By way of an Introduction: These pages contain individual chapters from my 1990 book, Postmodern Sophistications. I have obtained the rights to the essays am making them available separately. The entire text of the book is also available on Research Gate.

The underlying aim of this collection of essays was to question the opposition between the Sophists and Plato. That classic dispute has been the model for many discussions of tensions within our society:: on the one hand you have the clever manipulative salesmen who care nothing about truth. On the other hand the rigorous scientific investigation that never quite makes contact with politics. Rootless nihilism vs. naturally grounded values. Anarchy vs. Rules.

In this book I developed a pragmatic middleground, using themes from Heidegger and Dewey; in later writings I rely more on Hegel. But the point remains the same: don't listen to the Straussians and others who try to force on our politics or art or philosophy a simple opposition between truth-loving traditionalists (Socrates) and flaky relativistic postmoderns (the Sophists). It was not so simple in Greece and it's not so simple today.

Part of the book deals with postmodern critiques of rational knowledge, with Lyotard and Habermas on center stage. Their opposition between postmodern and modern views remains relevant, although post-1990 developments in deconstruction and critical theory have widened and deepened the debate. The points made in these essays remain useful, if not complete.

The second part of the book deals with architecture. The word postmodern has gone out of fashion in architecture. But the earlier use of the term for an attempt to bring substantive content into formal modernity retains important.

My conclusions about postmodern architecture's failute to escape modern distance from history also remain true, as does my argument that that proclaimed modern distance from history is itself an illusion, that we are more embedded in history than the moderns wanted to think, although that embodiment is not as total and restrictive as we have imagined true of our ancestors.

If you find any of these ideas useful, true, provocative, let me know. If you find them absurd or useless airy nothings, I'd still be delighted to learn from your reactions.

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This chapter criticizes Habermas as too much a modernist in his relation to tradition..

Chapter 6. Form and Content in Utopia

In this chapter I discuss some reasons why Habermas insists that our common dialogue and joint building must be done on modern terms; then I ask if his views give an adequate account the place of tradition. The reading I offer is an attempt to force Habermas where he does not want to go. His doctrines are designed to maintain a delicate balance between our particular roots and our universal critical project. I argue that this position is unstable, and that it leans heavily towards universality and distorts our relation to history.

Reflective distance from traditional ways and values allows one to use traditional material for one's own purposes: this is the Sophist at work, picking and choosing what strands of tradition to emphasize in order to achieve personal or party goals. This is also Habermas's ideal community at work, picking and choosing what strands of tradition to emphasize in order to achieve what they take to be universally justifiable goals. If the universality of those goals were to be questioned, then Habermas would look more like the Sophist. He means to look more like Plato, who tests and corrects traditional material. But Plato hoped to find substantive values and not just procedural rules to keep his use of tradition from being willful. Habermas does not mean the use of tradition to be willful, but perhaps that is an effect of the very formal rules and goals he suggests (cf. Bubner 1982, who accuses Habermas of being too close to the Sophists).

Modernity and Tradition

Habermas does not believe in the distinction between modernity and postmodernity; for him the crucial distinction is between the modern and the traditional. What does modernity have that traditional society lacked? Habermas summarizes the difference as follows:

> We have discussed the "closedness" of mythological world-views from two
> points of view: the insufficient differentiation among fundamental attitudes
> to the objective, social, and subjective worlds; and the lack of reflexivity in
> world-views that cannot be identified *as* world-views, as cultural traditions.
> Mythical world-views are not understood by members as interpretive
> systems that are attached to cultural traditions, constituted by internal
> interrelations of meaning, symbolically related to reality, and connected
> with validity claims--and thus exposed to criticism and open to revision. In

this way we can in fact discover through the quite contrasting structures of "the savage mind" important presuppositions of the modern understanding of the world. (Habermas 1981, 52-53)

When Habermas speaks of mythological world-views he has in mind the classic examples cited by anthropologists: the Nuer, the Azande, and so on. On this scale the Greek myths are not purely traditional; they represent an already changing system that is on the road to modernity. Fully modern society has learned to distinguish "the objective, social, and subjective worlds" and has institutionalized expert ways of dealing with these worlds.

For Habermas there is a story to tell about the gradual differentiation of modern society. The modern spheres of science, law, and art work according to their own evolving rules and become independent of political or religious control. This may resemble Lyotard's insistence on a postmodern plurality of language games, but Habermas's differentiated spheres fit together into a synthetic whole which Lyotard would be the first to attack. Unlike Lyotard's discontinuous proliferation, the expert spheres Habermas talks about each have their own developmental logic that guides them as evolving systems with continuing identities. There is no logic to the genesis of Lyotard's language games from one another, nor for changes within a given game.

In the story of modernization, the key trend is the gradual coming into focus of a distinction between nature (as something given) and culture (as something made). Primitive people, we are told, see culture a natural given and nature as something made by super-persons. Separating nature and culture means developing institutions that can distinguish and treat differently such things as ineptitude and guilt, causes and motives, harm and evil. This separation means seeing the difference between natural health and moral goodness. It means moving from a magical to a technological approach to nature, which brings a higher level of productive forces and more mastery of the environment.

These developments do not proceed haphazardly; Habermas likens them to the maturation of an individual, and he makes connections between Kohlberg's stages of moral development and the changing organizational principles of historical societies. He sees these developments as genuine improvements in a species-wide learning process that helps us fulfill our needs. Modernity is an advance, not just a change. Traditional society tends to be static and repressive, because without distinguishing the social and the natural order there is no room for envisioning alternative social arrangements as something that people could bring about on their own (Habermas 1981, 51).

Above all, modernity requires us to separate the world from language about the world. Habermas argues that as the distinctions he lists become available they allow people to separate their mode of talking from the world about which they talk. People become able to make semantic distinctions between the referent, the content, and the sign

in linguistic acts. This enables them to conceptualize linguistic acts as linguistic rather than natural acts, and to distinguish connections due to the rules of meaning from connections due to the causal relations among objects.

This destroys the magical function of language. But it open up the possibility of understanding how some statements might be valid locally just because of their connection with the rules of a particular language game. And other statements might be valid universally just because of their connection with the rules for communication in general. This allows us to distinguish various spheres of validity and the appropriate rules and type of rationality for each sphere. In working out these conditions and rules in detail Habermas arrives at his ethical and political conclusions.

The Three-World Story

These distinctions establish a picture of the world that explicitly distinguishes the world from its pictures. We can distinguish the content of a world-view from the presumed order of the world it is trying to describe. We become able to talk about a world-view as a cultural construct with its own rules for connecting statements. The logical structure of the world-view is distinct from the causal patterns it reveals in the world. We can also separate the logical structure of the world-view from the subjective qualities of our experiences. Once these three elements (world, world-view, and subjective experience) are seen as separate, we can imagine alternatives and criticize our traditions in more radical ways than ever before.

I call this overall framework "the three-world story." The three worlds are the "objective, social, and subjective worlds" mentioned above. There is the world of objective fact (linked by causal connections), the world of cultural constructions (linked by logical and other rule-governed connections), and the world of inner experience (linked in aesthetic and temporal connections, but not a realm of mental entities: cf. Habermas 1981, 91). Each of these three worlds makes sense in reference to the others, and they interact to provide a framework for language and understanding. "Taken together the worlds form a reference system that is mutually presupposed in communication processes. With this reference system participants lay down what there can possibly be understanding about at all" (Habermas 1981, 84).

Each of the three worlds fills a different function in our communication and action. It is important to see that the three worlds are completely defined by these functional roles. The cultural world that lies between experience and the objective world fulfills a certain function of structuring and unifying and guiding, and it does so for every culture, regardless of the particular constructs involved. Some cultures are more developed and differentiated, some less so, but there is a cultural world in every case, defined by its function rather than its content.

The three-world story is perfectly general. Since the function of each world within the overall story is not tied to any particular content for that world, a modern person can think about the nature and function of cultural constructs without necessarily referring to the constructs typical of his or her own culture. Moderns can talk about world-views or the role of inner experience without indicating any particular view or experience.

This generality allows modern people to criticize existing cultural constructs or experiences. Since we understand the differentiated roles of the three worlds, and the functions each world fulfills in the story, we can examine particular cultures or experiences to see if they fulfill their roles well. The story suggests the goal of making the three worlds function better together. That goal belongs to the three-world story itself rather than to any particular culture or world-view. In terms of this goal we can criticize culture and experience from a perspective that has no particular content it must hold sacred at the cost of its own identity.

Thus the abstract and formal quality of the three-world story allows it to be in principle shared by all cultures despite their differences. This should encourage consensus-building that will improve the functioning of the worlds of experience and culture in general. Of course this can only happen once people are able to make the distinctions on which the three-world story is based. They can share in the story once they have moved beyond the stage of seeing a particular tradition as "natural." Only modern people can tell themselves the three-world story.

The three-world story provides a self-image for modernity. The story includes a history of how people developed so that they became able to tell the three-world story: this gives a direction to the story and helps define its goals. What it means to be a modern person is to live in a society that is so structured as to make the three-world story basic to one's identity.

> We have to face the question, whether there is not a formal stock of
> universal structures of consciousness. . . . every culture must share certain
> *formal properties* of the modern understanding of the world, if it is at all to
> attain a certain degree of "conscious awareness." (Habermas 1981, 180)

Instead of a founding myth, moderns have the three-world story.//Footnote Like many myths, the three-world story murders the parents. Its picture of traditional society presumes too much unity and too little self-consciousness. I discuss some aspects of this problem in the next chapter. End Footnote// The story defines a place for modern individuals to stand and judge how well any tradition measures up to the ideal of smooth functioning expressed in the story. And because the story gives the form of modern culture rather than any particular content, it completes the development of self-consciousness that has been occurring throughout history. These features allow the three-world story to make normative claims that demand universal acceptance.

Because we moderns have seen how culture and the world fit together, there is no turning back. We cannot again sanctify any particular cultural or experiential content. There is no return to traditional forms of culture, for this would mean losing the differentiation that gives modern persons their distinct perspective. This could only be a regressive step.

As far as Habermas can see such regression is just what many postmodern thinkers are suggesting. When Lyotard says that grand narratives of liberation and progress have lost their credibility he is claiming that we can no longer believe in something like Habermas's three-world story with its built-in goal of perfect function and transparency among the three worlds. Yet Lyotard offers his own story that also involves a formal characterization our relation to each other and to history, this time in terms of multiple language games and the possibility of novelty. Like Habermas's story it provides a self-image, one closer to artistic than to social and scientific modernism. This story differs from Habermas's story because it does not invoke rational criticism, and because it does not lead to a final unity. Habermas stresses these differences in his critique of Lyotard, claiming they make Lyotard unable to properly criticize distorted and manipulative communication. Yet the results of both stories for our attitudes toward history may not be all that different in Lyotard and Habermas.

Form and Content

Is the three-world story the only way we have left to describe our relation to tradition and the past? It will be worth examining the distinction of form and content in the three-world story as it applies to our dealings with history.

If one defines as traditional a society with no self-consciousness at all about the status and nature of tradition, the roster becomes vanishingly small. Self-awareness of the society's relation to its traditions can emerge in many ways connected with changing patterns of trade, religious innovation, new agricultural technology, and so on. The decisive distinction between traditional and modern societies lies not in the presence but in the institutionalization of modes of self-reflection that may have existed in previous societies but were not made part of the standard modes of interaction among members of those societies.

Habermas accepts the general lines of Robin Horton's discussion of the difference between traditional and modern inquiry. Horton argues that modernity brings encouragement rather than repression of large-scale theoretical alternatives to received views and practices. But these views need to be qualified. Even in a traditional society with taboos on considerations of any but the received views there can be nothing that eliminates the possibility of self-reflection and criticism. There is no doubt that institutionalized theoretical reflection is a special development that vastly increases the amount of talk about the presuppositions of people's lives. But it is not the only locus of

social self-knowledge. Social practices get be discussed, roles complained about, views wondered at. To see how a traditional society talks about itself one should not go to the guardians of orthodoxy whom Horton examines, but to the traders and travelers and other practical people who have to deal with social patterns and presuppositions in their everyday life. End Footnote// Those new institutions include modern political arrangements, and the specialized spheres of science, law, and art which were mentioned earlier. Each of these deals with the past in a different way, but they share an objectifying attitude.

> From the moment when the past, which traditionally prescribed a plan of action to both individuals and groups, was outdistanced by the historical sciences, an objective world was established, open to critical scientific investigation. Modern man gains the freedom of an open future which, alone, can make him capable of transforming, according to scientific conceptions, the natural and the social environment. The "lack of historicity" of modern society, demonstrated through natural and social procedures, has then, the scientification of the past as an assumed premise. (Habermas, quoted in Portoghesi 1983)

Habermas claims that because of modern differentiations we find ourselves no longer able to stand in immediate unity with the traditions we have received. We interact with our traditions as with tools that we have made and whose function we must improve. The three-world story gives us a formally defined place to stand independent of the content of any particular tradition, and it gives us a universal project with goals independent of any particular historical project.

It may appear, though, that the goals of the three-world story are indeed those of a particular culture and tradition. Despite its apparent universality the three-world story appears to be a European story, and the cultural forms Habermas draws from the story are typically European. Habermas argues that this ethnocentrism is only apparent. While the modern structures emerged in Europe, for contingent historical reasons, taken as abstract structures they are not Western but universal since they concern action and communication in general.

More importantly, Habermas argues that what is described abstractly in the three-world story is not a European cultural project or form of life because it is not a full cultural project or form of life at all. It is a structure of distinctions, relations, rules, and values that must undergird any self-aware form of life. But that structure cannot be lived by itself. It provides necessary conditions for any modern form of life, but in order to be sufficient for actual life it must be supplemented by historical content.

The three-world story suggests a life where all three worlds relate in smooth functional interchange. But the rules and structures required for this functioning do not

make a blueprint for a perfect society. In his earlier works it sometimes appeared that Habermas was suggesting that it was possible to define a utopian society based merely on the conditions for perfect communication. More recently he insists that his discussions of the conditions of communicative action are meant to provide only the formal necessary conditions that make possible a modern society. They are not meant to outline sufficient conditions for a utopia. He defines utopian thinking as "the confusion of a highly developed infrastructure of possible forms of life with the concrete historical totality of a successful form of life" (Habermas 1981, 74).

There is another reason why Habermas does not want the three-world story to be a sketch for a complete culture. While he wants to affirm the modern trends towards universal norms, differentiated institutions, and the creation of more flexible individual identities, he does not want to say that we could have a purely procedural society made up of what I earlier called "thin" individuals.

In a society of such individuals, people would be characterized only by their given lists of preferences, and by a drive to maximize satisfactions. Institutions would be set up to facilitate the trades in goods services, or in rewards and punishments, that would help the aggregate goals. This subordinates everything about persons to the gathering of satisfactions, and everything about society to the efficient functioning of one kind of interaction. Many theorists approve this picture. Others attack it from the right and left. Hegel and Marx attacked such a picture (of "civil society"), and later Weber feared that modernity was developing in precisely this direction. Habermas's predecessors at Frankfurt, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, shared Weber's fear. They saw a "dialectic of enlightenment" whereby differentiation and rationalization paradoxically develop into a homogeneous society where all life is subordinated to an inhuman rationality of production and efficiency (cf. Horkheimer and Adorno 1969, Connerton 1980). Those early Frankfurt thinkers would concur with some recent postmoderns in seeing rationalization as ultimately repressive, and in hoping for aesthetic or instinctive means to counter the dominance of modern rationality.

The three-world story is meant to provide the resources to counter such pessimistic accounts; it allows Habermas to develop a subtle theory about different types of rationalization that function in the separation and in the integration of the three worlds. He argues that there is no fatal flaw in the process of rationalization itself, but there is a dynamic by which certain types of rationalization tend to dominate others due to their position in the current economic structure. We must favor the principles of rationalization and differentiation if we are to be self-critical. What we need is a more differentiated study of rationalization. The bad effects cited by Adorno and Horkheimer are effects of capitalist modes of rationalization, not a necessary consequence of rationalization in general.

There are kinds of rational development operating in the various expert spheres of

culture. There is also a more general rationality operating in the consensual dialogue found in the everyday lifeworld. This latter works to re-integrate the results achieved in differentiated spheres of culture back into the everyday world. These kinds of rationality involve our dealings with one another in communal dialogue and the exchange of justifications for beliefs and decisions; they are not oppressive; they liberate us from the shackles of traditional roles and values.

What is oppressive about modern society is that yet another sort of rationality has become too dominant. Our dealings with nature have been made vastly more efficient by a means-end instrumental rationality that replaced traditional magical and emotional dealings with nature. Habermas agrees with his predecessors that in capitalist society this kind of rationality has come to dominate life. Impersonal mechanisms such as market forces and bureaucratic efficiency break into interpersonal relations where they are inappropriate, thus allowing one kind of rationality to dominate others that are necessary for the reproduction of a full human life and world. Habermas calls this the colonization of the interpersonal lifeworld by the impersonal systemic imperatives and their instrumental rationality.

Ideally speaking, in a differentiated modern society described by the three-world story, the structures making society possible would be so general that they should be open to an immense variety of particular content. Such a society should support more different lives and a richer mix of goals and projects than any traditional society could ever achieve. Traditional society needed to stabilize definite values and ways of life in order to maintain its identity. Modern society finds its identity in the formal structures of the three-world story and so it can be more accepting and flexible.

Our society does not fulfill this ideal. What may appear as greater variety is partly a matter of differentiation and mostly a matter of the consumption of commodified life-styles. The dominance of instrumental rationality is reducing our possibilities and blanking out rather than transforming traditional content. We are sacrificing the real richness of human life to the flashy surfaces of consumerist efficiency. In this Habermas is at one with many postmodern critiques of our contemporary world.

I will return to the influence of system on lifeworld in the later chapters devoted to the problem of building livable places today. For now I want to concentrate on Habermas's positive alternative, and indicate its problems in dealing with the past.

Habermas wants life to have content as well as form. The three-world story must be supplemented by historical material for its processes to work on. If there were no historical "substance" to consciousness that were not purely procedural, something very like the "dialectic of enlightenment" might indeed take place (Habermas 1985, 401-402)./

This is quite similar to Hegel's argument that civil society cannot do without the

spirit of the nation to give it content and help make the transition to the rational state. Except that for Hegel the content provided by the historical traditions is already inherently rational; this rationality needs to be made evident; it does not need to be constituted by critical discussion. Hegel does not believe that modern citizens can or should actively constitute their values by reworking contingent history; the values must be already guaranteed by their logical place in the process of spirit's development/

It is here, though, that the relation of formal process and particular content becomes problematic. Habermas says that historical material needs to be respected, yet the three-world story possesses goals independent of any particular historical project.

The past influences us "from behind" as our stock of pre-interpreted unquestioned beliefs and values. Habermas holds that our cognitive (and other) activities all take place within what he calls the "lifeworld," which is a network of undoubted background beliefs that act as a fund of meaning and a horizon. Every explicit act presupposes the lifeworld, though modern cognitive endeavors do so in a particularly self-conscious way.

Although for Habermas our belonging to the lifeworld we do is not something at our arbitrary disposal, it is available for communal reflection and correction. A traditional society would equate passing on the received background with passing on the truth, but what it means to be modern is to make a distinction at that point. The lifeworld supplies a fund of meaning, but the process of establishing the validity of propositions is distinguished, in modern societies, from the process of reproducing the lifeworld.

The lifeworld is composed of linguistically structured units, but it does not form a structured whole that can be seen or reviewed as a totality. But any particular belief in the lifeworld may be raised into explicit consciousness and have its validity claims tested. Such criticism might lead to a new consensus based on testing the past against objective criteria or communally accepted values (which can themselves be tested). The lifeworld may thus be changed piece by piece, though not as a whole.

The lifeworld has a unity more like a collection than a system. There is no one theme or understanding or set of meanings which somehow protects the lifeworld from changes that might threaten some core identity. The lifeworld functions to make possible our explicit beliefs and actions, but it does not do so as a transcendental, but only as a necessary, condition.

Thus although we always act from out of a background, there is nothing in that tradition which is sacrosanct, nothing that cannot be questioned and revised by conscious mutual agreement (Habermas 1985, 82). It cannot be judged all at once, but any part of it is available for judgment.

This is reminiscent of Otto Neurath's famous image of the ship. We are like ships under way. We cannot tear the ship down and rebuild it on the open sea, but we can

repair or change it part by part while we travel, working on one part while relying on the other parts to sustain us. This crew is quite modern; they relate to their ship in a purely instrumental manner. The present state of the ship only imposes the requirement that the steps from its current condition to some envisioned future state be carefully worked out. Possibilities are unlimited except by scarcity of materials.

In this image, as in Habermas's three-world story, tradition sets no goals and imposes no constraints. Neurath's ship has no destination; it is a philosophical Flying Dutchman. Any real ship is not travelling simply for the purpose of being remodeled to travel better. Habermas's three-world story sometimes makes it seem as if the purpose of living together were to purify the conditions for living together. All particular contents that might provide goals for living are subject to judgment and remaking in light of the formal goals implicit in the three-world story.

In Hegelian terms, what Habermas has done is to allow the difference between universal and particular to be posited as such, but not their unity. This is just Hegel's diagnosis of the problems of civil society. Hegel wanted to find a rational content for life that helped form the conditions for consensus rather than being judged by consensus. He claimed that the universal process of spirit's development involved definite historical contents that were more than purely formal and yet were guaranteed independently of any particular community decisions.

While Habermas looks to the historical lifeworlds for some solid content for living that is different from the purely formal structures in the three-world story, it turns out that the historical content serves only as material to be used in allowing the formal activity to continue (Habermas 1985, 401-402). Like the planking on the ship it is there to be remodeled. In itself the historical content sets no goals and imposes no restraints. Habermas cannot allow particular historical projects to set the goals of our self-criticism, for he fears that this would remove them from criticism. Only universal goals will do. But is this the only mode of self-criticism?

Habermas is rightly concerned to avoid the unity of the universal and the particular that can lead (as in Hegel) to sanctifying some particular arrangements as the final rational structure for society. So Habermas points out how general structure and particular content do not form a unity (Habermas 1985, 397-399). But when the structure and the content remain separate, there is danger of the complete dominance of efficiency and instrumental calculation. Habermas tries to ward this off by refusing to allow the modern formal structures to be, on their own, a complete blueprint for social living. What is to prevent instrumental dominance of social content is the requirement that there always be some historical content for the formal process to work on. But this is not enough to avoid the dominance of instrumental rationality and the dialectic of enlightenment, because the historical content is present only as material to be examined and reworked.

Habermas does invoke distinct kinds of rationalization that do not reduce to instrumental reason, but all his types of rationalization share the distinction of form from content. All content is to be judged by reflection and mutually constituted in a process guided by the formal goals in the three-world story. All identity is to be a made identity. Radical autonomy is the modern project. Historical goals and identities endure as cases of "believing because it is good for you."

Habermas's problem is the purity of the overall goals given in the three-world story. They have to be free of historical contamination so that they can be available on all occasions as tools for critiquing any tradition. But do such universal tools exist?

The difficulties with the three-world story are similar to the problems concerning the transcendental and empirical levels in Habermas's earlier writings: he seemed to be proposing conditions so transcendental that they had no critical bite. Or, if the principles had critical power, their own universality seemed in question. In his newer writings Habermas claims that the developmental logic of human growth leads to the three-world story and its associated norms. While not strictly universal these do give the pattern common to any sufficiently developed human community. In so doing they indicate that only certain historical contents are able to support the three-world story, so the principles have some critical power. But in attaining this power the story so dominates particular content that it raises again the spectre of the dialectic of enlightenment.

In his description of the modern situation Habermas makes use of many controversial principles. In claiming that there is an overriding unity to language that enforces rules that are valid for any form of discourse, Habermas must distinguish relations of pure formal validity from relations dependent on material forces or cultural particularities. In analytic philosophy the attack on pure relations of validity has been going on since the late Wittgenstein (1963), through Quine (1969), and now again in Rorty (1982). In continental philosophy as well the notion of a purely formal mode of being has been attacked repeatedly since Heidegger, usually by analyzing or deconstructing candidates to show their substantive roots and their inner betrayals of their supposed purity. Habermas is fully aware of these attacks and mounts spirited defenses against them. I will not try to rehearse these debates here, but will side with the critics who contend that what may appear to be pure relations of validity are always supported by ongoing community practices that are not themselves describable in purely formal terms.

Many postmodern thinkers endorse the general direction of Horkheimer and Adorno's theories about the oppressive nature of the process of rationalization. It might therefore seem that someone like Lyotard could give us more real historical connection than Habermas can allow. Certainly Lyotard vehemently denies any over-all goal such as the three-world story proposes, and he insists on the independence of our various cultural games from any universal norms. But the fact is that Lyotard's creation of new language

games, and the irony in much postmodern art and architecture, embody virtually the same attitude towards historical content as we find in Habermas. Historical content is only material for the play of postmodern signification. This is not Habermas's rational process of judgment and criticism, but it maintains the same general separation of a formally described process from its particular historical content. What may appear a reimmersion in history turns out to be an celebration of our distance from history.

In a sense there is a common difficulty with both Habermas's communicative rationality and Lyotard's shared language games. They have no historical depth that requires discernment. This is most obvious in Lyotard; as in Nietzsche, everything is remade by the present desire and history is subdued by the will to power that revalues its elements now. No interpretation is required, only forceful reinterpretation. The same effect occurs from the fact that the lifeworld in Habermas is composed of heaped-up beliefs rather than intersecting practices, and its total availability to reworking.

It is the purity and totality in Habermas's story that ought to be questioned. Can we separate a level of pure formal validity from the forms of life and historical development of practices? And even if a formal description of cultural constructs is possible, can it generate goals that give a critical perspective transcending all historical projects?//Footnote In Hegelian terms, we need to understand that the distinction of form from content may be made concerning our activities and creative efforts, but that it cannot be posited as such within them. End Footnote// If, on the other hand, we are more deeply historical, if we are set in many different motions by traditions, if what distinctions of form and content we can draw are either quite local or so universal that they provide no critical bite, then the pure process Habermas describes needs to be revised.

Its totality, transparency, and formally described goals make the three-world story thoroughly modern. The story prescribes an activity of communal self-criticism that ascends above the history that gave it birth. I have been urging that this underestimates our immersion in history, but Habermas has a powerful retort. Only the modern project, he argues, can free us from historical distortions. Because in a traditional society the various cognitive and social domains in the three worlds are not functionally differentiated, mythical discussions can blend them so that relations of things and powers substitute for relations of reasons and argument. People are swayed by bad arguments blended with power relations; there is no free rational criticism and consensus. The three-world story provides the goal of unmasking claims where power substitutes for reasons. As far as Habermas can see, theorists of postmodernity are working to collapse the differentiations and blend argument back with rhetoric, thus opening the door to the Sophists.

This is not to say that in the modern world all is clarity and argument. Myth is not the only way to befuddle the critical faculties. Modern society has its own ways to hide the relations of power, and Habermas's deepest intent is to unmask and criticize our present

world. But he thinks that the principles that enable us to do so are now implicit in our modern projects.

While we have good reason to worry about ideological distortions, Habermas's way of approaching the issue employs the same basic distinctions that I criticized in the earlier chapter about the Sophists. Since the three-world story demands self-transparency, ideological pressure can only be thought of as an outside force distorting a fundamentally self-active process of communication. In traditional societies there was no separation between the self that sought pure validity and the self constituted by social and causal pressures. But once modernity arrives with its formal process of rationality described in the three-world story, ideology can be seen as an alien force. This is because the process of intersubjective relations has become formal and empty. Habermas does not endorse modern the modern empty self, but he replaces it with the formally defined community for whom historical tradition can only be material. We need to rethink the categories of ideology and criticism to take account of our connections and impurities. We need to reconsider how the disciplines of craft and language might allow communal self-criticism without rational universality.

My argument has been that if the universality described in the three-world story were really established, any rootedness in the past would be destroyed, despite Habermas's attempt to have it both ways. I treat the three-world story as an impossible attempt to rise above history. The other side of this claim would be the diagnosis that the three-world story itself remains particular. This might be made plausible if we could show that there are other ways to move away from primitive social structures. There might be alternatives that are neither modern nor postmodern, other routes away from myth, other kinds of differentiation, and perhaps other strategies than differentiation. Perhaps for these one would have to characterize traditional society in other ways than as "non-differentiated." In the west such other alternatives would have been subdued by the Socratic story. But there may be paths that lead from myth to other kinds of self-reflection about tradition, ways that do not go by way of a confrontation with the Sophists and the establishment of universal criteria. These ways might not share all the presuppositions of our modern mentality. For example, the Buddhist notion of emptiness, as it expands into a critique of propositional truth, claims a self-awareness that is distanced from myth, but in a different manner than the western critiques.

Any story about us and the past needs some distinction of form from content; to talk about tradition at all is already to make such a distinction. The question is whether that distinction must support a critical practice with its own pure goals, as Habermas desires. Habermas sometimes speaks as if the alternatives were either his critical practice or a Sophistic pragmatism. But these both share a presupposition that the self or community stands outside tradition using it for its own particular or universal goals. Our

immersion in language and tradition is stronger than that, and we have no goals given outside of all traditions. But because of the distances and multiplicities involved in being "in" our past, we are not so restricted and uncritical as Habermas suggests in his modern picture of the premodern world.