

Social Change in Sociology and Social Philosophy (Manipal 28/04/2014)

I. Introduction

In this lecture, I am interested in the connection between critique and social change as well as in the connection between history and social change. I am interested in the relationship between temporal social norms as they govern our societies and universal values that, according to some moral philosophers, have to be considered as standing outside of history.

The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory had always thought it central to emphasise human collective agency as opposed to resignation to tradition or to a deterministic view of human behavior and human history.

Already the founders of the Frankfurt School, Horkheimer and Adorno, in their *Dialectics of Enlightenment* critiqued modern science, and social sciences in particular, for their inherent tension between an emphasis on the individual on one hand (by their methodological individualism) and a disregard for the individual on the other hand, by turning the individual into a mere number to enter their statistics.

Social change in this view remains a mere function of external circumstances. In the perspective of Critical Theory, however, individuals have a role to play in processes of social change. Individually and collectively, by exercising their faculty of understanding and critique, they are movers as well as moved by social change.

Now with the help of critical theorist Hans Joas, a contemporary German sociologist, I would like to take you a little bit back in history to those early sociologists like Durkheim and Weber, who already had similar concerns. I will then take you to the American pragmatist tradition, Dewey and Mead, which became influential for the second generation of the Frankfurt School, Habermas and Joas, and finally I will introduce you to the approach of the latest offspring of the Frankfurt School, Rahel Jaeggi, who introduces us to a new notion of social change via what she conceptualizes as “immanent critique”.

II. *Representations of Social Change in Classical Sociology*

1. Émile Durkheim

The question of how individual behaviour is governed by social rules – and how this is different from the determination of the behaviour of a physical object by chains of cause and effect – was raised prominently at the very beginning of modern sociology by Émile Durkheim; and with the rejection of determinism in human behaviour the question of emergence, development and change of social rules arose as well. The domain of the social assumes a peculiar intermediate status of objectivity. It is objective in the sense that it cannot be changed by “a given concrete individual”, but it is subjective in the sense that it is “not beyond the control of human agency in general”.¹ Following established terminology in the Frankfurt School, I shall call this intermediate status ‘intersubjective’ as opposed to both ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’. Whereas the behaviour of physical objects is governed by *natural laws*, human action is governed by *social rules* and *values*. These exist in the intermediate realm of the *intersubjective*.

Hans Joas summarises Durkheim’s main interest as the quest for a theory of the emergence of a “new morality”.² Under the impression of a culminating modernity in *fin-de-siècle* Europe with its far-reaching consequences for Europe’s traditional social order, the question of the emergence of a new social order and corresponding social norms and values was pertinent. Joas views Durkheim therefore as the first theoretician who attributed central importance to the “creativity of collective and individual human action”.³ Durkheim propagates the comparative study of social norms in different historical times and cultures against the dominant rationalist (Kantian, Utilitarian) trend of viewing ethics as an abstract, deductive science. Ethics, according to Durkheim, is not to invent a new morality. The philosopher’s role is not to solve moral problems for other members of society but moral philosophy can help bring about moral and thereby social change by exposing the man-made character of existing social norms.⁴ According to Joas, Durkheim views the role of the moral philosopher in elevating to the level of consciousness all strands of morality extant in a given society⁵ and he attributes special creativity to morally fractured times: “When traditional morality is not

¹ Parsons 1937: 709, quoted after Joas 1992a: 31.

² Joas 1992a: 77

³ Joas 1992a: 78

⁴ Joas 1992a: 89

⁵ Joas 1992a: 99

questioned, when no need is felt to renew it, moral reflection shrivels.”⁶ Joas however also points out that Durkheim is far from locating the creative sources of social change in the everyday actions of ordinary people but only in “extra-quotidian collective expressive acts”⁷ in “situations of collective effervescence” (*Überschäumen*).⁸

2. Max Weber

Similarly, Max Weber distinguishes action, which involves intentionality, from mere behaviour. The former is exclusively human; the latter may be attributed to physical objects or animals. Of course in a reductive mood, human action can also be analysed in terms of mere behaviour, but then the distinctive character of human action is lost. Positivist social sciences and most of economic theory describe human action in such a reductive manner. Within limits this can be legitimate.⁹ For Weber’s idea of sociology as the ‘science of human action’, this approach would be unsatisfactory. Weber speaks of ‘action’ only insofar

as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior ... ‘Meaning’ may be of two kinds. The term may refer first to the actual existing meaning in the given concrete case of a particular actor, or to the average or approximate meaning attributable to a given plurality of actors; or secondly to the theoretically conceived ‘pure type’ of subjective meaning attributed to the hypothetical actor or actors in a given type of action. In no case does it refer to an objectively ‘correct’ meaning or one which is ‘true’ in some metaphysical sense. It is this which distinguishes the empirical sciences of action, such as sociology and history, from the dogmatic disciplines in that area, such as jurisprudence, logic, ethics, and esthetics, which seek to ascertain the ‘true’ and ‘valid’ meanings associated with the objects of their investigation.¹⁰

The interpretation of ‘Meaning’, i.e. of the symbolic representation of social rules and values, is constitutive of sociology just as the idea of ‘life’ is constitutive for biology; and just as human action can be reductively described as human behaviour, life processes can be reductively described as processes of organic chemistry and ultimately of physics. However just as we lose a whole theoretical dimension when we describe biological processes in terms of organic chemistry, we miss out on the essence of what constitutes *human* action, as opposed to animal behaviour, when we reduce it to mere chains of cause and effect. Unlike in physical objects or in animal behaviour, humans can, through their manipulation of symbols and meanings, influence the rules that govern their own behaviour. To use a likening image

⁶ Durkheim 1986: 33-35, quoted in Joas 1992a: 99.

⁷ Joas 1992a: 96

⁸ Joas 1992a: 97

⁹ Joas 1992a: 62

¹⁰ Weber 1978: 4

from artificial intelligence: humans act like computers that are able to interpret and re-write their own programmes. This self-referentiality and auto-manipulability of the terms on which we act is due to the human faculty of language, which distinguishes humans from all other animals. Max Weber did not attribute self-referentiality and auto-manipulability to the general mass of people but only to certain select charismatic leaders. But through his theory of charismatic leadership we can already make out the general shape of a possible theory of social change. Borrowing from Nietzsche, Weber pictures the charismatic leader as a 'superhuman' capable of breaking with traditional norms so as to initiate a revolutionary transvaluation of values. In a more democratic outlook this 'superhuman' would be the collective subject of a self-conscious society. John Dewey and the American pragmatist tradition have developed this more 'democratic' perspective.

III. The American Pragmatist Tradition

1. John Dewey

According to Dewey and other pragmatists, the starting point of social theory is the individual involved in praxis. Praxis is rule governed human action. Individuals are not necessarily aware of the rules governing their praxis. They have internalised them to the extent that they have become their second nature. Only in moments of crisis can individuals gain an awareness of the habits governing their everyday lives, i.e. when a habitual process meets with an obstacle and the individual has to think of new ways of reaching its goal. This is the moment when new routes are discovered and new routines established. If many individuals meet similar obstacles and discover similar ways out (or if they copy each other's innovations), new routines can be established and may become normative in society. This is a form of creativity that does not necessarily depend on extra-quotidian collective acts, situations of collective effervescence or charismatic leadership. They are one way ordinary people contribute to social change in everyday situations where they creatively solve everyday problems.

Problem solving strategies involve first and foremost the competence of defining a problem. Individuals may have certain liberties in defining the problem they are facing but at the same time their definition cannot be totally arbitrary. To a certain degree the definition of the problem and the venues to its solution are determined by the situation in which they find themselves. To a certain extent, individuals are also free to choose between different but

equally rational problem solving strategies. In order to establish a new routine that is ultimately institutionalised in the form of social norms, a certain amount of collective coordination is required, if only tacitly. If made explicit, this process of coordination requires the manipulation of symbols (i.e. communication). The rules governing the usage of those symbols (i.e. their meanings) need to be shared between the individuals. Social change therefore depends on shared language.

2. George Herbert Mead

The first to have fully realised the mediating role of language in processes of collective coordination of action was the American pragmatist philosopher and psychologist George Herbert Mead. Mead sets out to understand the composite individual as a result of the symbolic interaction between its various components ‘I’, ‘Me’ and ‘Self’, and society as represented through a “generalised other” (Mead 1934: 90). Whereas the ‘I’ in Mead’s terminology is the source of spontaneous impulses, he calls ‘Me’ the representation of behavioural expectations of others as they are represented in the ‘Self’. Mead devised a theory of identity formation on the basis of the ability to take roles,

For each human being is able to react to his own expressions and actions as if he were the party addressed. In other words, humans anticipate the way partners in action would potentially behave in response, and create an inner representation of that response. This ability enables humans to gear their behaviour to what potentially would be that of partners. As the partner ... also had the same ability, a completely new pattern ... emerges for coordinating behaviour: coordination by means of a shared orientation towards patterns of mutual behavioural expectations.¹¹

This shared orientation towards patterns of mutual behavioural expectations is the foundation of moral norms and social rules.

Mead maintained that this was the basic trait of human sociality ... If an actor can objectify his own behaviour in the same manner as his partner, then what develops is an evaluative scale for spontaneous instinctive impulses, as these come to be seen in connection with anticipated reactions to the expression of these impulses. These expectations ... serve both as an evaluative agency that structures instinctive impulses and as an element in the emerging self-image.¹²

This emerging ‘Self’ is thus composed of the ‘I’, i.e. the source of spontaneous impulses, and the ‘Me’, i.e. the evaluative agency created out of a synthesis of behavioural expectations

¹¹ Joas 1992b: 187

¹² Joas 1992b: 187-8

derived from the anticipated reaction of others towards those impulses. Mead thus proposes a radically constructivist notion of ‘Self’ or personal identity:

Mead destroys the basis for assuming that individuality is a pre-given quality ... to his mind, the task for the actor is to create by himself a synthesis of the representations of the expectations [of the generalised ‘other’] ... The ‘self’ that thereby emerges is then a point of reference for unitary self-appraisal and for action orientation. It is thus by no means simply given from the outset of infant development, nor does it ever become the sure property of an individual as a product of mere maturation. Rather, Mead is interested in reconstructing an ability to create consistent behaviour within the conflict of different expectations and irregular instinctive impulses.¹³

The hint to a possible “conflict of different expectations and irregular instinctive impulses” is crucial for our interest in social change. Since social expectations are never uniform and instinctive impulses irregular, an element of *unpredictability* creeps into the patterns of human action. *Rule following* depends on the interpretation of possibly conflicting role expectations. Thus even in routine behaviour, which is based on the internalised expectations of the generalised other, an element of interpretation and thus variance enters even the pre-reflexive representations of these rules in the individual. Therefore even the routine behaviour of rule-conforming individuals is bound to vary and so will be its reflections in society. Variable responses to already varying ways of conforming to societies expectations potentiate their propensity to produce change.

Mead’s approach is especially suitable for the Indian context, where methodological individualism in the social sciences has raised so much criticism.¹⁴

Mead’s entire conceptual strategy is directed towards a non-individualist concept of social action. Whereas any action theory that is fundamentally individualistic would have to regard social action as a special case of something essentially construed as individual action, Mead starts from the ‘social act’, which he understands precisely not as individual action that refers to another person, but instead as a complex group activity, the parts of which are individual acts.¹⁵

In his own words, Mead is interested in “the conduct of the individual in terms of the organized conduct of the social group, rather than to account for the organized conduct of the social group in terms of the conduct of the separate individuals belonging to it”.¹⁶

¹³ Joas 1992b: 188, emphasis mine

¹⁴ Cf. Bhargava 2002; Rudolf 2005

¹⁵ Joas 1992: 189

¹⁶ Mead 1934: 7

For the post-war generations of the Frankfurt School, the work of George Herbert Mead has been invaluable. Apel, Habermas, Honneth and Joas build on the work of this American pragmatist. We will now take a look at the work of Hans Joas before leading over to Jürgen Habermas. Hans Joas is a philosopher in the guise of a sociologist.

IV. *The Frankfurt School*

1. Hans Joas

Against the rational choice approach that dominates much of social science and economic theory today, Hans Joas develops a “non-teleological interpretation of intentionality in human action”.¹⁷ Joas criticises that

*All theories of action which proceed from a type of rational action ... make at least three assumptions. They presuppose firstly that the actor is capable of purposive action, secondly that he has control over his own body, and thirdly that he is autonomous vis-à-vis his fellow human beings and environment ... The proponents of such conceptions are well aware that the preconditions assumed by the model of rational action are frequently not to be found in empirically observable action. However, these writers are forced to claim that the limited degree to which these preconditions obtain is not a deficiency of their particular theory but a fault of the actors themselves ... [What is needed] is therefore an analysis of the intentional character of human action, the specific corporeality and the primary sociality of all human capacity for action ... What emerges is a picture of the creativity of human action.*¹⁸

From the perspective of rational choice theories of action, lack of autonomy vis-à-vis fellow human beings in particular leads to the view of a person as not yet fully developed. This infantilising view of communitarian personalities has been met with much criticism in the postcolonial world. In India in particular, rational choice theory is often identified with ‘Western’ social science. We have to only remember how Ashis Nandy criticises Western understandings of rationality for infantilising Indians in view of their alleged lack of autonomy.¹⁹ We have to also realise, however, that there is a critique of the rational choice approach even in the West.

Intentional character, corporeality and sociality of human action

¹⁷ Joas 1992a, chap. 3.1

¹⁸ Joas 1992b: 147-8, emphasis in the original

¹⁹ Nandy 1983: 11-16

(Intentional character) The idea behind Joas' approach is that intentions are not something that occurs to an otherwise passive individual so as to motivate him/her for action. Joas emphasises that individuals are not normally inactive. They (almost) always act, if only virtually (speech acts, thought acts), and in so doing pursue ends, whether they are aware of it or not. The ends of our actions are built into our routines and these routines are normally like a *second nature* to us. They are our habit and all our habits taken together form our *habitus*, which is expressed in our body as well as in our mind. Our ends are not normally explicitly *on our minds* when we act. However, when asked (or when stumbling over an impediment) we may render them explicit. Only then we may reflect upon them or even change them.

(Corporeality) Joas' approach is radically anti-Cartesian in the sense that it does not take as a starting point the dualism between body and mind. Intentions are 'in' our body just as they are 'in' our mind. Mind and body are indistinguishable while we act (out of routine, i.e. when we walk or when we drive a car). Intentionality, when elevated to the level of consciousness, then becomes a way of self-reflectively navigating our ongoing behaviour. As post-Cartesians, our attitude to the world is not contemplative but active. The world is not presenting itself to an inert observer but is accessible to us through our interacting with it. The world discloses itself through our different modes of interaction. Things can be attainable or unattainable, familiar or unfamiliar, manageable or uncontrollable, responsive or irresponsive to our communicative interactive attempts.²⁰ Only when things seem unattainable, unfamiliar, uncontrollable or irresponsive do we halt in our routine and assume a contemplative attitude. Only then do we 'objectify' it and retire into contemplative subjectivity vis-à-vis our surrounding world. But even in this contemplative mode we are still embedded in a situation. This situation is not the pristine field in which we carry out intentions conceived elsewhere. Intentions are not only contingent with respect to our situation; they are constitutive of the conceptualisation of our situation.²¹ Intentions are generated through the engagement with a concrete situation but they are not fully determined by it. We build our intentions in dialogue, as it were, with a given situation.

[Intentions] may place us in situations, but do not in themselves provide a comprehensive answer to the challenges of these ... As a consequence, even in the case of purely individual action the concrete course taken by the action can never be fully traced back to some specific intentions. These may have been the decisive factors behind the particular plan, but they certainly do not determine the actual course the

²⁰ Joas 1992a: 233

²¹ Joas 1992a: 235

*action takes. Yet even drawing up a plan is not, as a rule, dependent on singly identifiable intentions. If, therefore, intentionality is to be thought of as a self-reflective realization and assessment of pre-reflective quasi-intentions in concrete situations, then motives and plans must be seen as the products of such reflections and not as the factual causes of action. Reflection on pre-reflective quasi-intentions depend, however, on a medium ... what is stated as a motive is always already based on a standardized vocabulary of possible and legitimate motives. Even when we try to clarify our motives in the solitude of self-reflection, we still cannot escape having to couch them in a common language.*²²

(Sociality) This leads us to the third characteristic of human action that Joas emphasises, its sociality. In as much as human action depends on reflection in a language whose vocabulary is shared by a group of people, it is always social even in moments when the agent is not actually interacting with anyone but him/herself. And again to the extent that our behaviour is social, it depends on social rules governing our linguistic behaviour. The reflection on first order motives governing our behaviour therefore points to second order motives governing our linguistic behaviour as speakers of a natural language. And in as much as our actions are governed by social norms, reflecting on these norms takes us to the rules governing our actions as speakers of the language that we share with the rest of society. Our shared language therefore enables reflection on our first order motives, but it also limits these reflections. The rules governing our language therefore open up space for reflection but at the same time restrict the same space. However by taking a third order look at these restrictive second order (linguistic) motives, we are able to open up new spaces by reflecting upon the way we speak – and therefore think – and by expanding this leeway from the vantage point of a meta-language. This process can be reiterated any number of times. For every object language we can create a meta-language from where to reflect on the rules governing the object language, and thereby revise them. Language therefore opens up limitless space for creativity – provided, however, that we do this collectively – for language, as we had already noted, is an essentially social phenomenon. As Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* has demonstrated, there can be no private language.²³

The full significance of the role of language has been realised by the second generation of the Frankfurt School, Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas. Apel devised a theory of transcendental pragmatics which Habermas used as a founding element for his discourse ethics.

²² Joas 1992b: 161-2

²³ Wittgenstein 1958 §243, §256 and onward

2. Jürgen Habermas

While most of the Frankfurt School followed a more or less Hegelian approach to social theory, Habermas tends towards neo-Kantianism. There is an apparent difficulty that neo-Kantian theories face when they are confronted with dissynchronous social circumstances.²⁴ We will see how Habermas avoids getting entrapped in these difficulties. Hegel had developed a concept of history and social change that could mediate between the Universalist aspirations of moral philosophy and the fact that universal philosophical truths can only be realised in particular historical circumstances. Neo-Kantian theories lack this mediating notion of history. When applied in normatively in-egalitarian (hierarchical) social contexts, neo-Kantian theories run into a contradiction. This contradiction occurs between their republican principle (R) and the fact that hierarchical social context may be adverse to the normative presupposition of equality inherent in their Universalist claim. The republican principle (R) reads as follows:

*(R) No-one should have to be subject to a coercive normative order to which s/he could not have given his/her assent.*²⁵

In contrast to non-republican theories of justice (utilitarian theories for example), republican theories cannot easily be expanded from one social/cultural context to another unless they can count on the *consent* of those to be governed by their principles. This leads to a predicament in contexts where the social, cultural and psychological conditions for such consent cannot be presupposed. My argument is that in such cases the extension of the theory justice has to wait for such conditions to historically *emerge* out of autonomous processes of social change from within these social and cultural contexts. I am arguing that such an *emergentic* theory of justice is implicit in Habermas' discourse ethics.

(R) is a premise made by all republican theories of justice in the tradition of Kant (i.e. also Rawls'). In his "Theory of Public Right" (*öffentliches Recht*), Kant speaks of the "lawful *freedom* [of the citizen] to obey no law other than that to which he has given his consent".²⁶ In this vein, neo-Kantian theories demand that society reach an agreement about the basic

²⁴ Ernst Bloch (1932) has coined the term 'dissynchrony' (Ungleichzeitigkeit) in his analysis of the contradictions in German life-forms in the run-up to Hitler's seize of power.

²⁵ The subjunctive refers to ideal conditions of consent, which different theories specify in different ways. Rawls calls it 'ideal theory' (1971: 9), Habermas 'ideal communication community' (ideale Kommunikationsgemeinschaft, 1985: 19).

²⁶ Kant 1989: 139, emphasis in the original ("[Kein Mensch habe einem anderen Gesetz zu gehorchen] als zu welchem er seine Beistimmung gegeben hat." Akademieausgabe VI, p. 314)

normative presuppositions that go into in the justification of the moral norms through practical reason. These *normative* presuppositions are grounded in an *empirical* reflective equilibrium regarding the value of equality, which can be presumed to obtain only in societies of a certain type. Thus the problem for any neo-Kantian theory of justice is this: How can principles of justice be based on moral norms, which are necessarily abstract and far removed from ethical life, and at the same time mediate between abstract moral and concrete social norms, which historically govern a particular life-world. This was the question originally raised by Hegel against Kant. Habermas is taking up this challenge in a lecture which is published only in German.²⁷

Habermas' *principle of universalization* demands that valid moral norms must satisfy the condition that "All affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its general observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of everyone's interests."²⁸ This leads to Habermas' *principle of discourse ethics*, which states that "Only those norms can be considered valid that could meet with the approval of all affected as participants in a practical discourse."²⁹ A necessary precondition for such a practical discourse is that "In principle all affected freely participate as equals in a cooperative search for the truth."³⁰ Habermas' principle of discourse ethics is founded on the following "fact of universal pragmatics": Only moral rules that could win the assent of all affected as participants in a practical discourse can claim validity."³¹ Thus the empirical condition and normative presupposition is that all affected can *freely* participate *as equals* in the practical discourse that leads to the justification of the normative order that governs their society. As Habermas agrees, these preconditions do not obtain everywhere and at all times. Habermas does not relinquish his claim to universality. He concedes, however, that prior and subsequent to the establishment of a universal norm:

²⁷ "Do Hegel's objections against Kant also apply to Discourse Ethics?" (Treffen Hegels Einwände gegen Kant auch auf die Diskursethik zu?) in Habermas 1985: 9-30.

²⁸ Habermas 2001: xvi, emphases in original ("So muß jede gültige Norm der Bedingung genügen, daß die Folgen und Nebenwirkungen, die sich jeweils aus ihrer *allgemeinen* Befolgung für die Befriedigung der Interessen eines *jeden* Einzelnen (voraussichtlich) ergeben, von *allen* Betroffenen akzeptiert ... werden können." Habermas 1983: 75-76, emphases in original).

²⁹ Habermas 1985: 12, my translation ("...daß nur diejenigen Normen Geltung beanspruchen dürfen, die die Zustimmung aller Betroffenen als Teilnehmer eines praktischen Diskurses finden könnten." Habermas 1985: 12).

³⁰ Habermas 1985: 13, my translation, my emphases ("...daß im Prinzip alle Betroffenen als Freie und Gleiche an einer Kooperativen Wahrheitssuche teilnehmen." Habermas 1985: 13).

³¹ Habermas 2001: 50 ("Auf diesen universalpragmatischen Sachverhalt stützt sich der diskursethische Grundsatz: daß nur diejenigen Normen Geltung beanspruchen dürfen, die die Zustimmung aller betroffenen als Teilnehmer eines praktischen Diskurses finden könnten." Habermas 1985: 61).

*Universalist morality depends on accommodating life worlds; it relies on a certain amount of conformity with practices of socialization and education ... on a certain degree of conformity with political and social institutions which already epitomise post-conventional ideas of morality and law.*³²

With “post-conventional consciousness” Habermas refers to Lawrence Kohlberg’s (1981) stage theory of moral development. According to Kohlberg, on the post-conventional level of moral consciousness, moral judgement is detached from the local conventions and historical hues of a particular life-form.³³ In modern societies moral consciousness reaches a level where moral agents are able to control their conduct based on highly abstract moral principles and rationally motivated convictions that they have internalised. They are therefore able to control their actions independently from external pressures that traditional social order with its ethical life exerts on the individual. Evidently, such post-conventional personalities are nurtured only in very specific life worlds, specifically modern milieus, which permit identity formation above and beyond the socially prescribed roles of traditional society.³⁴

Habermas describes the development of these social and psychological conditions as originating with modernity in the West but in a historical process of several hundred years, expanding across the world.³⁵ They are flanked, according to Habermas, by the development of more and more universal and far-reaching institutional guarantees for personal and collective autonomy:

In fact, Rousseau’s and Kant’s moral Universalism emerged in societies that were already characterised by such corresponding traits. Today, luckily, we live in western societies where in the last two-three hundred years a fallible, sometimes backfiring and rebounding, but nevertheless unidirectional process prevailed, leading to the realisation

³² My translation, emphasis in original (“Jede universalistische Moral ist auf *entgegenkommende* Lebensformen angewiesen. Sie bedarf einer gewissen Übereinstimmung mit Sozialisations- und Erziehungspraktiken ... mit solchen politischen und gesellschaftlichen Institutionen, in denen postkonventionelle Rechts- und Moralvorstellungen bereits verkörpert sind.” Habermas 1985: 25).

³³ “Deswegen spricht Kohlberg vom Übergang zur postkonventionellen Stufe des moralischen Bewußtseins. Auf dieser Stufe löst sich das moralische Urteil von den lokalen Übereinkünften und der historischen Färbung einer partikularen Lebensform“ (Habermas 1985: 39-40).

³⁴ “... ein System von inneren Verhaltenskontrollen, das auf prinzipiengeleitete moralische Urteile, also auf rational motivierende Überzeugungen anspricht und Selbststeuerung ermöglicht; es muß gegebenenfalls autonom, nämlich unabhängig vom sanften, aber externen Druck faktisch anerkannter, legitimer Ordnungen funktionieren können. Diesen Bedingungen genügt nur die vollständige Internalisierung von wenigen hochabstrakten und allgemeinen Prinzipien ... Es liegt auf der Hand, dass solche postkonventionellen Über-Ich-Strukturen nur in bestimmten Milieus entstehen können ... die Individuierungsvorgänge über die Grenzen einer traditionellen, an bestimmten sozialen Rollen haftenbleibenden Identität hinaustreiben” (Habermas 1985: 44).

³⁵ “Verflüssigung substantieller Weltbilder”, “Verallgemeinerung von Moral- und Rechtsnormen”, “Individuierung der vergesellschafteten Subjekte”, “okzidentaler Rationalismus”, “in Ausbreitung begriffen” (Habermas 1985: 45).

*of fundamental rights, a process, let us say, of a less and less selective interpretation of the Universalist content of fundamental rights norms.*³⁶

Thus, prior to the establishment of a practical discourse that could lead to a universally accepted norm; participants need to be inculcated with the necessary ideas, and trained to have the necessary dispositions, that make them suitable for Habermas' practical discourse. Habermas emphasises that the "[Practical] discourse itself cannot produce the conditions necessary to empower all affected to properly participate."³⁷ Participants need to be able and willing to transcend their traditional morality, which effectively amounts to the acceptance of the equal worth of all affected. "[The participants] must make a pragmatic presupposition to the effect that all affected can in principle freely participate as equals in a cooperative search for the truth in which the force of the better argument alone can influence the outcome."³⁸ Moreover, with the empirical preconditions that need to obtain for Habermas' discourse ethics to get off the ground, the mutual entanglement of abstract moral universalism and concrete ethical life does not end. Even subsequent to the establishment of a universally accepted norm, its application again depends on functioning institutions. Habermas points out that "[The] discursive justification of a norm cannot simultaneously ensure the realisation of the corresponding moral insights."³⁹

We have seen that Habermas is fully aware of the historical contingencies on which depends his procedural account of moral universalism. For the procedure (practical discourse) to even get off the ground, certain historical conditions have to obtain and for its results to become effective in a society yet another set of conditions needs to be in place. But what if they don't?

Habermas claims that there is probably no human life-form to be found on this planet without at least some elements out of which the necessary preconditions for practical discourse could not be developed. Whoever grew up in a halfway undisturbed family situation, whoever has experienced circumstances which guarantee mutual recognition and some symmetry in

³⁶ Habermas 1985: 25-26, my translation, emphases in original: "Tatsächlich ist ja der moralische Universalismus durch Rousseau und Kant erst im Kontext einer Gesellschaft *entstanden*, die solche *korrespondierenden* Züge aufweist. Heute leben wir glücklicherweise in westlichen Gesellschaften, in denen sich seit zwei bis drei Jahrhunderten ein zwar fallibler, immer wieder fehlschlagender und zurückgeworfener, gleichwohl aber *gerichteter* Prozeß der Verwirklichung von Grundrechten, der Prozeß einer, sagen wir: immer weniger selektiven Ausschöpfung der universalistischen Gehalte von Grundrechtsnormen durchgesetzt hat."

³⁷ Habermas 1985: 27 ("Vom Diskurs selbst können die Bedingungen nicht erfüllt werden, die notwendig sind, damit alle jeweils Betroffenen für eine regelrechte Teilnahme an praktischen Diskursen instandgesetzt werden.")

³⁸ Habermas 2001: 49-50, my emphases ("die Teilnehmer [müssen] pragmatisch voraussetzen, daß im Prinzip alle Betroffenen als Freie und Gleiche an einer kooperativen Wahrheitssuche teilnehmen." Habermas 1984: 61).

³⁹ "... daß die diskursive Begründung von Normen nicht zugleich die Verwirklichung moralischer Einsichten sicherstellen kann" (Habermas 1985: 27).

expectations and perspectives, circumstances that are not completely disrupted by systematically distorted communication, would have attained the required moral intuition necessary for an engagement in Habermas' practical discourse.⁴⁰ But this may not be enough. Oppressive social circumstances may be too overpowering for such sprouts to grow anywhere near a reform of society. In the contrary, oppressive social circumstances can seriously interfere with interpersonal and family relations so as distort their predisposition for mutuality.

As a factual presupposition, republican theories like Habermas' need to take as fact the *effective* recognition of the equal dignity of all human beings *as human beings*. With 'effective' I mean that as a minimal condition they be recognised by those parts of society whose discourse exerts *hegemony*⁴¹ over the rest of society. This is at the same time an empirical as well as a meta-ethical condition. It alone lends plausibility to the assumption that all concerned by a certain social order would be likely to engage in counterfactual thought experiments along the lines of Habermas, which produce conditions of reciprocity and equality among empirically inequitably and unequally positioned individuals. These thought experiments lead to a normative order where social and juridical norms pertain to all individuals alike.

But even in life-forms where the value of different liberties and the consequences for the breach of norms vary due to differences in gender, status, and station, as in erstwhile feudal societies, islands of equality exist from which processes of social change can begin. In such societies, hierarchical representations of social order exert hegemony over egalitarian representations. Nevertheless, egalitarian principles may prevail in insular form for example among individuals within the same status group, age group and gender. Ernst Tugendhat has pointed to the fact that these islands of equality never seem in need of justification. He concludes that the onus of proof is therefore on the defenders of inequality, which offers at least a slight argumentative advantage to the defenders of equality.⁴²

How are we then to extend Habermas' ideas to such societies? Not by imposing egalitarian values, as this would produce resistance and thus prevent free consent. Forceful measures are

⁴⁰ "Wer immer in einer halbwegs ungestörten Familie aufgewachsen ist, wer seine Identität in Verhältnissen wechselseitiger Anerkennung ausgebildet hat, wer sich in jenen Symmetrien von Erwartungen und Perspektiven behauptet ... in Verhältnissen aufwachsen, die nicht durch systematisch verzerrte Kommunikationen vollständig zerrissen sind ... der muß eine Art von moralischen Intuition erworben haben ..." (Habermas 1985: 78)

⁴¹ As "intellectual and moral leadership," Gramsci 1971: 57.

⁴² Tugendhat 1997.

anyway ruled out by a republican theory's own standard (R). Instead, Habermas reminds us that "The incremental incorporation of moral principles in concrete life-forms ... is chiefly owed to the collective efforts and sacrifices of social and political movements"⁴³ – from within these societies themselves, as we might add.⁴⁴ In Situations where hierarchy prevails over equality, we have to wait for social and political movements to bring about conditions suitable enough for Kohlberg's post-conventional consciousness to arise on a broad social scale. Only then can we engage in a wide-ranging social discourse about justice which may lead to the emergence of universal moral principles. The diagnosis of a possible asynchrony⁴⁵ within the same life-form, global or regional, is what makes these reflections relevant for questions of global justice.

3. Rahel Jaeggi

Joas' and Habermas' approach would rest on pious hope if we could not show how philosophical analysis and social critique can mediate and act as a catalysts in processes of social change. This is what fourth generation Critical Theorist Rahel Jaeggi attempts with her conception of "immanent critique".⁴⁶

Social and political movements have various strategies at their disposal to bring about social change. In the remainder of this paper, I shall explore the role of *critique* in social movements, which are geared towards bringing about the hegemony of egalitarian over hierarchical ideas of social order. For an immanent critique of existing life-forms, social and political movements systematically use existing islands of equality and submerged egalitarian traditions from within the nested and interlaced bundles of social practices that make up a complex life-form, a culture or a society.⁴⁷

Life-forms, according to Rahel Jaeggi, are "bundles of social practices with habitual character and normative expectation." They include "habitualised attitudes and behaviours of a

⁴³ my translation ("die schrittweise Verkörperung von moralischen Grundsätzen in konkreten Lebensformen ... verdankt sich in erster Linie den kollektiven Anstrengungen und Opfern sozialer und politischer Bewegungen." Habermas 1985: 25-26).

⁴⁴ my translation ("Der geschichtlichen Dimension, der diese Bewegungen angehören, darf sich auch die Philosophie nicht entziehen fühlen." Habermas 1985: 25-26). "Philosophy," Habermas writes, "should not blind itself to the historical dimension of these movements." (ibid.) We are reminded of Gramsci's (1971: 5) "organic" intellectual.

⁴⁵ Ernst Bloch (1932) has coined the term 'asynchrony' (Ungleichzeitigkeit) in his analysis of the contradictions in German life-forms in the run-up to Hitler's seize of power.

⁴⁶ Jaeggi 2014: 277-308

⁴⁷ I am drawing here on Rahel Jaeggi's (2014: 277-320) conception of an "immanent critique" of life-forms.

normative nature,” which relate to ethical life, although they are “not strictly codified or institutionalised”.⁴⁸ Most importantly, they are not objective facts but intersubjective. The identity conditions of life-forms are neither independent from human subjectivity nor arbitrary. They are dependent on subjective acts of interpretation but the social character of these interpretations makes life-forms non-arbitrary from the perspective of the individual.

Normally we inhabit our life-forms in a way that we take the social order that they represent for granted. We have formed our identities in congruence with society’s expectations and we have internalised the rules governing social behaviour to the extent that they have become second nature to us. If asked, we may be able to explicate these rules but normally we are not conscious of them. The ethical life of our community has become our *habitus*; it is ingrained in our personality and even in our body. Now, like Habermas, drawing on the American pragmatist tradition, especially Dewey and Mead, Jaeggi points to moments of crisis when established practices meet with unexpected obstacles and routine behaviour comes to a halt. It is in these moments of *crisis* that we reflect on what we are doing and begin to search for new ways. This is the moment when established norms and practises are questioned and can be critiqued.

Jaeggi distinguishes three forms of critique, *external*, *internal* and *immanent*. *External* critique evaluates a given life-form with reference to demands that go beyond the principles inherent in this life-form or which question the life-form altogether.⁴⁹ The external critique does not share with the participants of a life-form their commitment to its inherent norms. *Internal* critique, by contrast, uses demands and norms already inherent in a life-form to criticise an eventual lack of compliance.⁵⁰ Internal critique does not aim for the reform or fundamental change of a life-form or for the establishment of a new social order. Instead it aims at the recovery or re-establishment of those already accepted norms that it perceives as having come into misuse or oblivion.⁵¹

Immanent critique contrasts with both, external and internal critique. Unlike external critique, it “localises the normativity of social practices within the conditions of their execution itself. But immanent critique assumes that the contexts from which it derives its standards are

⁴⁸ Jaeggi 2014: 77.

⁴⁹ Jaeggi 2014: 261.

⁵⁰ Jaeggi 2014: 263.

⁵¹ Jaeggi 2014: 265.

contradictory in themselves. Therefore, it is no accident that these standards are not realised for they are marred with a systematic problem.”⁵² According to Jaeggi, the systematic problem inherent in an established practice reveals itself only through theoretic reflection.⁵³ The internal contradictions of a life-form in crisis need to be analysed and understood by the critique using only those resources that are available with the ‘material’ provided within the life-form itself. Immanent critique thereby gains an exemplary role for the participants of a life-form in crisis. It demonstrates how any such participants can move from A to B without requiring resources other than those available to all.

Furthermore, the analysis of the crisis as rooted in an internal contradiction of a life-form needs to point out the *constitutive character* of this contradiction for the life-form in question. Mutually incompatible demands or norms are not by chance integrated in the same life-form and cause its tension; – this tension plays an instrumental role in the constitution of the life-form. Here Jaeggi draws on Hegel for whom modern life is marred by the contradiction of emphasising individual autonomy and setting the individual free from traditional communal bindings while at the same time increasing the dependency of the individual on an ever more tightly integrated society for its survival. For Hegel, and later Marx, the constitutive character of this fundamental contradiction of modern life lay in its propensity to dynamise the labour market and thereby early capitalist society. While the individual gained freedom from bonded labour, it also ‘gained’ the freedom to starve to death if it could not find a job on the ‘free’ labour market. Hegel attributes a tragic character to the contradictions of modern life. The trope of a tragic entrapment, where all sides want only well, but produce only disaster, may not be a suitable template to follow in *every* analysis of life-form in crisis. But immanent critique may not only be limited to this type of analysis. Important features to retain from Jaeggi’s conception of *immanent critique* are (1) its normative innovativeness and (2) its conscious limitation to only those cultural resources that are available to the participants in the life-form in question.

V. Conclusion

Jaeggi as well as Habermas dismiss the notion of historical determinism. Social change, whether local or global, remains an open ended process. In particular, it remains open whether

⁵² Jaeggi 2014: 277, my translation. The question whether the internal contradictions characteristic of life-forms in crisis are a contingent or a necessary feature of their analysis is left open by Jaeggi.

⁵³ Jaeggi 2014: 278.

local processes of change combine to yield a unified global tendency or whether the trend would lead to a globalisation of local particularisms. However, Habermas' and Jaeggi's conception of life-form is malleable enough to permit the overlapping and intersection of life-forms.

The horizon of every form of life is fluid, its boundaries permeable. There is no absolute barrier to the 'desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible.'⁵⁴ Practical knowledge can all the more readily claim to be knowledge the more radically we open ourselves to others and expand our local knowledge and ethnocentric outlook – indeed, extend our community in a virtual manner such that our discourse ultimately includes all subjects capable of speech and action.⁵⁵

A complex life-form therefore can share in global and in local life simultaneously. If we submit that local processes of change combined to yield a global tendency favourable to egalitarian conceptions of social order, then this would have produced the necessary conditions for a global practical discourse to get off the ground. The result of such a discourse would be moral principles with a global reach. These in turn could legitimise a global theory of justice. Habermas speaks of universal moral principles. But it seems that Habermas' universalism is somewhat less universal than Kant's. Habermas' approach potentially includes 'all subjects capable of speech and action'. It therefore remains internal to the globalised human perspective. Unlike Kant, Habermas does not reach out to rational beings as such, human or non-human, planetary or extra-planetary. His perspective remains internal to our human world.⁵⁶ It is cosmopolitan more than it is universal, and it is historically indeterminate: the shrine of universal moral values remains empty, the concept of universal moral norm vacuous, until humanity has reached its potential to form a global practical discourse community.

VI. References

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⁵⁴ Rorty 1985: 5, quoted in Habermas 2001: 124.

⁵⁵ Habermas 2001: 124, emphases in original.

⁵⁶ Habermas' universalism remains an *internal universalism* as described in Dusche 2000, §5.

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