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Introduction

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"In the philosophical discourse of modernity," writes Habermas, "we are still contemporaries of the Young Hegelians." Distancing themselves from Hegel's attempt to replace the subject-centered reason of the Enlightenment with Absolute Knowledge, Marx and the other Left Hegelians already announced the "desublimation of the spirit" and a consequent "disempowering of philosophy." Since that time, these tendencies have continued apace. The overwhelming "impurity" of reason, its unavoidable entanglement in history and tradition, society and power, practice and interest, body and desire, has prompted, among others, Nietzsche's heroic proclamation of the end of philosophy, Wittgenstein's therapeutic farewell, and Heidegger's dramatic overcoming. The current end-of-philosophy debates are largely echoes of and variations upon themes developed in these earlier rounds. For French poststructuralism, which serves as the point of departure for these lectures, it is above all Nietzsche and Heidegger who furnish the inspiration and set the agenda. Habermas is concerned here to respond to the challenge posed by the radical critique of reason in contemporary French thought by reexamining "the philosophical discourse of modernity" from which it issues. His strategy is to return to those historical "crossroads" at which Hegel and the Young Hegelians, Nietzsche, and Heidegger made the fateful decisions that led to this outcome; his aim is to identify and clearly mark out a road indicated but not taken: the determinate negation of subject-centered reason by reason understood as communicative action.
That strategy and aim define the focus and compass of the lectures. They deal with modernity as a theme of philosophical, not aesthetic, discourse. There are, however, some significant overappings, for the aesthetic critique of modernity has played a crucial role in the philosophical critique — from Schiller and Romanticism to Nietzsche and poststructuralism. In particular, the realm of radical experience — of experience set free from the constraints of morality and utility, religion and science — opened up by avant-garde art has figured prominently in more recent attacks on the egocentric, domineering, objectifying, and repressing "sovereign rational subject." From Nietzsche to Bataille, it has seemed to provide access to the outlawed "other" of reason, which typically furnishes, if often only implicitly, the criteria for that critique. Habermas also discusses earlier accounts of art's potential to reconcile the fragmented moments of reason, as well as Nietzsche's and Heidegger's variations on the theme of an aesthetically renewed mythology (Dionysus as the absent god who is coming).

But the enhanced significance of the aesthetic is only one facet of the philosophical discourse of modernity, which turns centrally on the critique of subjectivistic rationalism. The strong conceptions of reason and of the autonomous rational subject developed from Descartes to Kant have, despite the constant pounding given them in the last one hundred and fifty years, continued to exercise a broad and deep — often subterranean — influence. The conception of "man" they define is, according to the radical critics of enlightenment, at the core of Western humanism, which accounts in their view for its long complicity with terror. In proclaiming the end of philosophy — whether in the name of negative dialectics or genealogy, the destruction of metaphysics or deconstruction — they are in fact targeting the self-assertive and self-aggrandizing notion of reason that underlies Western "logocentrism." The critique of subject-centered reason is thus a prologue to the critique of a bankrupt culture.

To the necessity that characterizes reason in the Cartesian-Kantian view, the radical critics typically oppose the contingency and conventionality of the rules, criteria, and products of what counts as rational speech and action at any given time and place; to its universality, they oppose an irreducible plurality of incommensurable lifeworlds and forms of life, the irremediably "local" character of all truth, argument, and validity; to the apriori, the empirical; to certainty, fallibility; to unity, heterogeneity; to homogeneity, the fragmentary; to self-evident givenness ("presence"), universal mediation by differential systems of signs (Saussure); to the unconditioned, a rejection of ultimate foundations in any form. Interwoven with this critique of reason is a critique of the sovereign rational subject — atomistic and autonomous, disengaged and disembodied, potentially and ideally self-transparent. It is no longer possible, the critics argue, to overlook the influence of the unconscious on the conscious, the role of the preconceptual and nonconceptual in the conceptual, the presence of the irrational — the economy of desire, the will to power — at the very core of the rational. Nor is it possible to ignore the intrinsically social character of "structures of consciousness," the historical and cultural variability of categories of thought and principles of action, their interdependence with the changing forms of social and material reproduction. And it is equally evident that "mind" will be misconceived if it is opposed to "body," as will theory if it is opposed to practice: Subjects of knowledge are embodied and practically engaged with the world, and the products of their thought bear ineradicable traces of their purposes and projects, passions and interests. In short, the epistemological and moral subject has been definitively decenterted and the conception of reason linked to it irrevocably desublimated. Subjectivity and intentionality are not prior to, but a function of, forms of life and systems of language; they do not "constitute" the world but are themselves elements of a linguistically disclosed world.

Another important strand in the radical critique of reason can be traced back to Nietzsche's emphasis on the rhetorical and aesthetic dimensions of language. Thus, a number of critics seek to undercut philosophy's traditional self-delimitation from rhetoric and poetics as reflected in the standard oppositions between logos and mythos, logic and rhetoric, literal and figurative, concept and metaphor, argument and narrative, and the like. Pursuing Nietzsche's idea that philosophical texts are
After the model of self-consciousness. Feeling the need to grasp “reason” in more modest terms, the Left and Right Hegelians also chose paths still marked by the philosophy of the subject — with, as Habermas shows, consequences that continue to reverberate in contemporary praxis philosophy, on the other hand, and in recent vintages of neoconservatism, on the other. While it is his intention in these lectures to resume and renew the “counterdiscourse” that, as a critique of subjectivism and its consequences, has accompanied modernity from the start, his immediate focus is on the “counter-Enlightenment” path hewn by Nietzsche — or, rather, on the two paths that lead out of Nietzsche into the present, one running through Heidegger to Derrida, the other through Bataille to Foucault.

At the heart of Habermas’s disagreement with Heidegger and his followers is the putative “ontological difference” between Being and beings, between world-view structures and what appears within these worlds. In Habermas’s view, this distinction is deployed so as to uproot propositional truth and devalue discursive, argumentative thought. After hypothesizing the world-disclosive aspect of language and disconnecting it from innerworldly learning processes, Heidegger leaves us with a kind of linguistic historicism, outfitted with the quasi-religious trappings of a “truth-occurrence,” a “destining of Being,” to which we can only submit in an attitude of “expectant indeterminacy.” Habermas argues that this construal misses the dialectical interdependence between a historically shaped understanding of the world and the experience and practice possible within its horizon. Innerworldly practice is indeed informed by general, pregiven structures of world-understanding; but these structures are in turn affected and changed by the cumulative results of experiencing and acting within the world. Social practice submits the background knowledge of the lifeworld to an “ongoing test” across the entire spectrum of validity claims. Meaning cannot be separated from validity; and it is precisely the orientation of actors to validity claims that makes learning processes possible — learning processes that may well cast doubt on the adequacy of the world views informing social practice. Because Heideg-
ger ignores this reciprocal connection between propositional truth and truth-as-disclosure and reduces the former to the latter, his "overcoming of metaphysics" amounts in the end to a "temporalized superfoundationalism."

This has broader implications for the Heideggerian reading of modernity. The "palpable distortions" of a one-sidedly rationalized world get enciphered into an "impalpable Seinsgeschick administered by philosophers." This cuts off the possibility of deciphering the pathologies of modern life in social-theoretical terms and frees their critique from the rigors of concrete historical analysis. "Essential thinking" consigns questions that can be decided by empirical investigation or theoretical construction — by any form of argumentative or discursive thought — to the devalued realm of the ontic and leaves us instead with the "empty, formulaic avowal of some indeterminate authority."

In a long excursus on the literary-theoretical reception of Derrida in the United States, Habermas deploys the same views of language and practice to resist the leveling of the genre distinction between philosophy and literature and the reversal of the traditional primacy of logic over rhetoric with which it is linked. Once the impossibility of a Platonic conception of logos is acknowledged and the omnipresence of the rhetorical dimensions of language is recognized, the argument goes, philosophical discourse can no longer be (mis)conceived as logical rather than literary, literal rather than figurative — in short, it can no longer be conceived as philosophical in any emphatic sense of the term. The strategies of rhetorical analysis, which is concerned with the qualities and effects of texts in general, extend to the would-be independent realm of philosophical texts as well. As Habermas reconstructs it, the heart of this argument is whether or not it is possible to draw a viable distinction between everyday speech (as it functions within contexts of communicative action) and poetic discourse. If not, then the aestheticizing of language proposed by Derrida carries, with the consequence that any given discourse can properly be analyzed by rhetorical-literary means. Habermas defends a position that, while not denying the omnipresence and ineradicability of rhetorical and poetic elements in everyday discourse, insists on distinguishing those contexts in which the poetic function predominates, and thus structurally determines discourse, from those in which it plays a subordinate and supplementary role. We are dealing here with a continuum, no doubt. Toward one end of the spectrum, we find the ordinary communicative uses of language in which illocutionary force serves to coordinate the actions of different participants: normal speech as part of everyday social practice. Toward the other end, we find those uses in which the fictional, narrative, metaphorical elements that pervade ordinary language take on a life of their own; illocutionary force is "bracketed" and language is disengaged from everyday practical routines. In the communicative practice of everyday life, language functions as a medium for dealing with problems that arise within the world. It is thus subject to an ongoing test and tied to processes of learning. In poetic discourse, by contrast, the everyday pressure to decide and to act is lifted, and the way is free for displaying the world-disclosive power of innovative language. In Derrida and his followers, Habermas argues, language's capacity to solve problems disappears behind its world-creating capacity. Thus, they fail to recognize the unique status of specialized discourses differentiated out from communicative action to deal with specific types of problems and validity claims: science and technology, law and morality, economics and political science, and so forth. In these discourses, as in the philosophy that mediates between them and the everyday world, the invariably present rhetorical elements of speech are "bridled," "enlisted for special purposes of problem solving," and "subordinated to distinct forms of argumentation."

Along the other main path leading from Nietzsche to the contemporary critique of reason, the key points at issue are somewhat different. The critique of metaphysics is not given pride of place in this more "anarchist" strain; there is no "mysticism of Being" conjured up here. The target is still subject-centered reason and the domination of nature, society, and the self that it promotes. But the guiding thread is now Nietzsche's theory of power, and the fundamental premise is that modern reason is nothing more than a perverted and disguised will to
power. The aim of critique is, then, to strip away the veil of reason and to reveal naked the power it serves. In Bataille, this takes the form of an invocation and investigation of "the other of reason"—of what is expelled and excluded from the world of the useful, calculable, and manipulable. In Foucault, it takes the form of a genealogical unmasking that reveals the essential intrication of knowledge with power. Habermas devotes two lectures to Foucault, and readers might justifiably conclude that in his dialogue with French poststructuralism, Foucault is the preferred partner. More than any other of the radical critics of reason, Foucault opens up a field of investigation for social research; there is in his work no "mystification" of social pathologies into the "destinings" of this or that primordial force. Like Horkheimer and Adorno, he is sensitive to the power claims lurking in theoretical and practical reason; and also like them, he attaches to the concept of power both a transcendental-historical and a social-theoretical significance.

Genealogy is, on the one hand, a kind of transcendental historiography. Its aim, as Foucault once put it, is to construct a "history of the objectification of objectivities," a "nominalist critique," by way of historical analysis, of the fundamental ideas in terms of which we constitute ourselves as subjects and objects of knowledge. It treats any such constitution as a historical event, constructing an indefinite number of internal and external relations of intelligibility around it. The "theoretical-political" point of this "analytic decomposition," Foucault tells us, is to "show that things weren't as necessary as all that," to replace the unitary, necessary, and invariant with the multiple, contingent, and arbitrary. In particular, Foucault wants to break the hold on our minds of the modern "sciences of man," behind whose facade of universality and objectivity is concealed the ever-spreading operation of modern techniques of domination and of the self. This points to the second aspect of genealogy: It serves also as a historically oriented, more or less functionalist, critical sociology of knowledge, aimed in particular at types of knowledge that, incorporated into therapies and social technologies, serve as the main conduits for the normalizing and disciplinary effects of "truth."

Habermas's disagreements with Foucault certainly do not amount to a blanket rejection of this critical perspective on power-knowledge configurations. It is the "totalization" of critique that he objects to, the transformation of the critique of reason by reason—which from Kant to Marx had taken on the sociohistorical form of a critique of ideology—into a critique of reason tout court in the name of a "rhetorically affirmed other of reason." On his view, the real problem is too little rather than too much enlightenment, a deficiency rather than an excess of reason. And he supports this view with a double-edged critique of Foucault's "totalization," one edge applying to the transcendental-historiographic aspect of genealogy, the other to its social-theoretical aspect. Briefly, he argues that Foucault cannot escape the "performative contradiction" involved in using the tools of reason to criticize reason; this has the serious consequence of landing his genealogical investigations in a situation embarrassingly similar to that of the "sciences of man" he so tellingly criticized. The ideas of meaning, validity, and value that were to be eliminated by genealogical critique come back to haunt it in the spectral forms of "presentism," "relativism," and "cryptonormativism." On the other hand, the social-theoretical reading of modernity inspired by the theory of power turns out to be simply an inversion of the standard humanist reading it is meant to replace. It is, argues Habermas, no less one-sided: The essentially ambiguous phenomena of modern culture and society are "flattened down" onto the plane of power. Thus, for example, the internal development of law and morality, which on his view bears effects of emancipation as well as of domination, disappears from Foucault's account of their normalizing functions. It is precisely the ambiguity of rationalization processes that has to be captured, the undeniable achievements as well as the palpable distortions; and this calls for a reconstructed dialectic of enlightenment rather than a totalized critique of it.

As I mentioned at the outset, Habermas's strategy is to return to the counterdiscourse of modernity—neglected by Nietzsche and his followers—in which the principle of a self-sufficient, self-assertive subjectivity was exposed to telling criticism and a "counterreckoning" of the cost of modernity was drawn up.
Examining the main crossroads in this counterdiscourse, he points to indications of a path opened but not pursued: the construal of reason in terms of a noncoercive intersubjectivity of mutual understanding and reciprocal recognition. Returning to the first major crossroad, he uses this notion to reconstruct Hegel’s idea of ethical life and to argue that the other of reason invoked by the post-Nietzscheans is not adequately rendered in their “model of exclusion”; it is better seen as a divided and destroyed ethical totality. Habermas follows Hegel also in viewing reason as a healing power of unification and reconciliation; however, it is not the Absolute that he has in mind, but the unforced intersubjectivity of rational agreement. At the second major crossroad, he follows Marx’s indication that philosophy must become practical, that its rational content has to be mobilized in practice. This yields a counterposition to the post-Nietzschean privileging of “the extraordinary” — limit experiences of aesthetic, mystical, or archaic provenance. If situated reason is viewed as social interaction, the potential of reason has to be realized in the communicative practice of ordinary, everyday life. The social practice Habermas has in mind cannot, however, be identified with Marx’s conception of labor; in his view, productive activity is too specific and too restricted a notion to serve as a paradigm of rational practice. Furthermore, it harbors an idealist residue — labor as constitutive of a world in alienated form that has to be reappropriated — that needs to be overcome if we are to get definitively beyond the paradigm of subjectivity. The solution he opposes to the simple elimination of the subject is a kind of “determinate negation”: If communicative action is our paradigm, the decentered subject remains as a participant in social interaction mediated by language. On this account, there is an internal relation of communicative practice to reason, for language use is oriented to validity claims, and validity claims can in the end be redeemed only through intersubjective recognition brought about by the enforced force of reason. The internal relation of meaning to validity means that communication is not only always “immanent” — that is, situated, conditioned — but also always “transcendent” — that is, geared to validity claims that are meant to hold beyond any local context and thus can be indefinitely criticized, defended, revised: “Validity claims have a Janus face. As claims, they transcend any local context; at the same time, they have to be raised here and now and be de facto recognized . . . . The transcendent moment of universal validity bursts every provinciality asunder; the obligatory moment of accepted validity claims renders them carriers of a context-bound everyday practice . . . . a moment of unconditionality is built into factual processes of mutual understanding — the validity laid claim to is distinguished from the social currency of a de facto established practice and yet serves it as the foundation of an existing consensus.” This orientation of communicative action to validity claims admitting of argument and counterargument is precisely what makes possible the learning processes that lead to transformations of our world views and thus of the very conditions and standards of rationality.

In sum, then, Habermas agrees with the radical critics of enlightenment that the paradigm of consciousness is exhausted. Like them, he views reason as inescapably situated, as concretized in history, society, body, and language. Unlike them, however, he holds that the defects of the Enlightenment can only be made good by further enlightenment. The totalized critique of reason undercut the capacity of reason to be critical. It refuses to acknowledge that modernization bears developments as well as distortions of reason. Among the former, he mentions the “unthawing” and “reflective refraction” of cultural traditions, the universalization of norms and generalization of values, and the growing individuation of personal identities — all prerequisites for that effectively democratic organization of society through which alone reason can, in the end, become practical.