the vehicles for humanising nature, for projecting the qualities and powers of social entities into nature. Social properties are desocialised, separated off from society, externalised. Meanwhile science is 'naturalised', but some care needs to be

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<sup>40</sup> Bhaskar, 'Philosophies as ideologies of Science', in *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 52-3.

taken here. Naturalisation here should be understood negatively, as indicating that things are held to be independent of social activity and existence, i.e. as intransitive in Bhaskar's terminology. Naturalisation should not be taken to mean that things are positively attributed with specifically natural qualities and powers. It is more consistent to speak in terms of the illicit transfers of things between the transitive and the intransitive dimensions, where the distinction between the two rests on the presence or absence of human mediation.

The reification of facts as things, for instance, strips them of their social and historical character, simply by asserting that they are passively received in ordinary experience. However, facts are not, as positivism holds, passively apprehended in sense experience, but instead depend on theories which organise our apprehension: they are potentialities of conceptual schemes which are actualised in discovery, sustained in practice and objectified in sense experience.<sup>42</sup> They are possibilities inherent in cognitive structures, structures which are reproduced and transformed by social activity. They belong to the transitive dimension, being dependent on structured social mediation. Equally, their co-production depends on the actualisation of unmediated, i.e. intransitive, natural powers.

Reification, then, is an effect of the failure to sustain the category of transitivisation, collapsing the distinction between transitivity and intransitivity. This generates a systematic ambivalence or equivocation over the distinctiveness of the real objects of social activity, for they are held to have a distinctive mode of existence, on the one hand, whilst they are imbued with social qualities, on the other.<sup>43</sup> This produces the first of the two forms of anthroporealist exchange characteristic of irrealism: anthropomorphism. Reification projects social qualities into nature, illicitly naturalising and universalising them as it does so. This means that the sphere of philosophical anthropology is illicitly extended into the rest of nature becoming, in effect, an ontology or general form of being. Anthropomorphic reification illicitly universalises the anthropological conception it presupposes, and it does so at the expense of the

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<sup>41</sup> Bhaskar, 'Philosophies as ideologies of Science', in *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 51.

<sup>42</sup> Bhaskar, 'Philosophies as ideologies of Science', in *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 60.

<sup>43</sup> Bhaskar's argument here is to say that reification engenders an equivocation over the independent existence of the objects of science. This is so only as a consequence of bringing something within the transitive dimension, which is to make a general attribution of social mediation.

distinctiveness of philosophical ontology. It entails a double error, both misconceiving the sphere of social existence and conflating it with a misconceived non-social sphere.

It is, then, as the consequence of an extraordinary combination of exchanges and absences that social facts come to appear as if they belonged to an unchanging natural order. The absence of change brings us back to monism and the idea of knowledge as unchanging, to a conception of knowledge which externalises absence. This is strongly reinforced by atomism.<sup>44</sup> In addition to concealing the structural depths of the social relations which engender them, the atomistic conception of facts conceals epistemic change, whether it occurs at the level of what a given set of social relations produces or at the level of those relations themselves. On this basis, positivism treats knowledge as both desocialised and deprocessualised, while the effects of projecting this view of knowledge onto nature means that natural things are also abstracted from their temporal processes and rendered changeless.<sup>45</sup>

The anthropomorphic dimension of irrealism, then, is disclosed through this elaboration of the categorial structures of reification. Its most significant features are, firstly, a failure to sustain a distinction between the cultural and non-cultural and, secondly, to present that ambiguous world in terms of a generalised ontological destratification and deprocessualisation, i.e. within a metaphysics of ontological monovalence.<sup>46</sup>

The fetishism of closed systems is a manifestation of the second set of irrealist, anthroporealist, exchanges, i.e. those of anthropocentrism. The naturalisation of constant conjunctions is the moment of the naturalisation of science, while the fetishism of closed systems is the socialisation of nature. Once again, the intransitive-transitive distinction is mooted, only to be immediately negated. The two dimensions are run together, producing a new, anthropocentric, reality, by insinuating social causes into nature. Like reification, this involves a double collapse: the first is the collapse of the

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<sup>44</sup> Atomism means the absence of internal spaces, or absences. The externalisation of absence which accompanies atomism is vividly illustrated by the dualism of classical atomistic ontologies which reduce the world to indivisible atoms and the void in which they move.

<sup>45</sup> These implications of the absence of absence are not explicitly addressed in the early phase of Bhaskar's work.

<sup>46</sup> *Philosophies as ideologies of science*, pp. 60-62.

distinction between the exercise of causal powers and their realisation.<sup>47</sup> The second is the fusion of natural and social causal powers.

The significance of all this for an understanding of theoretical Europicism is that the illicit character of modern universalism can be understood in terms of anthroporealism. In this specific case, it attaches to the claims for the universality of scientific laws disclosed by experimental science. Any such laws have to be underpinned by the implicit ontology of closed systems. If constant conjunctions are natural and universal, then their conditions of possibility - closed systems - have also to be natural and universal. Equally, for laws to have applicability beyond the laboratory they have to be assumed to occur independently of scientific activity. This requires the desocialisation of socially closed systems and their implicit projection into nature as the hidden cause of its constant conjunctions, engendering equivocation over the independent exercise of causal powers. What is more, these claims for the universality of law-like regularities imply the concrete universalisation of socially generated closure. Social causes, in this case those of experimental science, are transformed into the reasons for the existence of natural laws and the reasons for how and why they operate. The anthropomorphism of the expressly universalistic idiom of the sciences and its philosophy illicitly generates a worldview in which its own social presuppositions are simultaneously desocialised and universalised and in which the natural world is represented as anticipating its own universal mediation by these same presuppositions.

It is only a short step from this account of the anthroporealist representation of the technical mediation of nature by science to an appreciation of the common sense underlying the 'promethean' attitude to the natural world characteristic of modernism.<sup>48</sup>

## V. Conclusions.

The introductory remarks to this chapter drew attention to the place that critical realism has in addressing the problems evident in the development of conceptions of relativism. Critical realism is offered here as making a vital contribution to dealing with problems of historical reflexivity and as providing a theoretical conception of the forms of

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<sup>47</sup> *Philosophies as ideologies of science*, p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> For a brief discussion of Marx and prometheanism see chapter 8.

modern European social formation. The presentation of Bhaskar's work was organised around the categories of anthroporealism and transitivisation, both of which are fundamental to an adequate understanding of the illicit universalism of the modern intellectual tradition.

The chapter has served a number of purposes. The idea of transitivisation, taking up Bhaskar's distinction between the intransitive and transitive dimensions of philosophy, was developed here as a category of philosophical anthropology. It treats cultural activity as the human mediation of the effects and/or activities and/or structural transformation of that activity's own conditions of possibility. The effect of such mediation is the transformation of those conditions and the production of cultural forms – forms of life – and their reproduction and transformation.

One effect of modern cultural activity is the production of anthroporealist universals, the dominant forms of meaning through which that activity is understood. Such universals are 'chaotic' conceptions and symbolic representations of transitivisation, whose reality they obscure through their structural forms. Specifically, transitivisation is systematically hidden from view, acting as a structural constraint on historical theoretical reflexivity.

As a philosophical term, pitched at a transhistorical level of generality, anthroporealism refers to any categorial error embodied in the treatment of nature and culture and which fails to sustain the intransitive/transitive distinction. These errors can be found in works belonging to very different traditions, e.g. Aristotle's naturalisation of the Polis and Hobbes' account of the state of nature. While it is appropriate to ask questions about how these writers imagined the extent of their potential audiences and their universalistic intent, they are certainly both read as universalists. From a critical perspective, they both produce anthropic universals. The cultural specificity of their work, however, renders them ethnocentric. Illicit universalism, i.e. anthroporealism, is always-already ethnocentric.

As the example of Hobbes suggests, then, the anthroporealism of the modern tradition has to be understood as a form of ethnocentrism. It is of its cultural time and place and bears all the marks of being so. Whether it is the naturalisation of modern science,

experimental activity or its technological results, or whether it is the establishment of ethical economic visions of society as the human essence, these anthropic forms are embodied in the many and diverse disciplines of the modern tradition of European political and social thought. By drawing on Bhaskar's work in this way, critical theoretical anti-Eurocentrism is able to disclose the structural form and implications of Europic thought and to point to its ubiquity as a constitutive feature of that tradition.

There is also a third reason for drawing on Bhaskar's work. It has been noted how the realist category of transitivity understands the production of cultural forms in terms of its mediation of (some of) its own preconditions. Having examined the forms of Europic thought it therefore remains to do the same for Europic social relations, i.e. to turn to the 'practical' dimension of Europic Dialectical Universalisation. This task involves a kind of 'translation' of anthropic illicit universals into a theoretical account of the non-discursive dimension of social relations. There are two steps to be taken here. The first fleshes out a further aspect of irrealist universalism in terms of analytics, and locates this within an overarching conception of dialectical process (Chapter 7). The second shows how the full account of anthropic contradictions is made concrete, as it were, in the capital relation, i.e. a necessary, if insufficient, universal of Europic social formation (Chapter 8).

## **Chapter 7 - The Dialectics of Irrealist Social Forms.**

### I. Introduction.

The critical-theoretical anti-Eurocentrism being elaborated here can be understood as a development of the critique of political economy from the perspective of its anthropic universalism. As discussed previously, realist critique is many faceted, involving the transformation of both theoretical form and the disclosure of the real forms of social relations. This chapter brings the latter to the fore, with its most significant step being the translation of the concept of anthropic universalism from the metacritique of irrealist theory into the philosophy and sociology of modernity. This entails utilising this specific concept of irrealist form, with its characteristic absences and contradictions and its systematically ambiguous relations between universality and particularity, to theorise social relations.

This theoretical translation establishes a formal homology between the two dimensions of social life. For his part, Bhaskar insists on an irreducibly hermeneutic dimension of social life, such that social relations are dependent on meaning. This chapter develops this internal relation by taking up Winch's assertion that there is a fruitful analogy to be made between the spheres of meaning and social relations:<sup>1</sup> social relations are not only dependent on meaning but are also meaning-like in their categorial structures. Addressing questions relating to the possible forms of social relations and contradictions in this way means that the chapter establishes ir/realism as a general conception of all social forms and thereby provides a framework for theorising modern social relations in terms of irrealist universals.

Approaching both Althusser's and Marx's work as a critique of the illicit universalism of modern forms of thought, the first section of this chapter returns to the theme of a problematic. The aim now is to show how Althusser, and Marx, relate the forms of modern universals to those of modern social relations. The second section provides a further elaboration of realist conceptions of form, with an examination of Bhaskar's distinction between dialectics and analytics, approaching it on this occasion from the

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 4.

perspective of how it deals with alterity by establishing illicit modes of identity. The category errors of what Bhaskar calls the 'analytic problematic' are then treated as a dimension of the universalist problematic.<sup>2</sup> Its principle feature is the illicit fixing of meanings at and between levels of generality, reinforcing anthroporealism. The 'analytic' character of modern social relations is then established by drawing these ideas together. This establishes analytic relations as structural aspects of the dialectical processes of universalisation.

## II. The Expanded Europtic Problematic

Under the heading of a thoroughly problematic universalism, in the introductory chapter, I sketched out an initial, brief, conception of Eurocentrism as a process involving the theoretical and practical illicit universalisation of European categories. That process was said to be dialectical, in the double sense that it was both motivated by and constituted by contradictions. At that point, the primary locations of contradictions were said to be (i) in theory, the location of anthropic universal categories of thought and (ii) in social relations, the site of really abstract universals. Bringing these ideas together gives the following account of Eurocentrism: the dialectical universalisation of theoretical and real Europtic abstractions under the sign of their universality.<sup>3</sup>

It is now possible to develop the account of this dialectic by relating the processes of Europtic universalisation to the expanded conception of 'problematic' encompassing

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<sup>2</sup> This discussion of the concept of a Europtic problematic takes up the earlier, more general account in previous chapters. That discussion established its theoretical expansion, moving it beyond its limited theoretical scope to encompass an ensemble of theory, practice and social relations. This chapter narrows its use, by focussing on the Europtic problematic.

<sup>3</sup> This last aspect is informed by Bhaskar's account of 'dialectical universalisation'. Despite the existence of some important problems associated with Bhaskar's use of this concept, it is essential for an adequate understanding of Eurocentrism. Bhaskar's use of the term is a global one, denoting the processes through which contradictions are absented as eudaimonia, the good life, is realised for the whole of humanity. The idea of a global process, however, is reserved here for the Europtic dialectics of universalisation, those in which the internal contradictions specific to this form of life are preserved as they are extended ever more deeply into the social and natural worlds. One of the implications of Bhaskar's use of dialectical universalism is that a contradiction-free mode of human existence, one he equates with the realisation of true social being, is an ever-present possibility. This ahistorical approach to historical possibility is discussed in an article by Alan Norrie and myself: Hostettler, Nick and Alan Norrie, 'Are Critical Realist Ethics Foundational', *Critical Realism: The Difference it Makes*, Justin Cruickshank (ed.), Routledge, London, 2003.

theory, practice, relations and process as a whole. In addition, the theory of the European problematic has to be sufficiently open to allow for its complexity and development in space and time. This means that it must encompass the combined and uneven multiplicity of the modes of European universalisation and their articulations with one another.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of problematic, as developed by Althusser, is an important aspect of the critique of political economy and civil society. The critical theory of Eurocentrism, for its part, takes that critique in a particular direction, motivated largely by the problem of the forms of illicit universalism. That is to say, by approaching the critiques of political economy and civil society as critiques of their universalism, in the way that Bhaskar's work was approached in the previous chapter, they can be understood as contributions to critical-theoretical anti-Eurocentrism. The concept of problematic, then, while not intended as such, can be readily appropriated to this end.

The disciplines, for whose theorisation the term problematic was originally intended, such as economics and politics, not to mention philosophy, have already been discussed as Eurocentric. Here they are treated as examples of Eurocentric praxiologies *par excellence*.<sup>5</sup> These traditions are essential to the developing institutional capacities for the transformative mediation of the world in terms of 'universal relations'. That is, they contribute to establishing, developing and universalising the really abstract relations of the Eurocentric social formation. Such forms of intellectual inquiry inform the activities through which the process of European universalisation are established and maintained: they are the dominant theoretical medium through which the modern world is shaped. Universalist praxiologies are the primary bearers of the Eurocentric visions of modernity and they mediate the imposition of European forms onto the world. They are a vital cognitive aspect of European transnationalisation. In light of all this, Althusser's work on the problematic can be treated as if it were dealing with Eurocentrism.

In its established use, problematic refers to the causes and effects of structured inquiries, and tends to refer to strictly theoretical or cognitive concerns. However, while its use

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<sup>4</sup> The overall effect of this is to push the concept of problematic in the direction of the concept of hegemony.

<sup>5</sup> See immediately below for a discussion of 'praxiology'.

draws attention to the institution of, say, the intellectual boundaries of a given discipline, the full extent of the structures to which a rounded account of intellectual limits needs to refer are broader than a narrowly hermeneutic use suggests. In his study of *Capital*, Althusser disclosed the way political economy established 'exchange value' as the dominant category around which its inquiries revolved. Political economy also instituted limitations on that inquiry, providing an effective way of protecting the category. This meant that 'exchange value' could be preserved in its particular form, a form whose hidden qualities were disclosed by Marx's critique. Political economy was revealed by Marx's critique as the problematic of an illicitly naturalised 'value'. From the vantage-point of a dialecticised critical realism, the category of 'value' is an anthropic universal, having been displaced from its proper, historically specific context and elevated onto the level of the transhistoric. This move illicitly universalises the socially specific category, such that 'value' appears to belong to the order of categories which are natural to the species. As a result, the range of questions and answers produced within the confines of political economy are delimited by the internal structure of the conception of its 'master category.'<sup>6</sup>

This account, as we have seen, provides only the first take on the concept of problematic: a theoretical discipline whose defining qualities are the internal absences embodied by its primary categorial register. The discipline is constituted as a problematic by virtue of its deep internal, structural, absences, and the categorial and conceptual effects it generates, effects which serve to protect the established master category. So, while the discipline is ostensibly an inquiry into the category, it actually functions to produce a series of defences for it, even defending the category against the practice of inquiry itself by blocking off the potential for critique.

We can see, then, how the first of Althusser's contributions to the concept of problematic draws on the ontological categories of depth and absence, and how it is concerned with them in as much as they constitute internal limitations to ways of thinking. The second contribution pushes the concept of a problematic in the direction of social relations and social practice, a direction already indicated by Marx. The category 'value' is not simply produced by specifically intellectual work. Rather, it

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<sup>6</sup> The phrase is Quentin Skinner's, commenting on politics as a discipline.

arises with the institution of 'economic' social relations. What is more, its form of appearance is not generated by theoretical means, but can be accounted for in terms of social practices. 'Value' appears in the form it does to those whom it mediates. It appears to those engaged in commodity exchange as a natural quality of those commodities. The categories of political economy, then, have to be understood as being grounded in and sustained by social activities and relations.

As discussed earlier, it is by drawing these two dimensions of the problematic together that it becomes possible to speak of a concrete problematic which encompasses theory, practice and social relations. In effect, Althusser read Marx's critique of political economy as the disclosure of the problematic in which the categorial form of the theoretical category of value is conjoined to the form of 'economic' social relations. Given what has already been said about political economy, it is clear that the concept of the problematic refers to the theory-practice ensemble of theoretical universals and universal social relations.

It remains now to take this expanded conception of problematic and to make it explicit how the processes of Eurocentric dialectical universalisation constitute such a problematic. It has already been seen, in the previous chapter, how Bhaskar's work on anthropism, monovalence and the absence of absence provide us with aspects of an account of the contradictions of Eurocentric and Euromorphic theory. This conception of anthropism provides a general theory of the internal theoretical structure of the universalist problematic. Now, two further contributions by Bhaskar can be drawn on to develop this conceptual expansion of 'problematic'. The first is the conception of 'praxiology', which has been developed by Alan Norrie in respect of the law and legal practice.<sup>7</sup> The second area is the translation of Bhaskar's conception of the anthropic irrealist form of theory into a conception of the forms of social relations.

Praxiology, in general, refers to the kinds of knowledge which inform social practices and institutions and the reproduction of social relations. It also implies a relation between knowledge and practice where the former is shaped and distorted by its subordination to the latter. In respect of Eurocentrism, the purpose of social theory is,

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<sup>7</sup> Alan Norrie, 'The Praxiology of Legal Judgement', in *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 544-558.

first and foremost, the reproduction and expansion of the 'universals' which are its dominant categories. The most developed example of a discipline as a praxiology is given in Marx's critique of political economy. Marx showed how the central categories of political economy were either mystifying or false.<sup>8</sup> The category of economic value appears as a universal when it is in fact the particular form taken by commodified wealth, or capital. All of the forms of value are forms of capital, and cannot be identified with wealth as such, because the form that wealth takes depends on the broader form of the society in question. Political economy is a praxiology because it is both functional to the expansion of a given social relation and because its theoretical form is 'irrealist'. That is, in order to fulfil its practical function it is internally constituted by determinate contradictions: its theoretical anthropism is *for* its social universalisation.

Also, due to this internal structure, praxiologies have a great deal of ideological flexibility. Their internal contradictions mean that they cannot provide any stable rational basis for any resolutions they advance for their own intellectual problems. Instead, solutions to problems are motivated and explained by external, namely practical matters related to the process in which they are embedded. The praxiologies of political economy, then, provide rationales and motivations to actors and they are the idiom in which practical measures are advanced.

The practical effects of praxiology, its consequences for shaping the world, bring us to the second use of Bhaskar's work in theorising Eurocentrism.<sup>9</sup> His conception of the anthropic contradictions of theory can be adapted to the concrete forms of the world structured by 'universals'. That is, the social formation dominated by real abstractions can also be understood in terms of anthropic contradictions. Not only are the dominant theoretical categories of modern praxiologies anthropic, the social relations they mediate also embody this form of contradiction. The European problematic encompasses a double set of anthropic contradictions: one in the realm of theory, the other in the sphere of social relations.

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<sup>8</sup> Norman Geras, 'Marx and the Critique of Political Economy', in *Ideology in Social Science: Readings in critical social theory*, Robin Blackburn (ed.), Fontana, 1972.

Once again, Marx's work provides the most valuable resources for developing this conception of modern universal social relations. For current purposes, I shall be drawing heavily on the account of *Capital* developed by Moishe Postone in *Time, Labor and Social Domination*.<sup>10</sup> In that work, Postone argues that Marx provides us with an account of capital in terms of impersonal domination, which he, Postone, describes as 'social domination'. Social domination is the form of alienation peculiar to modern societies. It does not imply any absence of personal domination, far from it. But it means that as a result of this mode of European universalisation the relations of domination between, say, dominant and subaltern, develop in ways which are increasingly subject to the operation of impersonal, social, imperatives.

Read as an account of European universalisation, this account of capital significantly enriches our understanding. Universalisation, firstly, is the expansion of originally European political and economic relations of social domination. It is a Eurocentric process of concrete universalisation, the production of a social 'totality' mediated by the homogeneous social relation of capital.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, the development of this totality entails increasingly intense social demands. Both give rise to political struggles over the concrete forms of universalisation. Such struggles can be concerned with the speed and scale of the process itself, i.e. enforcing and resisting the extension of the capital-relation into areas of social and natural life, and with the distribution the various demands generated by the process, e.g. distributing levels of exploitation between classes, groups, centres and peripheries, regions, etc. These efforts to advance and respond to concrete universalisation shape the political terrain to which the more substantive connotations of Eurocentrism can be applied. Struggles over colonialism, for instance, being only one of the most obvious examples.

Social domination is abstract in more than one sense. It is abstract in that it is not personalised but is rather a general, social, force, i.e. it makes itself felt through the

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<sup>9</sup> Bhaskar has a well developed sense of the possible contradictions of social relations. He does not, however, use 'anthropism' in the same practical sense as it is being used here.

<sup>10</sup> Postone, Moishe, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

efficacy of the nature of social relations themselves, through their related practices. It is also abstract in the sense that economic value, the primary form of social domination, is a real abstraction. Capital gives rise to a world of commodities, objects which appear to possess the property of exchange value. Value, indeed, appears as the universal property of human and natural products: all things appear as potential sources of profit. Marx, of course, discloses how things are not at all what they appear to be: this form of value is, in fact, neither a human universal, nor a property of things. Value appears as a universal as a function and/or effect of the social relations within which commodities are produced: it is a property of the social relations between commodity producers. Commodities only appear to have properties of their own because the properties of these particular social relations are displaced on to them. It is for this reason that value cannot be a universal property of human products. Rather, it is the displaced property of a specific social relation.

Crucially, this property of the social relation is an effect of its universalisation. It is the universalisation of commodity production which imposes an abstract identity on every concrete form of commodity producing labour; it is this socially produced universality that is displaced onto commodities and which appears as their intrinsic identity. It is therefore this form of universalisation which leads to the labour of all producers acquiring its dual character. On the one hand labour assumes a concrete form: a furniture porter moves sofas; a teacher teaches; a bricklayer lays bricks; an economist theorises, and so on. Each of these kinds of labour is intrinsically different from the others, so none can be put in the balance and weighed against another as they have nothing in common. In the absence of a common quality, a universal, there can be no common standard against which they can all be measured: they are incommensurable. This is so for any and every form of labour, regardless of which kind of society it belongs to. In a capitalist society, however, as well as being concrete, commodity producing labour becomes an instance of labour in the abstract, and as every instance of commodity producing labour is similarly abstract it is also identical to every other one. It is this abstract labour which appears as the value of commodities.

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<sup>11</sup> Postone argues that he follows Marx's use of 'totality'. The term is borrowed from idealist philosophy to refer to 'a general whole that is substantially homogeneous'. *Time, Labor and Social Domination* p. 72.

It is the mutual relation of commodity production which establishes the relation of identity between producers, as each kind of labour can be exchanged for every other kind. As they cannot be identical in their concrete forms, their identity has nothing at all to do with concrete differences. Rather, concrete individuality is stripped away in a relation of purely abstract, universal, identity. Commodity producing labours are all identical simply because they produce commodities in the form of goods or services, which then stand in as proxies for those forms of labour. It is as proxies for the labour which produced them that commodities are, in their turn, treated as identical, i.e. can be exchanged for one another. Now that all forms of labour are identical they can, after all, be measured by a common standard, and the standard measure of this abstract form of labour is time. Qualitatively identical, labour varies only according to how long it takes to produce something.

This abstract form of labour is not a property of forms of concrete labour in isolation from one another, but only arises with the ongoing reproduction and expansion of relations of identity between concrete forms. This relation is mediated by commodity production and exchange, which means that commodities are also its 'bearers' or 'supports.' The universal identity of labour is therefore embodied in all its proxies, i.e. in all forms of value, and in every aspect of capital. This means that social, impersonal, domination by capital is nothing other than domination by forms of value, or as we can now say, domination by abstract labour. Social domination comes about as this abstract character of labour develops a life of its own, as it were, through the imposition of impersonal imperatives. Not only is abstract labour instantiated in all its concrete forms, it is also split off from and comes to dominate them. Social domination is the generalised domination of the concrete by a generalised abstract social relation.

The duality of abstract and concrete is a primary effect of Europic universalisation, and is continually reproduced by the social activities of its bearers. As such it is an intrinsic aspect of Europic universalisation and the Europic problematic. The universalisation of capital is one mode of Europic universalisation: it is a mode of transitivity and engenders a form of life which is mediated, constituted and dominated by real abstraction. This can be understood, firstly, in terms of its analytic moments of identity. These can then be understood as being overarched by the, second, dialectical moment in which the absences and contradictions of analytics are universalised.

### III. The Analytics and Dialectics of Eurocentrism

Analytics is frequently contrasted with dialectics. Whereas the former is ostensibly concerned with the preservation of meanings attached to terms and with logical relations between them, dialectics deal with non-logical relations, change and contradiction. However, the problems associated with analytics do not arise so much from its narrowly epistemic character as from the displacement of what is properly only a moment in the process of knowing things onto those things themselves. Analytics becomes a problem when it overreaches itself, especially so when this highly circumscribed epistemic moment stands in for epistemology as a whole, and where the epistemology stands in for ontology.

Analytical principles, in and of themselves, need not imply any particular metaphysical commitments.<sup>12</sup> However, it is easier said than done to maintain the strictly abstract character of principles, not least because principles only acquire their full meaning through their application. Once an 'abstract' principle is understood in relation to some part of the world, i.e. once it is applied to statements about the world, it becomes a moment of theoretical practice and is necessarily implicated in any philosophical questions such statements raise. While abstractions themselves might be neutral, they cannot be deployed neutrally.<sup>13</sup> All of which, of course, demands the need for clarity about the metaphysical context in which they are used.

Bhaskar situates analytics by arguing that that all forms of reasoning must have their analytic moments, in which given meanings are preserved, but that all such moments have to be situated within an overarching dialectic of cognitive change. Reasoning is irreducible to the exercise of analytical logic, being 'a dialectic of its analytical and dialectical moments':

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<sup>12</sup> Collier, 'Dialectic in Marxism and critical realism', in *Marxism and Critical Realism*, Brown et al (eds.), Routledge, London, 2001.

Dialectic can only achieve its full purchase in relation to its analytical antipode. [...] From this standpoint [of dialectics], analytics expresses the ontology of stasis, and an implicit ideology of repression: that is to say, it assumes the shape of an unselfconscious legitimator normalizing past (and local) changes and unfreedoms, and denegating present and future (and general) ones.<sup>14</sup>

Failing to recognise the overarching dialectic, and extending analytical principles beyond their legitimate scope generates what Bhaskar calls the analytic problematic, whose consequences are manifest in a range of illicit statements of identities. The three principal forms this takes are type-type identity, token-token identity, type-token identity.<sup>15</sup>

A type is a general term, while a token is an instantiation of a type, a particular. For instance, the term Monarch is a type term, while a particular monarch, e.g. Elizabeth II, is a token. Type-type identity occurs when the use of a general term, such as monarchy, preserves its meaning. Individual instances of monarchy are treated as identical, with the implication of semantic consistency between uses of terms being some kind of ontic identity. The main effect of preserving a general definition of identity is to obscure the realities of difference. Token-token identities have the effect of obscuring real change. For instance, to identify the monarchy of Elizabeth II today with the monarchy of Elizabeth II fifty years ago is to negate any of the real changes that have occurred during that time: she both is and is not the same. Finally, the type-token identification of monarchy with Elizabeth II elevates the token to the very definition of the type. This presupposes that the generality has only one real mode of concrete existence, i.e. the one actualised by this monarch.

Take the terms 'culture', as a type, and 'European', as a token. The first type-type identification arises with the fixing of meaning for different uses of general terms, attributing essential meaning to the term and implying common and necessary qualities. This establishes a given meaning of culture as universal. Establishing a token-token identity, by speaking of European culture in the present and at some moment in the past or future as the same thing, does away with any possibility of real change. So doing confirms European culture as possessing a given essence. Type-token identification

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<sup>13</sup> For a detailed discussion of how this relates to the debates on universalism and relativism see chapter five.

<sup>14</sup> *Plato Etc.*, p. 135.

elevates a given instance of European culture to the real definition of culture in general, establishing Europe as the very essence of what culture means.<sup>16</sup>

One further example can be usefully given here. Modern economic theory, as noted above, has identified wealth in terms of exchange value. However, exchange value, as Marx observes, is only one possible cultural manifestation of wealth. Yet the tradition of economics has systematically conflated the particular form of exchange value with the general category of wealth, making it possible to speak of all wealth as forms of exchange value.<sup>17</sup> The illicit universalism of economics is sustained by all three modes of illicit identity: type-type identifications disregard the different cultural forms that wealth has taken historically; token-token identifications disregard changes to the forms assumed by capital; and of course it is the type-token identification that elevated capital to the transhistorically real form of wealth in the first place.

The analytics of the Europic problematic, then, can draw in a wide range of categories, dealing with the form of society as a whole or with the form of one of its constituent relations. The systematic utilisation of these modes of identification generates a mode of thought with multiple moments of monovalence, i.e. it imposes stasis at the level of particulars, between the general and the particular and at the level of the general.

Given that it has to cope with these internal contradictions, and to develop a series of defences against the possibility of critiques, the analytic problematic is what Bhaskar calls a TINA compromise formation.<sup>18</sup> As discussed below, both ideologies and praxiologies are TINA compromise formations. Where they take a European subject,

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<sup>15</sup> *Dialectic*, p. 191; *Plato Etc.*, p. 138.

<sup>16</sup> The strategy can be taken further, as the following quotation from Victor Hugo in anticipation of the Prussian siege of Paris shows. Paris = Europe = Civilisation.

“It is in Paris that the beating of Europe’s heart is felt. Paris is the city of cities. Paris is the city of men. There has been an Athens, there has been a Rome, and there is a Paris.... Is the nineteenth century to witness this frightful phenomenon? A nation fallen from polity to barbarism, abolishing the city of nations; German extinguishing Paris.... Can you give this spectacle to the world? Can you, Germans, become Vandals again; personify barbarism decapitating civilisation?... Paris, pushed to extremities; Paris supported by all France aroused, can conquer and will conquer; and you will have tried in vain this course of action which already revolts the world.”

*The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune 1870-71* by Alistair Horne, MacMillan, 1965, p. 73.

<sup>17</sup> See the next chapter for a thorough examination of the Europic character of value.

<sup>18</sup> TINA: There Is No Alternative.

and conform to the general structures of the analytic problematic, their anthroporealism acquires a specific and distinctive character: such analytics, and their related dynamics, become those of the European problematic and of Imaginary Dialectical Universalisation, and they can be accounted for in terms of theoretical projections of visions of Europe onto the different moments of the problematic. The necessary response to the problems of the analytic problematic is dialectics, ontologically, epistemically and socio-historically.

Within ontology, the dialectical alternative is to establish the opposite principle, that of non-identity, between these various moments, allowing for both real differences and real change. It also has consequences for how type terms, such as the transhistorical generalities of philosophical anthropology are understood. They should be understood to be dealing with formal possibilities, in the way that the theory of irrealist category errors does. This gives them the flexibility and openness to encompass known differences and changes in concrete realities, and also to be able to adapt to future ones.

This can be illustrated, for instance, with reference to the nature of epistemic change. The attempt to reduce knowledge to analytic statements falsely abstracts from the social conditions under which statements of any kind are produced, reproduced, and transformed.<sup>19</sup>

From the most elementary to the most recondite, analytical reasoning is entirely dependent upon the process of transformative negation necessary to ascertain, in an open-ended hermeneutic, 'what x means' or when two instances of A are to count as the same. Such hermeneutics is a constant.<sup>20</sup>

The transformative negation referred to here is the making of necessary changes to things to establish the existence of the non-identities, i.e. the real difference, needed to contrast with the relevant identity. Also, given the internality of absence to knowledge discussed earlier, epistemic processes involve real cognitive changes, often produced through dialectical processes in which existing contradictions are removed. These dialectical processes overarch analytic moments in the sense that meanings are preserved for as long as necessary, but once a new meaning is established the old ones

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<sup>19</sup> See the discussion in chapter five on relativism.

<sup>20</sup> *Dialectic*, p. 190.

are discarded. Analytic moments of this kind are akin to the rungs of a ladder which are dropped away once they have been used.

Of course, the theoretical problematic of a political or social science discipline does not conform to the good dialectics of cognitive progress. Rather, it conforms to the bad dialectics of the analytical problematic as it preserves its master category. This was clearly seen in the discussion of Imaginary Dialectical Universalisation. What is most interesting though, is that the theory of the theoretical dimension of the problematic can be translated into an account of its practical and relational moment.

The capital relation comes into being as a peculiar social form, whose peculiarity rests on the fact that an abstract category has become a social reality. The institution, i.e. production and reproduction, of a really abstract relation is the institution of a set of analytic identities. Under any other conditions such identifications would not exist. Ordinarily, to speak of labour in the abstract would be to speak theoretically at one of two levels of generality: the general cultural one at which the social activities are related to the production and reproduction of wealth; the culturally specific forms of activity this might take.

In either case, the abstraction is strictly theoretical, not real. Also, the category of social labour would be a complex one, involving a host of relations to other categories of social being. There would be no 'labour in itself', only labour as an aspect of the rich sensual quality of concrete social activity. To speak of labour under these conditions would not involve reification. However, this is not the case with the capital relation. Here, an abstract category of labour has become a social relation. The complexity of other forms of labour, deeply embedded in concrete forms, is left behind and this abstract category is instituted in all its simplicity as labour as such.

Now, being a simple category it is both the general form of labour as well as its individual instances: there is no longer any distinction to be made between these levels of generality. It is, therefore, the abstract and simple character of this relation that accounts for the analytic moments of capital: those in which commodity producing labour establishes social relations in the form of identity-relations. Crucially, these identity-relations are not semantic. Rather, they are the (socially and historically) real

identities between instances and forms.<sup>21</sup> It was seen above how the analytic problematic involved the collapses of three kinds of distinction, i.e. those between token and token, token and type, type and type. Here, however, to avoid any confusion with the semantic references of 'token' and 'type' the point can be made clearer by speaking of 'instances' rather than 'tokens' and of the 'form' rather than the 'type'. In this case the generality is commodity producing labour, while its instances are each of individual occurrences. This makes it possible to speak of the following moments of identity:

1. Instance-instance (token-token) identity.

At the level of relations between instances, each instance of abstract labour is identical to every other one, as the capital relation confers this identity on all concrete forms of labour. It should be noted, however, that the duality of commodity producing labour as both abstract and concrete means that there is also instance-instance non-identity as, concretely, each instance of labour is differentiated from every other. The duality of commodity producing labour is therefore a duality of instance-instance identity and non-identity, or alterity.

2. Instance-form (token-type) identity.

As far as the relations between individual instances and general form are concerned the usual distinction is collapsed. The simple abstract category is both form and instance. The social form, commodity producing labour, has only one kind of instantiation. Still, the duality of labour means that here too there is also a duality of instance-form identity and non-identity. Concretely, the ensemble of commodity producing labour can take on many and varied configurations.

3. Form-form identity.

Finally, as the social form is a simple, rather than complex category, it lacks the internal space, as it were, required for internal differentiation or real change. Its categorial simplicity means that its form is strictly singular and that its nature is essentially static and fixed over time and space. Once again, though, the duality of identity and non-identity is preserved. While commodity producing labour retains its abstract form over time, its concrete configurations, the global ensemble of concrete labour within the

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<sup>21</sup> Being 'identical to' means having a common identity, while being 'identical with' means being the same thing as another thing.

social formation, has a complex and differential temporality. The abstract relational qualities are, as it were, ahistorical within the epoch they define. They constitute a fixed dimension around which the concrete is continually reconfigured.

On all three counts, then, the socio-historical relation is 'analytic.' It is this simple, abstract and analytic relation that makes it possible to speak of the social mediation by capital in terms of the irrealist category of 'totality'.

The analogy between the characteristics of the narrowly conceived theoretical aspect of the analytic problematic and the qualities of its relational dimension can be developed further still. In parallel with its significance for semantics, the analytic characteristics of social relations similarly imply a series of real categorial collapses and closures. That is to say, the social processes which establish these analytic relations also entail the production of real absences and contradictions characteristic of the dialectical processes of discursive development. For instance, where the analytic problematic establishes illicit universals, foreclosing on absence, depth and real change, the relations of capital are tendentially universalising and are oriented towards shutting down historical alternatives. The ultimate 'goal' or 'telos' of universal capital, for instance, is a world in which alternative forms of wealth are eliminated. The 'project' of capital is to reproduce the erroneous categorial forms of political economy, but as socio-historical realities.

There is also a connection to be made between this ahistorical, illicitly universalist, conception of wealth and the universalising expansion of capital. The conceptual conflation of transhistorical with historically specific categories appears as a prefiguration of the realisation of the historical project which is practically oriented towards achieving the actual eradication of that distinction. The conceptual subsumption of the analytic problematic is directly analogous to the real subsumption of social wealth by the commodity form.

The internal relations between these analogous forms can also be developed. Social domination, the institution of a totality of real abstractions and impersonal imperatives, is a consequence of mediating society and nature by the abstract human category of labour. This transfiguration of a category of human activity into a social relation projects the natural human quality into the domain of social history. Conversely, it then

seeks to establish this as a natural feature of social existence. This is an anthropomorphisation of cultural life. The scientific, technical and commercial penetration of nature insinuates human causes into nature, while the mediation of social relations by things desocialises the inner causes of social life. This is a form of anthropocentrism of social existence. Against this, the normal, desirable, state of affairs is for people to make things because they are useful to them, because they contribute to and enhance life. However, capitalism alienates individuals, subjecting them to the demands of their own creations. Socially dominated individuals are not only subordinated to the things they make, they are also subject to them as bearers of abstractions. They create a world constituted by an inverse hierarchy, with abstractions at the top, things in the middle and people at the bottom. Social domination, then, embodies the anthropic forms of illicit identification and constitutes a set of internal contradictions of social existence.

Historically, the universalisation of capital is of course a highly complex process, or set of processes. While the institution of analytic identities is one of its defining features, it also involves the relations between the various moments of analytic identity and non-identity: the problematic of capital involves more than simply establishing its analytic universal. The latter requires, as a condition of its own possibility, the establishment and maintenance of the dominance of analytic identity over non-identity. From the perspective of capital, that is, the non-identity relations between concrete things, and between persons, should be functionally reduced to the requirements of identity relations. Capital engenders pressures to render the concrete forms and configurations of production, exchange, distribution and consumption entirely consistent with the further expansion of capital. However, this is the source of further contradictions within the problematic of value and generates its needs to develop defensive mechanisms and strategies. Broadly speaking, the development of these mechanisms and strategies and their exercise, along with resistance to them, fall under the category of hegemonic struggles. Hegemony is the terrain on which projects of universalisation are pursued and contested, on which struggles over the nature and fact of universalisation are fought out, again very broadly, on three fronts: the subsumption of pre-/non-capitalist forms of production; the re-configuration of capitalist production; the curtailment of post-capitalist forms. It is also, as discussed in previous chapters, the terrain of struggles over the institution of visions of the ethical economy.



#### IV. The Europic Problematic

The concept of the Europic problematic, as it emerges in these pages, develops through a critical realist critique of modern universals. This chapter has shown how the categorial structures of irrealist discourse, notably those of anthropism, the analytic problematic and dialectic all have their analogies in the forms of modern social relations and processes. This has been demonstrated by taking the idea of the analytic problematic, as developed by Bhaskar, and the broader idea of the problematic as intimated by Althusser, and drawing them together with a conception of the dialectical universalisation of capital.

This, conception of the Europic problematic situates its more narrowly conceived theoretical dimension within a wider account of a practical problem-solution set. On this account it becomes an ensemble of (i) praxiologically mediated practices which are oriented to the (ii) reproduction and expansion of abstract universal social relations necessitating (iii) hegemonic struggles over projects of universalisation which (iv) unevenly combine a multiplicity of related dialectical processes.

The connections between the theoretical discourse of Europic universalism and social formation are two-fold. On the one hand we have the praxiological mediation of social practice. Universalist discourses are oriented towards the objective transfiguration of their master categories by instituting them as abstract social relations. This connection between social theory and social formation is exemplified by the development of the capital relation. That is, the praxiology of political economy, organised around the category of exchange value, propels the formation of a social totality mediated by the social relation of abstract labour. On the other hand, the objectivation of these abstract relations reinforces their significance for traditional social theory as they appear to it as its categorial givens. The 'unproblematic' nature of these presuppositions and preconditions, the absence of any sustained concern with their contradictory form, is a defining feature of traditional, Europic, theory.

These considerations, though, are but a contribution. A further step in the expansion of this concept of the Europic problematic would bring have to take the above comments on hegemony and set about a detailed conceptual integration. Carrying this through

would entail a final broadening out of the dialectics of universalisation to encompass other modern European universals, as the concept of hegemony marks a decisive shift away from any kind of economic reductionism and takes us onto the wider terrain encompassing the state and civil society, law and culture. That is to say, the concept of hegemony draws together the different modes of modern universalisation, recognising them as so many aspects of modern social formation, and seeing them as both the condition and object of collective identity formation and political struggle. Hegemony is the terrain formed by combined and uneven dialectical universalisations and the struggles over them.

A fuller account of European universalisation, then, would involve an account of the many modes of universalisation; their differential sequential development in different times and in different places; their articulations, contradictions and overdeterminations. So, while capital is a fairly obvious candidate for the kind of treatment given here, there are a number of other candidates which are a little less obvious because they have not been subject to the same kind theoretical dialectisation to which Marx subjected capital, or else such treatment is less well known. First amongst these are the categories of reason and law. Reason, in the form of the illicit universalism of the modern tradition, exemplified by positivism, has of been addressed in some detail already. While there is not the space to deal with this here, it can be argued that law needs to be understood both in terms of praxiology and as one of the fundamental social relations constituting modern social formations, and one which also bears striking analogies to the categorial forms of capital.<sup>22</sup>

More surprisingly, perhaps, is that such self evident and seemingly unproblematic everyday categories as 'time' and 'space' can be understood in these terms. Time, for instance, as measured by clocks, appears to us as an independent reality. There appears to be little doubt that it is a given feature of the world. If any of our categories is a truly ahistorical universal, then it is most probably 'time'. Yet, the modern category of time does have a history, dating back only to thirteenth century Europe. What is more, on closer inspection, it too is a generalised abstraction. 'Time', it turns out, is only the

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<sup>22</sup> Pashukanis, E., *Law and Marxism: A General Theory*, Pluto Press, London, 1989:  
Alan Norrie, 'Pashukanis and the Commodity Form Theory – A Reply to Warrington', *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 10 (4), 1982.

generalised abstract identity of all individual concrete durations.<sup>23</sup> All these concrete durations are rendered identical thanks to the invention of clocks and to the way they have become a general mediation of social relations. The claims made for the universality of abstract and homogeneous time cannot, after all, stand: it is yet one more abstraction, grounded in social relations, illicitly posing as a universal. What is more, the processual universalisation of time has much in common with that of value, and while it cannot be explained wholly in terms of the spread of value, the development of time is intimately connected to it. It does seem that the social institution of this form of time prepares the way for that of value, while the institution of value propels that of time. Abstract time, after all, is the real measure of abstract labour.

These considerations, while they cannot be pursued in depth here, reinforce the initial intuition that any theory of Eurocentrism must have the theoretical object of the form of life as a whole as its concern, and that the form of modern universals is what defines the modern, European, social formation. This is due to the fact that each modern universal institutes a distinct social totality, unifying disparate aspects of the social formation on the basis of a particular, universal, category. A more precise account of the nature of such relations is the subject of the next, and final, chapter.

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<sup>23</sup> The remarks follow Postone's account of categories of time. Also see the next chapter.

## Chapter 8 - *Capital* and Europic Dialectical Universalisation

### I: Immanentism in theoretical Eurocentrism

This final substantive chapter secures an adequate distinction between two kinds of abstract universal. It clearly marks the separation between the categories of philosophy, on the one side, and those of historical social relations, on the other. One of the principal errors of theoretical Eurocentrism is its identification of the social relations of modernity with the transhistorical categories of its philosophical anthropology: modernisation is identified as the historical process through which philosophical categories are realised as social ones. The kind of universalism to which this gives rise is a form of immanentism. One version of an immanentist argument was encountered at the end of Chapter 4 in the comments on Charles Taylor. At the same time, some comments of Marx's were also cited, comments which appeared to affirm a similar commitment. Against this, it also suggested that immanentism is effectively rejected in *Capital*: developing his theory of value as a social relation, advanced in terms of abstract labour, Marx decisively rejects the conflation of the philosophical with the socio-historical and, in so doing, inaugurates a novel social ontology.

The problem of immanentism is in fact a familiar one within debates on *Capital*, though not necessarily always understood as such. It is posed, for instance, in what has become known as Rubin's dilemma: Marx uses what appears to be a transhistorical category, abstract labour, as the basis of an avowedly historically specific social relation. However, this dilemma only appears as a consequence of interpretative presuppositions which obscure those actually informing Marx's writing. This chapter explores those presuppositions and offers an account of *Capital* as having successfully provided a theory of the specific form of the universality of modern social relations. The distinctiveness of this theory of universals draws on the social ontology of *Capital*, a social ontology which, once properly understood, makes an invaluable contribution to theoretical anti-Eurocentrism.

II. The 'religious' or irreal nature of capital.

It was acknowledged in earlier chapters that there is some ambiguity in Marx's work in respect of Eurocentrism. His work does express a sense of the cultural superiority of capitalism over pre-capitalist forms, even replicating some of the common sense of the times in his depictions of the non-European. However, Marx's language does not express the superiority of capital in the common parlance of the times. There is nothing essentially European about either the bourgeoisie or commodity production more generally. Nor, despite the fact that modern forms possess unrivalled and still developing, capacities for mediating and transforming society and nature, can their immediate consequences be greeted with anything other than the most profound moral ambivalence. Even his most apparently Eurocentric works are filled with a sense of the inevitably horrific side of Europtic universalisation and with compassion at the miseries it inflicts, as a matter of course, on its victims. Capital appears as a civilising process only in a very peculiar sense: it entails an extraordinary expansion of human powers, but at the same time those powers bring about terrible distortions of cultural existence. This duality, the intimately entwined heightening of capacities with the deformation of those so endowed, and subject to them, is essential to capital. The civilising potential of capital can only be realised once those powers are subsumed within a post-capitalist form of life. If Marx's evaluation of the modern in these terms can still be called Eurocentrism then, at the very least, it is a Eurocentrism of the most unusual kind.

Running against any Eurocentric tendencies are powerful counter currents. Indeed, Postone argues, it is possible to read Marx's *Capital* as a generalisable critique of modernity.

[The] opposition between the abstract universality of the Enlightenment and particularistic specificity should not be understood in a decontextualised fashion: it is an historically constituted opposition, rooted in the determinate social forms of capitalism. [...]

The form of domination related to the abstract form of the universal is not merely a class relation concealed by a universalistic facade. Rather the domination Marx analyzes is that of a specific, historically constituted form of universalism itself, which he tries to grasp with his categories of value and capital.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996. p. 163.

Reading *Capital*, then, should be oriented towards drawing out its critique of both theoretical and relational universalism. This, in turn, makes it possible to draw on *Capital* to reinforce the critique of Eurocentrism by giving an account of the structural contradictions of capital in terms of the dialectical critical realist conception of anthropism.

One justification for reading Marx's account of social contradictions through the prism of philosophical irrealism is a consistent position Marx took throughout his life with respect to the relation between the structures of forms of thought and social relations. From 'On the Jewish Question' to *Capital*, Marx insisted that the religious character of forms of thought, including avowedly secular thought, had to be understood in relation to the religious or philosophical form of the social order to which that thought belongs: the specific forms of contradictions found in forms of thought could be analogous to those belonging to social relations.<sup>2</sup>

The later Marx's account of abstract labour, indeed, should be read as the culmination of the younger Marx's attempt to speak about the modern, 'secular' world as having an essentially 'religious', 'philosophical' or 'metaphysical' character. These are all pejorative terms for Marx, indicating problematic and absurd forms of both philosophical speculation and social reality. The importance of this is recognised by Chris Arthur, who writes:

The most important single influence on [my work] is Marx's insight into the 'metaphysical' character of capitalist commodity production. Throughout the first chapter of *Capital* there are references to 'ghostly objectivity'; 'sensuous supersensuousness'; 'mysteriousness'; 'turns into its opposite'; 'stands on its head'; metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties'; 'fantastic'; 'absurd'; and so on. This language I take to be much more than rhetoric. Many have complained that Marx's concept of value is metaphysical. They have not seen that Marx himself said this, but saw it as a feature of reality. Such a 'metaphysical theory of value' is what I aim to vindicate. Capitalism is marked by the subjection of the material process of production and circulation to the ghostly objectivity of value.<sup>3</sup>

Marx's earlier writings on the state propound a similarly metaphysical theory of the political. For instance, the 1843 'On the Jewish Question' repeatedly refers to the

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<sup>2</sup> There are strong affinities between this way of understanding the social and Peter Winch's claim that social relations are more like language than they are like anything else.

religious or philosophical character of the bourgeois forms of social relations. He writes: "When the political state has achieved its true completion, man leads a double life, a heavenly one and an earthly one, not only in thought and consciousness, but in reality, in life."<sup>4</sup> Also: "Of course the bourgeois, like the Jew, only remains in the life of the state sophistically speaking, just as the citizen only sophistically remains a Jew or bourgeois; but this sophism is not a personal matter. It is a sophism of the political state itself."<sup>5</sup> Again: "The fantasy, dream and postulate of Christianity, the sovereignty of man, but of man as an alien being separate from actual man, is present in democracy as a tangible reality and is its secular motto."<sup>6</sup>

The forms of metaphysical thought, having been exposed for what they are, possess theoretical value because those same forms may be applicable to real world structures. He affirms, in practice at least, an 'objective idealism', the conviction that the social relations of bourgeois, rational, secularism really embody the same forms of contradiction as does its metaphysics.

Such forms of thought, indeed, so 'reflect' those of the world from which they arise, that they provide an essential resource for understanding it.<sup>7</sup> Marx consistently sustained the idea of a strong, internal, link between the character of contemporary religion and the analogously 'religious' structures of bourgeois life. In "Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction", one of his famous epigrams on religion declares that:

This state, this society, produces religion's inverted attitude to the world, because they are an inverted world themselves. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its universal basis for consolation and justification. It is the imaginary realization of the human essence, because the human essence possesses no true reality. Thus, the struggle against religion is indirectly the struggle against the world whose spiritual aroma is religion.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Chris Arthur, 'The Spectral ontology of value', in *Critical Realism and Marxism*, p. 216.

<sup>4</sup> Marx, 'On the Jewish Question' in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, David McLellan (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977. p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> See the discussion of Andrew Brown's work, below, for an examination of the term 'reflection' in relation to Marx's mature works.

<sup>8</sup> Marx, 'Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, David McLellan (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977. p. 63-4.

While the later works were no longer concerned with religion in its more obvious forms, the earlier critique of idealism was fleshed out in terms of the deep structures of capital. As a persistent critic of the limitations of bourgeois quasi-secularised self-understanding, Marx struggled for a realist account of how these limitations were firmly grounded in bourgeois existence:

In the capital-relation what is characteristic is the mystification, the upside-down world, the inversion of the subjective and the objective. ... Corresponding to the inverted relation, there necessarily arises, *already in the actual production process itself*, an inverted conception.<sup>9</sup>

The contradictions previously ascribed to explicitly religious thought are here transferred to its secular rivals, which remain, as a result, 'religious' through and through. This translation, however, does not leave things quite as they were. As Marx's ideas develop so does the form they take. The theoretical form in which the dual character of commodity producing labour is presented requires a novel categorial structure, one much more adequate to the task of expressing the constitutive, metaphysical, contradictions of modern reality.

### III. Labour, value and philosophy

There are two sets of problems associated with abstract labour. The first relates to the historical status of the category as Marx uses it, the second to the question of commodities being the 'embodiment' of this category. In respect of value, Marx appears to create difficulties by affirming its historical character, only to specify it in terms of the apparently transhistorical category of 'abstract labour'. In relation to embodiment, Marx unequivocally declares the identity between abstract labour and its products to be an absurdity, yet repeatedly deploys that very absurdity to elucidate the nature of value.

Patrick Murray and Geert Reuten have debated rival accounts of these questions.<sup>10</sup> Despite their many differences, though, their debate begins from a common starting

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<sup>9</sup> Economic Ms. of 1861-63, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Marx-Engels Collected Works (MECW)*, Vols 30-34, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1988-1994. Vol. 33, p.72.

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Murray 'Marx's 'Truly Social' Labour Theory of Value: Part I, Abstract Labour in Marxian Value Theory, in *Historical Materialism*, No. 6 Summer 2000, pp 27-66; 'Marx's 'Truly Social' Labour Theory of Value Part II: How is

point. They agree that the interpretation of 'abstract labour' as a reference to the common, i.e. transhistorical, physiological character of all forms of labour gives rise to 'Rubin's dilemma'.<sup>11</sup>

One of two things is possible: if abstract labour is an expenditure of human energy in physiological form, then value also has a reified-material character. Or value is a social phenomenon connected with a determined social form of production. It is not possible to reconcile a physiological concept of abstract labour with the historical character of the value it creates.<sup>12</sup>

For Murray, there can be no simple deduction from the validity of the distinction to the conclusion that Marx either held or confused the two kinds of theory. He argues, instead, that when Marx declares all commodity producing labour to have the qualitative identity of 'abstract labour' he actually means that it is all 'practically abstract labour'. This should not be understood 'physiologically' but as the real social efficacy of what I call an 'indifference principle': from a proletarian perspective, the intrinsic worth of concrete forms of labour, arising from what it produces, is extinguished; the mediation of production and consumption by money, and the mediation of producer and production by the wage relation, reduces work to no more than a means to an externally related end. Reuten, for his part, agrees that evidence of such an indifference principle is indeed to be found in Marx's work, but argues that not all of every use of 'abstract labour' can be interpreted in this way. So while Murray argues that Rubin is right about the antinomy but that it is not to be found in Marx's mature theory, Reuten holds both that the antinomy is correct and that Marx reproduces it.

When it comes to the language of 'embodiment', by which abstract labour is identified with value, our two writers are in greater accord. Marx writes: "If I state that coats or boots stand in a relation to linen, because the latter is the universal incarnation of abstract human labour, the absurdity of the statement is self-evident."<sup>13</sup> It is plainly absurd that commodities, or money for that matter, are identified with the social character of the labour which produced them. Given this 'self-evident' absurdity,

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Labour that is under the sway of Capital *actually* Abstract? in *Historical Materialism*, No. 7, Winter 2000, pp. 99-136. Geert Reuten, 'The Interconnection of Systematic Dialectics and Historical Materialism, in *Historical Materialism*, No. 7, Winter 2000, pp. 137-166.

<sup>11</sup> Isaak I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1973.

<sup>12</sup> Rubin, p. 131.

Murray suggests that we can make sense of Marx's references to such identification only if we treat them as 'metaphorical', as rhetorical gestures pointing out the absurdity. This, though, is too much for Reuten. There is insufficient warrant for us not to take Marx at his word. The problem is that Marx means what he says, and that he must stand condemned for it.

Neither of these sets of questions can be resolved as it stands, for both kinds of problem arise from the failure to recognise that the structures of identification constitutive of capital are really *analogous* to the metaphors found in religion. Where religion gives rise to imaginary symbolic relations, however, Marx discloses the objective symbolic structures of capital. Once this symbolic dimension of social relations and social practice is established as a fundamental aspect of Marx's social ontology it becomes clear that Rubin's dilemma is premised on a misapprehension. From the perspective of objective symbolic relations it is quite right to say that there are contradictions in Marx's writing on labour and value. However, contrary to both Murray and Reuten, it makes complete sense to recognise those contradictions as belonging to the world, and that Marx expresses them quite coherently. Murray is right to insist that Rubin's dilemma does not apply to Marx, but he is right for the wrong reasons. Reuten is right to argue that Marx is not using language metaphorically, but fails to recognise his use of analogy. On the other hand, Murray fails to see that Marx uses the language of 'abstract labour' in a third sense, and one for which we have more than adequate warrant to attribute to Marx: the abstract quality of commodity producing labour simply denotes that a relation of formal identity is established, through commodity exchange, between all its forms. Finally, both Murray and Reuten are wrong about embodiment, for it is quite reasonable to speak of this social quality as being symbolised by, i.e. 'embodied' in, the commodities which constitute and mediate this relation of formal equality.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 169.

<sup>14</sup> The previous chapter made this argument. Also, see Moishe Postone for a similar reading. *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, pp. 144-8. Postone, speaking of Lucio Colletti's argument as to the centrality of the category of abstract labour suggests that 'Colletti's argument parallels some aspects of that developed in this work. Like Georg Lukács, Isaak Rubin, Bertell Ollman, and Derek Sayer, he considers value and abstract labor (sic) to be historically specific categories and regards Marx's analysis as concerned with the forms of social relations and of domination that characterize (sic) capitalism.'" p. 147.

The question that needs to be asked of Marx, then, is not Rubin's. The proper question is whether or not he succeeds in specifying 'abstract labour' (i) as a non-discursive feature of reality, as against a 'mental generalisation' and (ii) as the quality of a specific form of social identity, rather than a transhistorical characteristic, and (iii) whether this identity is symbolically mediated. Answering this requires a reinvestigation of how Marx uses the term in accounts of commodity-producing labour which, in turn, demands that we are able to reconstruct the theoretical contexts in which it used.

Bertell Ollman provides an account of how such contexts can be reconstructed. He shows how Marx's intellectual reconstruction of capital requires a continuous, self-conscious, use of perspectival switches.<sup>15</sup> Marx shifts perspective by moving along and between three axes: level of generality; extension; vantage point.<sup>16</sup> The first of these, the level of generality, has been a theme running throughout the discussion up to this point and needs no more attention here. As far as extension is concerned, abstractions are limited to the degree that spatial and temporal boundaries are put on the abstracted parts of the concrete. Lastly, changes in vantage point can be understood subjectively, i.e. roles and positions in relationships can be adopted as perspectives on the world, but these are by no means the most significant kind of perspectival vantage point in *Capital*. Ollman writes that "... abstraction establishes ... a vantage point or place within the relationship from which to view, think about, and piece together the other components in the relationship".<sup>17</sup> That is, in writing about a social relation, Marx identifies various points from which to investigate the internal relations between a circumscribed set of determinations and relations.

Marx's writing carefully delineates the theoretical context within which categories are used, and through which meaning is imparted to them. Interpretations of meaning must remain alive to continually shifting perspectives as it alters the parameters of theoretical context. Ollman draws this out in his discussion of Pareto's jibe that Marx's use of language was characterised by inconsistency: one moment things appear like bats, the next like mice.<sup>18</sup> Pareto's commitment to analytics meant that a consistent identification

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<sup>15</sup> Bertell Ollman, *Dialectical Investigations*, Routledge, London, 1993.

<sup>16</sup> Bertell Ollman, *Dialectical Investigations*, pp. 39-77.

<sup>17</sup> Ollman, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> Ollman, *Alienation*, Routledge, London, 1993. Sometimes it looks like a bat, at other times like a mouse.

of terms with given meanings was essential, so Marx's inconsistency in this regard was sufficient reason for damning him. For Ollman, though, each category has to be understood as being conditioned by its theoretical context, and meaning has to be understood as a function of how it is integrated into that context. Marx's terminology is therefore less susceptible to being pared down, dictionary-style, to determinate meanings floating free of context, and is likely to be distorted if externally defined, pre-given fixed meanings are imposed onto his use of categories. Such imposition blocks off the hermeneutic efficacy that theoretical context has in the generation of meaning. Abstracting meaning from context prevents the work of framing from making itself felt.

Much of Murray's effort is devoted to showing how Marx sustained a clear sense of the precise level at which his abstractions are pitched. Indeed, this concern with generality explains why Rubin's dilemma is of such significance for him. However, as Ollman's reading suggests, focusing on this dimension of theoretical context at the expense of others might limit any interpretation. Murray puts the problem like this: "If one equates the concept of value-producing labour with the (general) concept of abstract labour, an asocial, naturalistic concept of value is inescapable. That's one horn of Rubin's dilemma."<sup>19</sup> Alternatively, "if we equate abstracted labour with a historically specific sort, what can we make of Marx's lack of a generally applicable concept of abstract (physiological) labour?"<sup>20</sup> Murray argues, in a vein similar to Ollman's, that the problem only arises if one fails to recognise that Marx's terms are used to convey a variety of meanings. For Murray, Marx "sorts three concepts: (i) the (general) concept of *abstract* labour, (ii) the (determinate) concept of 'practically abstract' labour, and (iii) the general concept of labour."<sup>21</sup>

Building on Ollman's work to develop a sense of theoretical context, these distinctions can be expressed as follows. The most significant difference between (i) and (iii) is their relative complexity. In Chapter Seven of *Capital*, Marx embarks on a discussion which shifts between two uses of 'labour' at different levels of generality, comparing and contrasting as he does so. At one level we have the category of labour-in-general. "Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man,

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<sup>19</sup> Murray, pp 31-32.

<sup>20</sup> Murray, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> Murray, p. 49

through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature."<sup>22</sup> In this instance, (iii), the extension is all of human existence, i.e. the scope of this category is coterminous with that of 'culture'. This transhistorical concept is pitched at the highest level of generality. It necessarily lacks specificity, being open to both form and content. It serves as a vantage point from which to explore social existence in general, and is the point from which related, similarly general and broad, categories are investigated. This kind of discussion is a bounded exercise in philosophical anthropology, detailing generalities that will be fleshed out and organised in the more specific discussion of commodity-producing labour.

At this level, Marx stresses the concrete, historical character of all actual forms of labour and the distance between social labour and animal activity.

Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power. We are not dealing here with those first instinctive forms of labour which remain on the animal level.

The reductive abstraction, (i), 'labour pure and simple', 'labour as such', associated with the 'physiological' account of labour, is one of Marx's 'simplest determinations'. From the perspective of labour-in-general, this category appears as one of its internal relations: labour-in-general relates to the way that social activity puts our physical natures to work, thereby giving it a concrete reality it could not otherwise possess. However, although 'labour' is pitched at the same level of abstraction as labour-in-general it does not have the same extension: the stripping away of sociality reduces it to a more general, animal, quality: "it abstracts altogether from the sociality, conscious purposive, and natural conditions characteristic of all human labour."<sup>23</sup> Murray calls this "'analytical' because it identifies an aspect of any sort of labour rather than identifying a sort of labour as the concept of practically abstract does."<sup>24</sup> However, Murray does not notice that it is pitched at a level of generality higher than anthropology. Using this category, without further specification, is sufficient to alert us that, when it is used by Marx, something far from straight forward is going on.

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<sup>22</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p. 283. The language of human labour and transitivity completely coincide at this point.

<sup>23</sup> Murray, p. 48.

The third use of 'labour' concerns the indifference principle. Murray limits its extension to commodity-producing labour and, as an abstract feature common to such labour, it is pitched at a high level of generality. Here, though, it is the vantage point from which this characteristic appears that is the most interesting thing about it. Murray argues that capitalist social practice treats labour as abstract. "Practically abstract' labour is socially validated in a way that shows society's *actual* indifference towards labour's specific character, that is, towards labour's specific ways of transforming nature and towards the specific use-values characteristic of its end products."<sup>25</sup> A society in which use-values tend to be reduced to no more than bearers of value is a society which tends regards the concrete dimensions of production with complete indifference or pure instrumentality. Murray also refers to 'Johnny Paycheck', i.e. to workers' indifference to the way they earn their living. The perspectives from which this category appears, then, are those of either the direct proletarian producers or the indirect bourgeois managers of production. For either party, the concrete character of labour, from their respective subject positions, is of no significance: an attitude of subjective indifference is generated by bourgeois class relations.

Once 'labour' is understood in these various ways, the solution to Rubin's dilemma is straightforward. Marx, Murray argues, does have a historically specific sense of the abstract character of commodity producing labour, so there is no need to read 'physiological' labour for every use of 'labour'. Rubin's unpalatable choices can be sidestepped.

Reuten fully agrees with using 'labour' in these various ways. His objection is that Murray illicitly reads them all into *Capital*. Specifically, on the claim that 'practically abstract labour' can be read into every otherwise problematic use of 'labour', Reuten says:

Murray makes the astonishing move of delivering this as an *interpretation* of Marx's theory. He interprets Marx's *one* term of abstract labour to have *two* separate meanings, one general and one determinate (can we choose at will?). For an interpretation of the current text of *Capital* this runs too fast.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Murray, p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Murray, pp. 43-44.

<sup>26</sup> Reuten, p. 155.

Reuten supports this by raising the problem of 'embodiment'. He sees no problem with regarding commodities as objectifications of the specific kinds of labour which produce them. However, Marx's use of 'embodiment' suggests that the peculiarity of commodity producing labour is that its abstract quality is somehow transferred to those commodities through the process of production. Reuten insists that using this language preserves the errors of Ricardian, ahistorical, value theory. Value cannot, without absurdity, be identified with the abstract quality of the labour that produces it. Nevertheless, Marx consistently affirms this identity throughout Chapter One of *Capital*, and Reuten cites several passages in which Marx progressively specifies this identification.<sup>27</sup>

Reuten specifies the difficulty this appears to create.

Murray agrees that the concept of labour set out here is indeed a *general*, transhistorical, instead of a historically *determinate* notion. We also agree that both the concepts of value and use-value are meant to be determinate. However, the concept of value especially suffers here from the *general* abstract labour notion. If so, we cannot say we are on the track of a theory of the particularly capitalist kind of *social form*.<sup>28</sup>

For both Reuten and Murray, then, there are two, irreconcilable, idioms in which Marx could be speaking about commodities. The first uses the idea of commodities as embodied labour, sustaining essentially pre-Marxian conceptions of political economy. The second uses concepts of value forms, breaking from and superseding the first. Murray's position is simply to deny that Marx really uses the first idiom: the language of 'embodiment' simply should not be taken literally.

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<sup>27</sup> Reuten, p. 154.

If we make an abstraction from its [the commodity's] use-value, we abstract also from the material constituents and forms which make it a use-value. ... The useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears; this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labour. They can no longer be distinguished, but are altogether reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract.

Let us now look at the residue of the products of labour. There is nothing left of them in each case but the same phantom-like objectivity; they are merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour, i.e. of human labour-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure. All that these things now tell us is that human labour-power has been expended to produce them, human labour is accumulated in them. As crystals of this social substance, which is common to them all, they are values - commodity values.

How is the magnitude of this value to be measured? By means of the quantity of 'value-forming substance', the labour contained in the article. This quantity is measured by its duration, and the labour-time itself is measured on the particular scale of hours, days, etc

Marx, *Capital*, p. 129

Still, why *does* Marx talk about ‘embodiment’ and ‘substance’? I believe that Marx expects us to be shocked by the ludicrousness of the proposition that abstract labour is ‘embodied’ in commodities: how can *abstract* labour be embodied? Is not the bodily the antitheses of the abstract?<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, Murray suggests that we are stuck with the peculiarity of this language. When speaking of capital we have to resort to such oddities “because of the absurdity of *thinking* that tailoring just *is* abstract labour incarnate. Talk of ‘embodiment’ and ‘substance’ cannot be avoided in writing a critique of capitalist society, but lets not lose the irony”.<sup>30</sup>

From the perspective of a dialectical critical realist reading of Marx all of this amounts to an extraordinary, not to say somewhat perplexing, mistake, for there is nothing at all ironical or metaphorical about Marx’s language. When Marx puts quotation marks around these seemingly out of place terms, he draws attention to them as *analogies*. Marx was a skilled rhetorician, but to suggest that his references to a ‘phantom-like objectivity’ are at best *merely* rhetorical, ironical, turns of phrase is to impose on Marx’s work an implicit social ontology shorn of all its distinctiveness.

#### IV. Marx and Dialectical Critical Realism

The problem here is that, despite the concerns for methodological and presentational matters, there is an absence of appropriate socio-ontological considerations. Generally, there is a need for a social ontology that accommodates real contradictions. More specifically, there needs to be an ontology that is capable of providing the theory of commodity fetishism with its appropriate significance. Otherwise all that is left is a meagre theory of fetishism which reduces the relevance of the categories of the ‘absurd’ and the ‘distorted’ to phenomenal forms alone and denies their relevance to deeper and non-linguistic aspects of reality. Such an ontology, of course, entails a realist conception of contradictions, but, as the previous chapter showed, it extends and clarifies the range of forms that real contradictions can take. In particular, it needs to be able to adequately encompass the primary social contradiction disclosed by *Capital*: that between the abstract universal and the concrete particular. Murray’s and Reuten’s positions, though, appear to deny the possibility that social relations can assume abstract qualities. Take

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<sup>28</sup> Reuten, p. 154.

<sup>29</sup> Murray, pp. 57-58.

the above quotation from Murray in which he asks: "how can abstract labour be embodied? Is not the abstract the antithesis of the bodily?" But let us turn this around. What would it mean to speak of any real abstract quality as entirely disembodied? It should go without saying that once abstract social qualities are accepted as possible realities then they must be, in some sense, the characteristics of concrete forms. The problem of their embodiment is secondary to that of their existence.

Whether or not to include real abstractions in our conception of the world is, in part, a matter of our philosophical presuppositions. Jonathan Joseph reiterates the point that "the main errors of Marxist theory tend to flow from the attempt to impose a philosophical schema onto its analysis."<sup>31</sup> That is, Marx's presuppositions need to be the starting point for interpretations of his work. This demands a critical elaboration of the immanent philosophical implications of his mature work. Fortunately, a number of important contributions have already been made, and I shall be arguing that the (qualified) interpretation of dialectical critical ir/realism (provided in previous chapters) can be interpreted as just such an elaboration.

As already discussed, the most obvious relevance of Bhaskar's account of ir/realism is to the realm of theoretical discourse, where it provides the general theory of the internal, essentially contradictory, categorial structures of modern social theory. Of course, theory is not the only mode of communicating meaning, and in addition to the efforts of philosophy and science to come to grips with structures of meaning we also have the psychoanalytic disclosure of the processes through which symbols are structured in dreams, and critical, historical cultural theoretical disclosures of the changing forms embodied in the novel, cinema, documentary, etc. Each of these disciplines is concerned with the more or less deliberate, more or less mediated, social activities which produce the various forms assumed by concepts and symbols. The general forms and dynamics detailed by ir/realism are applicable to all of them.

The great significance of ir/realism, though, is that it is also relevant for an understanding of the contradictions of modern social relations. It is pertinent here

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<sup>30</sup> Murray, p. 59. I have put the emphasis on Murray's use of 'thinking' here.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Joseph, 'How critical realism can help Marxism', in *Critical Realism and Marxism*.

because of the 'linguistic' quality of social relations identified by Winch. The categories and relations of capital are, like concepts and symbols more generally, historically emergent cultural forms and, up to a point, can be treated in much the same way as the forms belonging to the discursive and symbolic spheres. This means that the contradictory forms of social relations can be approached through analogies with the contradictory forms of theoretical knowledge. That is to say, we can best understand the forms of the non-discursive aspects of modern social relations by drawing on analogies with discursive forms such as religion and philosophy, just as Marx did.

Metaphorical language is essentially poetic in that it likens one thing to one thing to something quite other, i.e. it intimates the identity of 'opposites'. From a narrowly rational perspective, to establish an identity between opposites on the basis of a metaphor would be absurd. Analogies, by contrast, draw attention to real similarities, to the (partial) identity of one thing with another. In the context of theoretical knowledge, analogies are commonplace, even necessary: knowledge develops through the use of 'scientific loans', analogies which establish a connection between one area of knowledge and another in which we find it difficult speak cogently. Through analogy the intelligibility of one part of the world is transferred to another. Theoretical knowledge does not stop with analogy, of course. It is only a contribution. It may be no more than a stimulus, of which only traces are left after theory has developed. In Marx's work, though, there is a strong and abiding presence of analogies between the metaphorical or poetical character of religion and philosophy with the contradictory structures of social relations.<sup>32</sup> Marx says:

... the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relations between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order therefore, to find an *analogy* we must take flight into the misty realm of religion.<sup>33</sup>

The value, to critical theory, of religion and speculative philosophy is its metaphorical and poetical character. From a rationalist viewpoint, though, these forms embody a host

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<sup>32</sup> Colletti, for instance, in *From Rousseau to Lenin*, illustrates this use of analogical absurdity to describe real social relations by drawing on Hegel's work in his account of alienation. Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, New Left Books, London, 1972.

<sup>33</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p. 165. My emphasis.

of absurd identifications. With the objectification of deities and the positing of a realm of supernatural beings, religions can bring a range of imaginary entities into cultural existence, such that social life is thoroughly mediated by practically efficacious poetic fictions. Indeed, within the realm of the imagination, all manner of peculiar relations can be created: deities might have incarnations or avatars; one being may take many forms without becoming essentially different - such as in the holy trinity; there is transubstantiation, as things transmogrify into alien forms which nevertheless remain identical with their origins. And so on. Many such fictions assume the anthropic form of fetishes, human creations whose powers depends on their social or communal origins having been effaced. There is plenty of scope here for describing such beings in anthropomorphic terms, of course, but to stop there would be to neglect their sociological dimension. The fetish is imbued and invested with meaning and significance, i.e. its exists within social relations and acquires real social powers and social qualities as a result, and such powers and qualities bear little if any relation to its existence as a natural object as understood from the point of view of the sciences. Social relations confer on the fetish powers, which, within those relations are seemingly autonomous and at the very least, cannot usually be brought entirely under control. The effective power of the fetish, then, always depends on a hidden displacement of social characteristics. The fetish has to be integrated into social life as a special conduit of symbolic significance, as a means of amplifying and transmitting symbolic and psychical energies. The process of symbolic integration itself must be self-disguising. All of which means that the anthropism attaching to the fetish, then, is very much a practical matter as well one of description. The fetish is a symbolic and causally efficacious (medium of) social power, whose efficacy depends on, but is irreducible to, the way it is described and understood.

Drawing on the two previous chapters, it is clear that Marx's theorisation of the commodity relation in terms of fetishism reveals the possibilities for extending conceptions of anthropic contradictions to the forms of capital. At first glance it is fairly clear that capital embodies the basic anthropic contradictions: the anthropocentric subordination of subjects to cultural institutions endowed with human powers and the anthropomorphic domination of the concrete by socially instituted abstractions. The alienation engendered by capital, the social constitution of alien powers, entails both kinds of anthropic contradiction: domination of people by things and the domination of

the concrete by the abstract. Two tasks now remain. The first is to show how the social domination this entails is a distinctive form of anthropism. The second is to show that this form of anthropism is a non-immanent form of universalism and to relate this to Eurocentrism.

The anthropic ir/realist contradictions of capital can be approached from four internally related sub-perspectives. Firstly, the epistemic or hermeneutic aporia and antinomies of traditional theory; secondly, actual contradictions, such as those of the market and its crises; thirdly, those which appear from the perspective of ontic depth, which Andrew Collier refers to as 'ontological inversions' and which are primarily associated with the centric axis of anthropism; fourthly the kinds of abstraction addressed by Moishe Postone and Chris Arthur, and associated with the morphic axis of anthropism.<sup>34</sup> Capital is constituted by the relations between all these different modes of contradiction, and Bhaskar's conception of anthropic irrealism provides a systematic grammatical elaboration of its formal structural dynamics. In order to substantiate this position it will be necessary to draw out the connections between the irrealist forms of anthropism and the structures of religious thought. To do this I want to show, firstly, that Marx draws on the possibility of using philosophical and religious metaphors in the way already suggested, by showing that irrealist forms have an essentially metaphorical character, and by showing how such metaphors can be analogous to the forms of social relations.

Marx uses the category of labour-in-general to frame an account of the labour process under capitalism in a way that allows these two dimensions of capital to be brought out. Labour-in-general, as the above discussion shows, provides a philosophical-anthropological perspective on social existence. At this level of generality, all forms of human labour entail a common set of features, i.e. practical, creative and purposive social relations with the social and natural context. However, the substantive forms in which these qualities are actually organised are open to historical development, with the formal range of possibilities including people's anthropic subordination to a world of their own creation, i.e. to the things onto which social qualities and characteristics have been displaced.

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<sup>34</sup> Andrew Collier, 'Dialectic in Marxism and critical realism', in *Critical Realism and Marxism*; Chris Arthur, 'The Spectral ontology of value', *Critical Realism and Marxism*.

Fleshing out the range of structural variation, Marx shows how the characteristics and locations of creativity and purposefulness have, historically, been organised in very different ways. In Chapter Seven of *Capital*, he contrasts the natural activity of bees with construction projects guided by architects. Bees have all the necessary capabilities to build their hives instinctively, without the aid of blueprints; the architect, on the other hand, conceives of the building before it is built. Architecture is an objectification of imaginative and creative cultural powers that mediate and direct social activity. However, the level at which this contrast between natural and human sociality is pitched can easily be mistaken. It might, mistakenly, be assumed that the example is merely an illustration of labour-in-general and that labour-in-general is simply an abstract generalisation from architectural practice. If this was the case then labour-in-general would be a straightforward universalistic humanist account of what distinguishes humanity from the rest of the animal world.

This would, though, be an over-simplification.<sup>35</sup> The general concept of transitivity, of labour-in-general, must accord with the hermeneutic critique of positivism, and insist on language and thought as essential aspects of human culture. Cultural production always is the objectification of imaginative powers mediated by capacities for practically transforming nature. The architect, however, cannot be taken as a transhistorical character, as an ahistorical representative of humanity. On the contrary, this role exemplifies the heights to which specifically bourgeois civilisational achievement aspires. The bourgeois era has been witness to an extraordinary condensation of imaginative and creative powers into single individuals. The great ecclesiastical monuments of pre-modern Europe, for instance, were constructed without architects, as we have come to know them.

In addition, the social distinction between architect and builder embodies a division of intellectual and manual labour which only emerged in the urban context of the early modern era.<sup>36</sup>

Construction and production tasks of such dimensions and novelty stretched the craftsmen to the limits of their resources and inventiveness. By the necessity to

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<sup>35</sup> I would like to thank Kathryn Dean for our discussions on the significance of these passages.

<sup>36</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, MacMillan, London, 1978.

tackle the problems there rose from the ranks of ordinary producers the great Renaissance craftsmen, the 'experimenting masters', artists, architects, and also engineers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>37</sup>

There are intimate connections between the specific forms of intellectual creativity and the forms of socially creative power emerging at this time. Specialist knowledge acquired its characteristically abstract, 'purely intellectual' form, while changing production techniques led to new forms of organisation and management. These forms of abstract knowledge and labour management have been essential forces of production ever since. Given all of this, the true implications of the architect for humanism concern the potential they suggest, rather than any affirmation of the class relations and division of labour of bourgeois society. On the one hand their existence signifies a historically specific promise of a wider expansion of the capacities of members of the species. On the other hand, it also embodies the betrayal of this promise as creative capacities are subsumed under the value form and as capitalist labour processes simultaneously throw the processes which brought the architect to the fore into reverse. Subsumed under the value form, both creativity and constructive powers are displaced into institutions and technologies which become the determinant locus of the creative energies of the few, while the powers of the many are alienated and underdeveloped. Capitalist labour processes continue to demand and shape high levels of creativity, but increasingly entail modes of real alienation, abstraction and reification.<sup>38</sup>

Andrew Collier identified some of the anthropocentric contradictions this involves with what he calls the 'ontological inversion' entailed by this displacement of human purposes and relating it to Marx's conception of "the domination of producer by product or living labour by dead labour".<sup>39</sup> The distinction is between living, productive, labour, and the dead labour embodied in its products; between activity-in-process and its products. To speak of their relationship as an inversion is to disclose the subordination of the former to the latter. The implied 'right way up' would be a wholly different kind of living process to which products were subordinate, i.e. in which they would be invested with their full status as use-values.

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<sup>37</sup> Sohn-Rethel, p. 112.

<sup>38</sup> See Georg Lukács, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', in *History and Class Consciousness*, Merlin Press, London, 1971 and Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination*.

Collier not only conveys a clear sense that capitalist labour processes are structured by these ontological inversions, he is also clear about their being distortions of reality which are constituted by the absences of real necessities: "There is an absence of reason, sentience and life at the heart of power in a capitalist society, and the ontological reality of these absences can be verified by their deep and wide effects."<sup>40</sup> The absenting of human imaginative and creative capacities, and their displacement onto institutions and technologies, generates absences at the very heart of contemporary power relations, an account of modernity readily understood in terms of irrealism.

With this domination of living by dead labour we have sufficient reason to attribute anthropism to Marx, but this is only one part of it. This account so far remains incomplete in the absence of an adequate account of its anthropomorphic dimension. Social relations and their bearers, i.e. the people or things which mediate them, acquire socially specific abstract qualities, such that the absurdities to which Marx refers are not solely, nor even primarily, a linguistic phenomenon. When Marx declares the universal equivalent to be the "universal incarnation of abstract human labour" it is not ideas about reality which he is seeking to expose as absurd, but the reality itself.

The case for the significance of the indifference principle to an interpretation of Marx rests heavily on the *Grundrisse*, where Marx comments on its prevalence in the United States at the time.<sup>41</sup> However, Marx runs those comments together with the following:

This example of labour shows strikingly how even the most abstract categories, despite their validity - precisely because of their abstractness - for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations.<sup>42</sup>

In this passage, Marx draws a clear distinction between two kinds of abstraction. On the one hand there are abstract categories with transhistorical validity whilst, on the other hand, there are those abstractions which have historically specific qualities. He also

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<sup>39</sup> See Andrew Collier, 'Dialectic in Marxism and critical realism', in *Marxism and Critical Realism*, p. 157.

<sup>40</sup> Collier, p. 166. Collier makes his case in terms of the absence of transhistorical necessities, but a more consistently Marxian case would do so in terms of the constraints on the realisation of historical possibilities.

<sup>41</sup> *Grundrisse*, p. 104.

<sup>42</sup> *Grundrisse*, p. 105.

expressly draws attention to the way that historical context confers validity on the latter. However, the passages from the *Grundrisse* do not suggest the dual character of labour in the same way that *Capital* does. While Marx retains the idea that abstractions acquire a peculiar social validity within the most modern relations, the essential social character of all forms of commodity producing labour is the emergence of their qualitative identity: a socially objective identity which is irreducible to how they appear from the subject positions they entail. Capital confers an abstract identity of universal validity onto all its diverse concrete forms of production. Through their subsumption under the capital relation, all forms of labour are effectively reduced to their most basic common element. For this reason the abstraction 'labour', acquires its social validity. All forms of commodity producing labour are both heterogeneous concrete forms of labour whilst also being homogenous and identical. Their identity arises from the fact that given quantities of every diverse kind of labour are exchanged for given quantities of every other kind, regardless of the concrete forms they take. This qualitative abstract identity is distinct from the attitudes of those involved, and is therefore irreducible to the indifference principle. The latter, rather, has to be seen as one of the phenomenal, overt, effects of the deeper, covert, character of this relation of universal identity.

The category of 'abstract labour', acquires its meaning within the precise theoretical context in which it is deployed. That context is bounded, firstly, by the conception of labour-in-general, which retains the social character of the physiological aspect of work, and only then is it bounded by commodity producing labour. Then, within this context, the category is used to refer the consequences of commodity production and exchange in bringing about the equality, homogeneity or identity of all forms of labour. It is only within this context that the social character of labour is defined by the absence of social specificity! This 'paradox', the abstract quality of a specific social relation, is what lends labour its appearance of universality. Meanwhile, the processual universalisation of capital means the tendency towards the universal mediation of all forms of commodity production by commodity exchange, and it is this process that establishes the specific relational identity between them. Within this universal relation qualitative differences are stripped away, leaving only qualitative identity, i.e. labour pure and simple. Concrete differences remain, of course, engendering the dual quality of this form of labour: qualitative differences coexist with the relation of qualitative identity.

Marx deals with this in the section of Chapter One of *Capital* dealing with commodity fetishism. He writes there that as soon as commodities are produced, i.e. as soon as the product of labour is intended as an exchange value, the labour which produces it assumes its twofold character:

On the one hand, it must, as a definite useful kind of labour, satisfy a definite social need, and thus maintain its position as an element of the total labour, as a branch of the social division of labour, which originally sprang up spontaneously. On the other, it can satisfy the manifold needs of the individual producer himself only in so far as every particular kind of useful private labour can be exchanged with, i.e. counts as the equal of, every other kind of useful private labour.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the specific social quality of commodity producing labour is its universal abstract identity: a universality which emerges when every form of labour can be exchanged for every other. We can express this relation of universal identity with the simple formula:

$$A \text{ labour } x = B \text{ labour } y$$

(where A and B stand for some quantity; x and y for any two forms of labour)

In order to express this relational abstract identity Marx goes on to say that it is only so far as different forms of labour are mutually exchangeable on the basis of their common identity that they take on the form of abstract labour.

Equality in the full sense between different kinds of labour can be arrived at only if we abstract from their real inequality, if we reduce them to the characteristic they have in common, that of being the expenditure of human labour-power, of human labour in the abstract.<sup>44</sup>

Strictly within this context, abstract labour is the simple category that expresses the qualitative identity of exchangeable forms of labour. The reduction occurs because, within the relation of identity between forms of commodity producing labour, their overt characteristics simply do not count for anything.

Now this relation of qualitative identity is both constituted and mediated by the production and exchange of commodities, i.e. it is mediated by forms of value. Commodity producers "by equating their products to others in exchange as values, equate their different kinds of labour as human labour. They do this without being

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<sup>43</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p. 166.

<sup>44</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p. 166.

aware of it."<sup>45</sup> Marx repeatedly stresses the objective, covert, character of this equality of labour. Indeed, the whole point of the language of fetishism is that this quality is transmogrified into that of the commodities themselves. Once it is clear that we are dealing with a historically specific and socially generated relation of abstract equality, Marx can be understood to be consistent in his rejection of value as the *physical* embodiment of any kind of labour, whether concrete or abstract. There is no physical trace of value in a commodity because value is no more than the displacement of the social quality of the labour which produced it onto its products. That is, the equality which exists between diverse forms of labour is displaced onto the equality, the qualitative identity, of all commodities:

Whence, then, arises the enigmatic character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity? Clearly it arises from the form itself. The equality of the kinds of human labour takes on a physical form in the equal objectivity of the products of labour as values; the measure of the expenditure of human labour-power by its duration takes on the form of the magnitude of the value of the products of labour; and finally the relationships between the producers, within which the social characteristics of the labours are manifested, take on the form of a social relation between the products of labour.<sup>46</sup>

The relation of equality, of abstract identity, between commodities is overt: they are obviously mutually exchangeable in certain proportions. Different forms of labour, on the other hand, are equalised because of this mediation. Products therefore 'represent', or 'objectively express', the relation of equality between producers. Indeed, Marx uses all these terms, not just 'embody', to describe this. Drawing on Marx's own use of algebraic symbolism in his discussion of money, we can represent the mediated relation of equality between commodity producers in the following expanded form:

Labour = commodity = money = commodity = labour.

(The series of A, B and x, y has been removed for clarity's sake.)

Relations between producers are mediated by this series of transactions and exchanges. As relations of production, circulation and exchange develop so there emerges the relation of equality between producers. These mediations between producers are also the 'bearers' of this relation, transmitting the equality of their labour from one to the

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<sup>45</sup> Marx, *Capital*, pp. 166-7.

<sup>46</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p. 164.

other. As with an algebraic equation, the terms on either side can be substituted for one another. This means that we can replace each of the terms of the above equation with 'labour' to give us:

$$\text{labour} = \text{labour} = \text{labour} = \text{labour} = \text{labour}$$

It is in this representative sense that commodities, and of course forms of money 'embody' equal, i.e. abstract, labour. These are all forms of value, and they are all representative embodiments of the relation of abstract labour. Money, as the universal equivalent of all commodities, really represents the universal identification of all forms of labour. This is to advance an absurdity of even greater obviousness than when Marx spoke of the absurdity of identifying a specific commodity with human labour. Despite their self-evident absurdity, however, there is no question that these relations of identity do not exist as such. The relation establishes a logical absurdity, in the sense that all value forms are identified with abstract labour. Yet the absurd identification is by no means an error: it belongs to reality and has a universal, and universalising, social presence. Given all this, there is no contradiction at all between an abstract labour embodied theory of value and value form theory: all forms of value are really absurd embodiments of abstract labour as they all representative of the same quality - labour.

Now, the emergence of abstract labour as the really universal identity of all concrete forms of commodity producing labour gives rise to an anthropomorphic relationship between its two dimensions. This has two aspects. On the one hand, there is the development of the duality, of the split between the abstract and concrete, which establishes the abstract dimension as a distinct reality with its tendencies towards independence. It is this split that gives rise to "the two-fold character of the labour embodied in commodities".<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, anthropomorphism is more than reification. The anthropomorphic character of capital develops in several ways: as its abstract dimension comes to dominate its concrete: as tendencies towards the subsumption of the concrete under the abstract are realised; with the functional

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<sup>47</sup> Title of section 2 of Chapter 1 of *Capital*.

reduction of all concrete forms of production to the accumulation of value; through the tendencies towards the annihilation of the concrete by the abstract.<sup>48</sup>

This formulation provides a general account of the dynamics of capital in terms of anthropomorphism. This can be both illustrated and clarified by examining Chris Arthur's related account. As noted above, Arthur presents capital in terms of its 'metaphysical' character, i.e. what I am here calling its anthropic irrationalism. Arthur, like Collier, takes the tendencies towards real abstraction and towards the intensification of abstractions to be constitutive of capital. He does so, however, in a way which develops the anthropomorphic dimension of fetishism:

Although our implicit starting point, 'the commodity produced by capital', appears as a concrete one, the real abstraction, imposed in exchange, from every given feature of it leads to a dialectic of 'pure form' homologous with the 'pure thoughts' of Hegel's logic. Whereas Hegel abstracts from everything through the power of thought, exchange abstracts from what is presented to it, a delimited sphere of use values. So we have in the dialectic of capital one that is less general than Hegel's in its scope, but with its own terms equally *absolute* in so far as it is founded on all round abstraction to leave quasi-logical primitives.<sup>49</sup>

This is a superb use of philosophy as historical analogy. Hegel's logic of pure thought is brought down to earth, as it were, to become the logic of a historical process generating real abstractions. For Arthur, the results of this process are a 'philosophical' or 'religious' inversion in which 'quasi-logical primitives', i.e. simple abstract generalities,

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<sup>48</sup> This is not the place to go into details of each of these dimensions of capital. However, it is worth noting how each of these forms of domination can be related to the dynamics of capital. The first of these deals with real subsumption, and is addressed by Marx in the appendix to Vol. 1. The second, functional reduction, covers both formal and real subsumption, where formal subsumption suggests imposing the demands of capital accumulation on pre-existing forms of labour without necessarily bringing about their internal transformation. Conceptions of capital which focus on raising levels of absolute surplus can be located here. The third is related to rising productivity and to raising levels of relative surplus value. This last is given central importance by Postone. For Postone, the most profound contradiction of capital is between the drive to accumulate value, on the one hand, and the drive to reduce the labour time needed to produce those values, on the other. Value is the embodiment of an expenditure of labour time, but is also related to the average time needed given the prevailing level of technological capacity. The intensive and extensive expansion of technological capacity brings about an increase in the total mass of values, but it also reduces the standard by which their value is measured, by reducing the average labour time embodied in each commodity. Every step taken to accumulate value must further reduce the standard of measurement. For Postone, the progressive tendency here is towards the elimination of the expenditure of labour time. Capital, however, demands that labour time is preserved as the measure of value. Realising the progressive possibilities of capital requires the elimination of abstract labour.

become real social mediations and which develop as the dominant determinants of social being. Capital really does tend to abstract general qualities from substantive, concrete modes of being; to hypostatise them in determinate forms of social relations; and to do so in a process oriented towards the ultimate subsumption of the entire substantive dimension of society under them. With what Marx calls real subsumption, or what Arthur describes as the 'introjection of form', he presents us with a materialised 'idealism', a mode of social being which grants ontological priority to its form at the expense of its substance.<sup>50</sup> The characteristically modern form of universality emerges with the progressive extrusion of abstract generalities from substantive being, and with the constant reorganisation of social existence needed to secure their reproduction and expansion. Such reorganisation is increasingly indifferent to the substantive, concrete, dimension of social life, which is tendentially reduced to little more than means to an end.

The universalisation of capital depends on the enduring distinction and connection between its existence as a 'totality' and as a 'whole'.<sup>51</sup> As was noted in the previous chapter, Postone points out that Marx uses the term 'totality' to refer to ideas, to conceptions, which embody a "rich totality of many determinations and relations".<sup>52</sup> As such totalities belong to the realm of ideas, they are despite all their internal differentiation, characterised by abstractness and homogeneity. Similarly, the philosophical conception of 'substance', a reference to the homogeneous essence of things, belongs to an idealistic idiom. Unlike other forms of being, however, commodity producing labour really does possess just such an essence: its unchanging abstract reality which, over time, determines its concrete existence. The abstract dimension of capital, the totality of value, can then be understood as being constituted by this essence, 'value producing substance', i.e. abstract labour.

Its concrete dimension, the whole, on the other hand, is the more or less organised sum of material objects and processes. This world embodies the tendencies towards a universal *heterogeneous whole* of interrelated concrete forms of labour and their

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<sup>49</sup> Chris Arthur, 'The Spectral ontology of value'. p. 221

<sup>50</sup> Arthur, 'The Spectral ontology of value'. p. 221

<sup>51</sup> Postone, *Labor and Social Domination*.

<sup>52</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, Martin Nicolaus (trans.), Penguin, Harmondsworth; New Left Books, London. 1973. p. 100.

products and, at the same time, a tendency towards the universalisation of a *qualitatively homogenous totality*. The peculiarly anthropic character of this, then, is to be located in the contradictory process of concrete universalisation which is constitutively mediated by a process of abstract totalisation. On the one hand, within the concrete dimension, we have the anthropocentric subordination of people to things. On the other hand this is accounted for in terms of the emergence of the abstract dimension of capital and the anthropomorphic subordination of the concrete to the abstract.

V. Concluding Thoughts: Historical Universals and the reified-material character of abstraction.

This reading of *Capital* has drawn out two aspects of its implicit social ontology which have not been sufficiently prominent in its interpretation. The first owes a debt to Peter Winch for his appreciation of the analogy between forms of language and forms of social relations; the second is indebted to Roy Bhaskar's conception of ir/realism and anthropic contradictions. Drawing these two together provides a general account of possible forms of social relations, an account, moreover, which can be read back into *Capital* without doing undue hermeneutic damage. The perspective that this generates, one that can be called dialecticised critical realist social ontology of modernity, grounds the disclosure of capital, the dominant modern social relation, as a form of European dialectical universalisation.

It only remains to elaborate some of the implications for European universalisation that can be drawn from this reading of *Capital*, and to make some final comments on Rubin's dilemma. One set of remarks concerns the relations between the discursive and non-discursive dimensions of European dialectical universalisation, while another deals with the possibility of generalising from the deep, structured, relational and categorial account of commodity fetishism to the European problematic of dialectical universalisation.

Charles Taylor urges the cautious use of social theory on the grounds that it is irreducible to being descriptive or explanatory: theorising about ourselves can be self-constitutive, which may have troubling implications. Taylor's concern with instituting the imaginary, however, needs to take into account the fact that self-constitution is

mediated by the forms its institution takes: however abstract social theory appears, it is not undertaken in the abstract: there is no theory from nowhere. As Jameson shows us, the instituted world is itself taken up into theory, with the real abstractions of this world giving our intellectual traditions their 'philosophical' or 'theoretical' character. We inhabit a world which is thoroughly mediated by real abstractions, and these abstractions also "serve to *define* ourselves; and ... such self-definition *shapes* practices,"<sup>53</sup> including our theoretical practices.

The significance of this for an account of the Europic problematic is that understanding processes of universalisation simply as the objectification of abstract forms of thought is inevitably one-sided. Taylor's contention should be taken seriously: Europic universalism does mediate Europic universalisation. Against this, though, universalistic theory is historically grounded in the real abstractions of modernity. The development of our theoretical traditions and the development of our forms of social relations have been mutually reinforcing. Real abstraction provides the historical grounds and the conditions of intelligibility of abstract theory; abstract, Europic, universalism mediates the praxis of universalisation. The absence of any recognition of this is, almost by definition, characteristic of theoretical Europism.

This absence, the absence of an adequately historically reflective critical theory, is apparent in the formulation of Rubin's dilemma. The contention that "It is not possible to reconcile a physiological concept of abstract labour with the historical character of the value it creates",<sup>54</sup> presupposes that the use of the terminology of 'abstract' labour could only be ahistorical. However, as the above arguments have shown, this judgement is too hasty. Any judgement as to how the term is being used, and therefore what it means, must first recognise that its use is circumscribed by its frame of reference. Against the uncritical readings which pre-judge the use and meaning of historical universals, *Capital* provides a fully rounded critique, encompassing its immanent, omissive and explanatory dimensions, of precisely those ahistorical readings of abstractions which accept them at their desocialised and ahistorical face value.

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<sup>53</sup> Charles Taylor, 'Understanding and Ethnocentrism', in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers*, 2, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 116.

The explanatory critique in *Capital* grounds the internal relations between forms of thought and social relations. That is, it sees intellectual reification co-existing and co-developing with real reification. As seen above, Rubin's dilemma was defended on the grounds that "if abstract labour is an expenditure of human energy in physiological form, then value also has a reified-material character".<sup>55</sup> The important part of this statement is the implication that it must be illicit to speak of value having a 'reified-material character'. This, in turn, presupposes that the analogy between language and social relations is illicit. However, if reification means the attribution to some non-thing of qualities and properties belonging to a thing, and it is allowed that this can be a matter of social relations and practice at least as much as it can a matter of thought, then speaking of the abstract dimension of commodity-producing labour in terms of its "reified-material character" can be entirely appropriate. The disclosure of the reified-material character of universal social relations provides the historical ground of idealist-materialist antinomies; it produces an account of social universals in terms of real anthropic abstraction. The historical-processual elaboration of this form of social reality, i.e. the development of these relations through processes of dialectical universalisation, is also, at one and the same time, the elaboration of the conditions under which these Europic-anthropic forms of thought come into their own as social forms of self-understanding.

It was argued in previous chapters that theoretical Eurocentrism, typified by the form of its universals, needs to be understood in terms of the grammar of anthropism. This same grammar has now also been shown to have non-discursive inflections, with modern European relations of domination, and processes of transformation emanating from Europe, having anthropic forms. Now it has been shown how the universals which constitute the totalising dimension of the modern are also to be understood on the terrain of this grammar.

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<sup>54</sup> Rubin, p. 131.

<sup>55</sup> Rubin, p. 131.

## **Conclusions - The Mutual Implications of Critical Theory and Eurocentrism.**

The task of critical theory is to disclose, explain and transform traditional political and social theory. It discloses the apparent and deep contradictions embodied in that tradition; it explains those contradictions in terms of their relations to the contradictory social relations they are embedded in; it transforms the nature of theory as it generates the categories and forms needed to comprehend and express those contradictions. That is, critical theory is driven by the contradictory nature of the modern towards a realist theory of this form of life. Central to this project is Eurocentrism.

The fundamental contradictions of the modern tradition arise from the structural form and significance of its universalism. Despite the fact that the modern secular tradition developed a strong sense of history, it has struggled to come to terms with the full implications of the historicity of its own form of culture. A systemic feature of the tradition is that its forms of thought are caught on the horns of the structural dilemma that generates the ambiguities of particularism and universalism. Unable to sustain distinctions between the levels of generality, the tradition persistently confuses the ontological, the anthropological, the sociological and the historical. Its intellectual horizons are shaped by the more or less implicit universalisation of its self-conceptions. In other words, its defining feature is its own ethnocentrism: Eurocentrism.

These intellectual problems are compounded by history. The modern form of life elevates its intellectual tradition to a central place in its own reproduction. The modern is saturated by its traditions as they provide the praxiologies of modernisation, where modernisation is the institution of universals. The modern is the ensemble of universalist theory, practice and institutionalised relation.

This ensemble, the Europic Problematic, provides critical theory with its object of inquiry. Critical theory becomes critical-theoretical anti-Europism, while traditional theory becomes theoretical Eurocentrism and modern social formation becomes real Eurocentrism. Critical theory is the critique of Eurocentrism.

The antinomial nature of theoretical Eurocentrism generates two diametrically opposed, but dialectically twinned, strategies for posing and resolving questions of its own

Eurocentricity. On the one hand, Eurocentrism is seen an instance of cultural particularism: dealings with others are necessarily conducted from a specific point of view, and are probably geared to securing culturally specific interests. Wherever such a bias causes difficulties, counter measures need to be put in place in order to achieve a more effective balance. With a sufficient degree of self-consciousness, practices might be corrected, as if compensating for the pull of a steering wheel or for poor eyesight by wearing the necessary glasses. Dealing with self-serving bias, on this account, means accepting that it is an inevitable consequence of engaging with the world with an attitude shaped by the form of life, whose undesirable consequences can be avoided given an adequate appreciation of its dangers. Richard Rorty's work on ethnocentrism exemplifies this strategy. It recognises the particularity of the European culture of civil society, while affirming its moral values. For Rorty, it is precisely these, ethnocentric, values which make it possible to minimise the potential ethnocentrism has for viciousness towards others.

This strategy usually entails a repudiation of claims to universality. However, this can only be at the expense of at least two forms of universality which cannot be avoided, at least not without creating insuperable difficulties. Firstly, modern culture is self-consciously and practically universalising. What Rorty praises as a kind of universal openness to others he fails to recognise as one aspect of deeply entrenched tendencies towards the universal expansion of modern culture and concomitant subsumption of alterity under Europic forms.<sup>1</sup> Such one-sided accounts of the cultural realities of Europic universalisation fatally undermine all attempts to take refuge in particularity. Also, for the very idea of cultural particularity, difference and change to be intelligible, some sense of philosophical universality, i.e. ontological and transhistorical categories and forms, is needed, albeit one that is cautious, limited and understood as fallible. In sum, a stratified and differentiated approach to universalism is an unavoidable precondition of coming to terms with particularity.

On the other hand, and more commonly, approaches to Eurocentrism adopt a universalist perspective. The counter image of the first, this approach affirms cultural claims to universality, thereby seeking to tackle Eurocentrism on its own terms. This

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<sup>1</sup> In effect, Rorty's account of the openness of liberal culture to alterity is a statement about United States immigration policy.

way of addressing Eurocentrism fails to disambiguate the different kinds of universalism it involves. In the absence of an adequate appreciation of the need for a dialectics of universalism, Eurocentrism appears as a deviation from a universal norm: an unethical privileging of the European which can be corrected, or subject to reform, without any substantial reconsideration of the nature of the European. Where the first strategy was critical of illicit universalism, and asserted particularism in response, Eurocentrism appears here as an illicit assertion of particularity, to which the proper response is none other than the reassertion of universality. This flight from particularity, which takes refuge in the universal, serves only to block off precisely the kind of inquiry into the universal which is so necessary for any understanding of Eurocentrism.

Within the terms of theoretical Eurocentrism, then, 'Eurocentrism' invokes a problem, but not a fundamental one. The term is 'critical', implying a sense of bias in favour of the European, be it cognitive, ethical, relational, etc. The relevant biases entail a practical or theoretical privileging of some aspect of the European over its others: either the mediation or subordination of culture or nature by the European, i.e. Eurocentrism proper, and/or the imposition of the European onto some area of culture or nature, i.e. Euromorphism. What neither strategy is capable of, however, is recognising that all such biases are essential aspects of its own social formation, and that the very choice of strategies for thinking about it is an effect of its own structures.

The critical-theoretical anti-Europic approach developed here grounds these structural antinomies in a social reality whose essential constitution is the developing ensemble of structural biases of *all* these kinds. In so doing it accomplishes what those other accounts do not, a critical realist theory of the complex dialectics of Europic universalisation.

This critical theoretical perspective accepts the inevitability of partial, limited and biased self understanding, but it also opens up the modern tradition to a deeper, structural, self-transformation. Critical theoretical anti-Eurocentrism fully embraces the moment of particularism, but cannot accept any simple reliance on techniques designed to compensate for one's own bias. Instead, it embarks on a thorough historicisation of its own particularity, one which forces apart the universal and particular, comes to a new understanding of them both, and establishes a new sense of the relations between

them. Historicisation succeeds not by reducing itself to repudiating the universal, but by grasping the moment of particularity in relation to a new sense of universality.

Against the claims for Europic universality, then, critical theory fully accepts the need for a turn towards the true self, but only if that turn is also a repudiation of the conceits of its forms of universalism. Critical theoretical anti-Europism depends on developing and sustaining a clear distinction between historical and transhistorical universals, both of which emerge out of the critique of Europic universals. The project of critical theory is the ongoing development of the resources needed to make this move, one that can only be realised through cognitive and practical self transformation.

The central concept developed here, the Europic problematic, refers to something considerably more than just one aspect of Western modernity amongst others. Rather, the strong position formulated here is that the Europic problematic identifies a general and essential dimension of modernity, a dimension constituted by the contradictory forms and dialectics of the 'Europic universals' of civil society. These universals are abstract relations with a tendency to develop in contradiction to the concrete realities they mediate; their dialectics of universalisation involve the institution of such abstractions, in both the real and imaginary dimensions of social life.

A claim of this order, inevitably, has many ramifications, not the least of which relate to the nature of critical theory. Conventionally, for the most part, critical theory, especially the critique of civil society and political economy, is treated as distinct from, even antagonistic to, concerns with Eurocentrism. In keeping with this, the most that might have been expected from this kind of work would have been that it could have developed a keener awareness of the problems of Eurocentrism, helping critical theory to become more aware of its own Eurocentricity. What would not have been expected is that this project would have identified the project of critical theory so closely with the problems of Eurocentrism. Rather than simply being an investigation of Eurocentrism from a critical theoretical perspective, this work has developed through the mutual transformation of both terms, disclosing the deep-seated internal relations between them.

One effect of the Europic Problematic for critical theory has been to reinforce attempts to shift the terms of its self understanding into a more historical register. One, general, consequence of Europism for modern theoretical forms of reflexivity is that they tend to be overly 'philosophical'. Critical theory too, in common with traditional theory, is historically grounded intellectual practice which struggles against reproducing Europic forms, forms which tend to make intellectual work appear detached from its historical and social ground. The elaboration of critical theory in relation to the Europic problematic, however, means that this can be addressed, to some extent. For instance, Horkheimer's attempt to drive a wedge between traditional and critical theory has been preserved, but it has also been developed thanks to the re-working of both terms in relation to Eurocentrism. Similarly, the intimacy of the relation between critical theory and Eurocentrism has been expressed here through a development of some of Althusser's terminology: Critical theory has been understood as critical theoretical anti-Europism, while the concept of its theoretical opposite has been developed in terms of theoretical Europism.

Also preserved here is something of Althusser's account, elaborated in *Reading Capital*, of the motivating force that the contradictory and absence-ridden raw material of ideology provides to critique. Bhaskar's systematisation, too, of the connections between immanent, omissive and explanatory critiques, which make explicit how the identification of conceptual contradictions and theoretical incompleteness are vital first steps on the way to the theorisation of polyvalent causal structures, has also been retained. However, all these terms, and their respective meanings, have undergone some alteration under the pressure of asserting a thorough-going historicity of both Eurocentrism and critical theory. In each case these concepts of critical theory, originally pitched at an abstract, philosophical level, have been reinvested with historical content.

This historicisation of critical theory emerges out of confrontation with the essential ambiguity towards historicity, or even its systematic disruption, in theoretical Europism. More positively, it has also been an attempt to conceptualise the ontology of this specific form of social existence. The 'Europic problematic' provides a general theory of the real nature of the historical ground from which critical theory emerges. At the same time, its historical ground also turns out to be critical theory's real object of

investigation, with the theoretical object of the Europic problematic providing it with its true aim and purpose. This project has therefore retained the methods of immanent critique: enhancing and realising the possibilities immanent within the Europic problematic for knowledges which are formally and substantively distinct from those which remain tied to the reproduction of the horizons of theoretical Europism.

Critical theory, though, remains strongly bound to this form of life. The theoretical contradictions grounded in the experience of Europic realities provide critical theory with its teleonomic push, driving it on towards their disclosure and explanation. At the same time, the search for its theoretical object, the Europic problematic, gives critical theory its teleological pull. Conversely, the Europic problematic also acts as a constraint on critical theory, generating a complex intellectual field constituted by countervailing forces and tendencies. Of course, this field is historical, and its dynamics are internal to the ongoing development of Europic social formation. For this reason, if no other, the present work makes no claim to bring critical theory to a point of completion. Rather, it provides a strong indication of the direction in which work can be taken. Nevertheless, the main point still stands: far from being opposed to one another, critical theory and the Europic problematic are intimately tied together, with the latter providing the former with its socio-historical conditions of existence, its intellectual significance and its moral purpose.

The bond uniting theoretical Europism and critical theoretical anti-Europism, then, is an antagonism, the essence of which is a struggle over the nature, form and status of universals. Indeed, it is the twin failures to either recognise the need for a critique of Europic universals and/or push that critique through to its full extent that account for the persistence of theoretical Europism in work otherwise interested in developing critiques of Eurocentrism. This issue was raised at the outset, by pointing to the cognitive problem of 'Eurocentrism' in terms of the fragmentary and incoherent nature of existing conceptions. It was noted then that universalism was indeed recognised as one of a number of problems associated with Eurocentrism, but it was quite unclear whether universalism or its lack was the real problem. On the terrain of theoretical Europism, universalism is profoundly ambiguous and essentially antinomial. The solution to such problems meant filling a theoretical void: and what was needed was to impose a wholly new structure onto the problem/solution set of Eurocentrism.

The fact that 'Eurocentrism', in the existing field, appeared incoherent, fragmentary and contradictory has to be taken seriously as symptomatic of inadequate structure of the conceptual framework from which it emerged. The critical-theoretical solution to this could not rest with simply adding yet another conception of Eurocentrism to an already confused field. Instead, there has been a vital shift in perspective, focusing on the Eurocentricity of the field itself, thereby making it possible to deal with the problem of European universalism by disclosing the differentiated, stratified and structured nature of the existing field as a whole.

This shift entailed a considerable expansion of the scope of 'Eurocentrism', but one that did not stop there. The reflexive impulse of critical theory, embodied in explanatory critique, demanded a further expansion. This expanded the concept of Eurocentrism still further by relating the structure of discursive universals to the form and development of relational universals. It was in order to draw all these elements together that the expanded concept of the problematic was put to work, giving us the European Problematic.

The other, omissive, moment of critique also had its place, and this too was reworked in relation to Eurocentrism. In particular, the absence of a theory of European universalism has been exposed as the central reason for why traditional conceptions of Eurocentrism are theoretically inadequate. Or, to put it another way, in order to play its social function in relation to the European problematic, the social ontology of theoretical Europeanism is necessarily contradictory. The structural causes of its contradictions are its constitutive absences, and what it primarily lacks is the realist social ontology.

The project of critical theory, then, is prompted by recognition of the real nature of the cognitive problem of Eurocentrism. Quite simply, it is a problem of self-understanding. What makes this a special kind of problem, however, is that it cannot be addressed without transforming the horizons of the Social Imaginary in which the world is understood. The only adequate response to the problem of theoretical-Eurocentrism is a self-transformation, i.e. the critical transformation of the internal structures of the general forms that self-knowledge of this society takes.

The focal point for this work of self-transformation was identified by further understanding Eurocentrism as a special version of a problem related to ethnocentricity. While any account of ethnocentrism must confront the problem of (implicit) illicit universality, in the Modern European case this problem is mediated by the expressly universal character of its ethnocentrism. That is to say, the issues arising from European ethnocentrism are peculiar because they crystallise in the form of its universals. Meaningful cognitive self-transformation begins with this.

There is a tremendous advantage in focussing critique on universals: thanks to their strategic position, European universals are the 'Achilles Heel' of Eurocentrism. They provide a weak point in the ideological armature of Eurocentrism, such that a successful blow struck at this point has systemic implications of great significance. Yet another reason for focussing on universals is that, in addition to being a point at which the problems of Eurocentrism condense, European universals are also the prime location from which critique emerges. Take Marx's observations on the obstacles in the way of Aristotle's attempt to theorise commodity value.

There was [...] an important fact which prevented Aristotle from seeing that, to attribute value to commodities, is merely a mode of expressing all labour as equal human labour, and consequently as labour of equal quality. Greek society was founded upon slavery, and had, therefore, for its natural basis, the inequality of men and of their labour powers. The secret of the expression of value, namely, that all kinds of labour are equal and equivalent, because, and so far as they are human labour in general, cannot be deciphered, until the notion of human equality has already acquired the fixity of a popular prejudice. This, however, is possible only in a society in which the great mass of the produce of labour takes the form of commodities, in which, consequently, the dominant relation between man and man, is that of owners of commodities. The brilliancy of Aristotle's genius is shown by this alone, that he discovered, in the expression of the value of commodities, a relation of equality. The peculiar conditions of the society in which he lived, alone prevented him from discovering what, "in truth," was at the bottom of this equality.<sup>2</sup>

Aristotle, then, discovered in exchange value a 'relation of equality' between commodities. That is, he drew attention to the relation of qualitative identity on which exchanges mediated by money must be based. He also recognised that this universal essence, the common quality of commodities, was not grounded in their nature as material objects, but was instead imputed to them in the course of social activity.

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<sup>2</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Ben Fowkes (trans.), Harmondsworth, London, 1976. pp 151-2.

However, the absence of a similar abstract universal imputed to persons prevented Aristotle from making further progress in his inquiry into the nature of value. His work had to end with what might now be thought of as a variety of conventionalism or social constructionism. For the most part, debates over value continue to resort to the twin possibilities of naturalism and constructionism, albeit in a variety of ways.

It was not until the social development of a universal abstract human essence had reached a certain level thanks, in no small measure to the development of capital, that the real nature of the qualitative identity of commodities could be discerned.<sup>3</sup> Put another way, the conditions of possibility of knowledge of capital were not present until capital itself had developed to a certain degree. In this case, at least, the development of the social relation has conditioned the ways in which it can be understood. However, it also needs to be recognised that while ‘the notion of human equality [having] acquired the fixity of a popular prejudice’ is a necessary condition for the resolution of the riddle of value, it is by no means a sufficient one. Rather, it provides some of the necessary raw materials from which a genuine solution can be fashioned, and it is only through the kind of critical transformation just discussed that the immanent conceptual possibilities of such universals can be realised. The critique of commodity fetishism is, after all, a complex one involving more than disclosing the attribution of social qualities to things. It also involves a theory of the nature of those social qualities, one that accounts for their social character in non-constructionist terms. The denaturalising of value has to be accompanied by a similar denaturalising of the form in which the universal human essence appears.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> There is a strong case for commercial capital being one of the primary drives towards the institution of modern capitalism. (See for instance Jairus Banaji’s ‘Islam, the Mediterranean and the Rise of Capitalism’ in *Historical Materialism* 15 (2007) pp. 47-74.) However, while the prevalence of commercial capital appears to have embodied tendencies towards the institution of abstract labour, it might not necessarily be an embodiment of it, nor might there be a necessity for it to become so. The relation between commercial capital and modern capitalism could well be a matter of evolutionary, but not structural, identity. That later forms provide clues to the anatomy of those from which they emerge does not mean that truths about the former apply to the later. This raises questions about the transhistorical validity of Marx’s theory of value to all forms of commerce, but ones that cannot be explored here.

<sup>4</sup> Althusser’s insistence that Marxism is opposed to all forms of humanism and to all conceptions of human essence can be read as an affirmation of this negative critique of the form of universals characteristic of theoretical humanism. His affirmation of real humanism, on the other hand, can be taken to be compatible with some account of human essence. What matters is precisely the question at

The possibility of Marx's critique, of course, was not solely dependent on the development of social universals, but also relied on other social and intellectual developments taking place within the wider social formation. Similarly, the more general critique of the European universals of civil society developed here has been conditioned by and made possible by a range of social processes. As was pointed out in Chapter 2, this work relies heavily on political and intellectual history, including the fall-out from major episodes such as the demise of colonisation and the institution of post-colonialism, the development of 'globalisation', and the contested elaboration of critical realism.

A final kind of reason for organising the critique of Europism around universals is their centrality to the theoretical elaboration of the European Problematic. The critiques of European universalism developed here have remained consistent with the established form of critique of civil society. That is, it has subjected these categories to a transformation whose consequence is a non-preservative sublation, retaining the category of the universal but in a new form. Wholly distinct forms of universality, irrealist forms, are integral to the general account of the dynamics of the European problematic: 'Universal,' from this critical theoretical perspective, remains the term required for describing the real nature of irrealist modern social relations; these irrealist universals are subject to processes of dialectical universalisation; 'universal' is also needed for the account of how theoretical Europism operates, i.e. the play of universals in the dialectics of ideology and utopia of the Ethical Economic Imaginary. The term remains, but its meanings, their referents and their moral significance are all changed.

Foremost amongst these changes is the need for a distinctive categorial and theoretical language in which they can be communicated, in which the forms and dynamics of the European problematic can be understood. The greatest part of the present effort has been devoted to developing this language, and central to this has been the use of dialectical critical realist conceptions of anthropic irrealism and dialectical universalisation. So, for instance, Bhaskar's concept of irrealism, i.e. of anthroporealism and its contradictions, has been used to provide an account of the polyvalence of both universalist conceptual

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hand: the conceptual form in which conceptions of essence are developed; the relations between transhistorical concepts and historical ones.

structures and universal social relations, showing how they are, in their own ways, constituted by the co-presence and co-evolution of constitutive absences and presences.

A crucial aspect of this theoretical development has been the 'translation' of the categories of 'anthroporealism' from where they have been most clearly elaborated, i.e. the sphere of discourse, ideas and meaning, into the non-discursive dimensions of history and sociology. This is not an entirely original move, as far as theoretical production is concerned: the warrant for such a translation of philosophical categories into sociological ones was taken from Marx's oeuvre, and his work on capital was also used to exemplify this crucial quality of the European problematic.

However, this conceptual borrowing in the context of European universal social relations is both novel and significant. This part of the work develops an analogy between the symbolic nature of language and some of the qualities of social relations. It marks a significant contribution to the philosophical anthropology, or social ontology, needed to understand Europeanism, by drawing out the possibilities of 'objective idealist' forms of social reality. Against this background, socially instituted universals can be understood to emerge through the practices of establishing real relations of identity between concrete entities, regardless of any naturalistic essence they might possess. The resulting relations are 'symbolic', such that the concrete entities they mediate all become representatives, or embodiments, of the relations in which they are enmeshed.

Identifying such universals as really symbolic relations in this way makes it possible to arrive at a coherent understanding of really abstract mediations of concrete cultural forms. By drawing on the categories and concepts of idealism, it has become possible to sustain the account of universals as relations whose institution entails real contradictions between them and the concrete forms they mediate.<sup>5</sup> By advancing these socio-ontological considerations, this work has helped to consolidate an understanding of the constitutive contradictions of modernity as those between socially instituted abstract, ideal, essences, and the naturalistic essences of concrete social and natural

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<sup>5</sup> This meant addressing those controversies over the nature of the value relation, which have long dogged Marx's work, by confronting the socio-ontological presuppositions underpinning them. The contention here being that debates over value have continually foundered on the absence of a sustainable concept of historically specific (European) abstract universals.

beings. Given these categorial presuppositions, it becomes possible to sustain a conception of the common tendencies of all forms of European universalisation as the subsumption of real concrete essences under socially unreal ones. This conserves the established understanding of universalisation as a process in which the concrete is extensively and intensively fragmented and reconstituted as subordinate moments in the formation of a social whole mediated by an abstract totality. It also points the way for an extension of this understanding from capital to other social relations, such as the state and law.

The final important conceptual transformation concerns the nature of universalisation and modernity. The European problematic takes up Althusser's formulation of historical processes in terms of their 'differential and complex spatio-temporality', and affirms the irreducibility of historical universalisation to any simple, single or linear conception. In this context, the spatio-temporalities of the European problematic are adequately expressed in terms of an uneven and combined, multiplicity of dialectical universalisations, in which the categories of the theory, practice and relations of civil society are themselves being continually fragmented and recombined in the emerging social formation of modernity. The complex spatio-temporalities of dialectical universalisation mean that the ongoing processes of civil social formation produce a tremendous variety of both historical and structural relations between its many aspects. One result of this, in the ontic dimension, is that the specific configurations of contradictions between the abstract and concrete dimensions of social life will always be understood as a matter of historical contingency. The result in the epistemic dimension is that this conception of the complex universalisation of the European problematic provides the theory of social ontology that is the defining absence of theoretical Europeanism: it is what has been missing all along.



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## **Appendix: The Blind Men and the Elephant - a Story from the *Buddhist Sutra***

Several citizens ran into a hot argument about God and different religions, and each one could not agree to a common answer. So they came to the Lord Buddha to find out what exactly God looks like.

The Buddha asked his disciples to get a large magnificent elephant and four blind men. He then brought the four blind to the elephant and told them to find out what the elephant would "look" like.

The first blind men touched the elephant leg and reported that it "looked" like a pillar. The second blind man touched the elephant tummy and said that an elephant was a wall. The third blind man touched the elephant ear and said that it was a piece of cloth. The fourth blind man hold on to the tail and described the elephant as a piece of rope. And all of them ran into a hot argument about the "appearance" of an elephant.

The Buddha asked the citizens: "Each blind man had touched the elephant but each of them gives a different description of the animal. Which answer is right?"  
"All of them are right," was the reply.

"Why? Because everyone can only see part of the elephant. They are not able to see the whole animal. The same applies to God and to religions. No one will see Him completely." By this parable, the Lord Buddha teaches that we should respect all other legitimate religions and their beliefs.

American poet John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887) based the following poem on this fable.

It was six men of Indostan  
To learning much inclined,  
Who went to see the Elephant  
(Though all of them were blind),  
That each by observation  
Might satisfy his mind

The First approached the Elephant,  
And happening to fall  
Against his broad and sturdy side,  
At once began to bawl:  
“God bless me! but the Elephant  
Is very like a wall!”

The Second, feeling of the tusk,  
Cried, “Ho! what have we here  
So very round and smooth and sharp?  
To me ’tis mighty clear  
This wonder of an Elephant  
Is very like a spear!”

The Third approached the animal,  
And happening to take  
The squirming trunk within his hands,  
Thus boldly up and spake:  
“I see,” quoth he, “the Elephant  
Is very like a snake!”

The Fourth reached out an eager hand,  
And felt about the knee.  
“What most this wondrous beast is like  
Is mighty plain,” quoth he;  
“ ’Tis clear enough the Elephant  
Is very like a tree!”

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,  
Said: “E’en the blindest man  
Can tell what this resembles most;  
Deny the fact who can  
This marvel of an Elephant  
Is very like a fan!”

The Sixth no sooner had begun  
About the beast to grope,  
Than, seizing on the swinging tail  
That fell within his scope,  
“I see,” quoth he, “the Elephant  
Is very like a rope!”

And so these men of Indostan  
Disputed loud and long,  
Each in his own opinion  
Exceeding stiff and strong,  
Though each was partly in the right,  
And all were in the wrong!

Moral:

So oft in theologic wars,  
The disputants, I ween,  
Rail on in utter ignorance  
Of what each other mean,  
And prate about an Elephant  
Not one of them has seen!