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RESEARCH ARTICLE

American Pragmatism, the Frankfurt School, and the future of Critical International Relations Theory

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Abstract

Critical International Relations Theory (CIRT) is in 'crisis'. Some argue for a recovery of 'the inspirational quality' of Horkheimer and Adorno's first-generation negative critique. Certainly the challenge of right-wing populism begs questions of CIRT's 'consolatory' cosmopolitanism. I have two concerns however. First, these proposals underplay the reasons why first-generation theorising failed; secondly, CIRT risks throwing the second-generation Habermas–Linklater 'baby' out with the 'bathwater' at the moment it has particular value. I do two things. I look back to pre-Habermasian Critical Theory, but I set a future agenda based on the Pragmatism of John Dewey. This helps CIRT realise the emancipatory potential in IR's recent 'practice turn', addressing concerns that CIRT is disengaged. It also brings balance to negative and positive critiques, offering a novel challenge to critical/problem-solving binaries in ways that speak to real-world challenges like climate change. Second, I look forward from Habermasian-inspired theory to the third-generation (and Pragmatist-inspired) 'recognition theory' of Honneth. This brings a critical edge to IR ontological security studies, further develops the praxeological branch of CIRT, and better informs the political left's response to the alienating effects of the liberal international order and the rise of right-wing populism.

Keywords: Critical Theory; liberal international order; ontological security; populism; practice theory; Pragmatism

Social theorists have long indicated the value of Pragmatism for reviving the emancipatory hopes of Critical Theory, but it has yet to inform discussions on the future of Critical International Relations Theory (CIRT).[1] This is regrettable because, in contrast to the hope offered by these accounts, CIRT seems to be in varying states of 'self-doubt',[2] 'crisis',[3] and in need of 'urgent rethinking'[4] or

[1]Roberto Frega, 'Between Pragmatism and Critical Theory', *Human Studies*, 37:1 (2014), pp. 57–82; 'Pragmatism and democracy in a global world', *Review of International Studies*, 43:4 (2017), pp. 720–41; *Pragmatism and the Wide View of Democracy* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Kadlec, 'Reconstructing Dewey: The philosophy of Critical Pragmatism', *Polity*, 38:4 (2006), pp. 519–42; Philip Kitcher, 'Pragmatism, Critical Theory, and the invisibility of moral/social problems', in Julia Christ, Kristina Lepold, Daniel Loick, and Titus Stahl (eds), *Debating Critical Theory: Engagements with Axel Honneth* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020); Felix Petersen, Hauke Brunkhorst, and Martin Seeliger, 'Critical problems and pragmatist solutions', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 48:10 (2022), pp. 1341–52; Larry Ray, 'Pragmatism and Critical Theory', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 7:3 (2004), pp. 307–21.

[2]Jean-Francois Drolet and Michael C. Williams, 'From critique to reaction: The new right, critical theory and international relations', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 18:1 (2021), pp. 23–45 (p. 24).

[3]Davide Schmid, 'The poverty of Critical Theory in IR', *European Journal of International Relations*, 24:1 (2018), pp. 198–220; *The Poverty of Critical Theory in International Relations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

[4]Stephen Hobden, *Critical Theory and International Relations* (Manchester University Press, 2023), p. 151.

'reimagining'.[5] For Beate Jahn, CIRT has become a victim of the success it achieves when it reaches beyond the Frankfurt School to include feminist, post-colonial, and race theory. From this perspective, CIRT has changed the discipline and has even become 'part of the establishment'. The problem is that the academic discipline operates within a neoliberal system that perpetuates the harms feminist, post-colonial, race, and Frankfurt School theories identify.[6] The way forward is to go backwards in time; to recover Max Horkheimer's original definition of Critical Theory, to stop trying to solve systemic problems, and to regain CIRT's 'inspirational quality' by disentangling itself 'from the alignment with hegemonic historical forces'.[7] Davide Schmid similarly writes about CIRT's 'crisis of critique'. Under the influence of Jürgen Habermas and Andrew Linklater, CIRT has become a project of normative political theory rather than a project of emancipatory political practice. While creating the means by which standards of appropriate behaviour (i.e. norms) are positively constructed, CIRT has forgotten Theodore Adorno's emphasis on 'the negativity of critique'.[8] Emancipation lies not in the pursuit of a normative ideal but in 'the negation of real historical structures of domination'.[9]

Certainly, the rise of a hyper-masculinised, anthropocentric, xenophobic, and dehumanising nationalism – which forms part of the right-wing populist response to the alienating effects of the liberal international order (LIO)[10] – begs questions of CIRT. Schmid's charge that Linklater's CIRT is a 'consolatory' form of cosmopolitanism hits the mark against the backdrop of misogynistic violence, international aggression, inhumane practice, and a failure to phase out fossil fuels. What is the point of 'harm conventions' if power simply ignores them?[11] I have two concerns with the way the future of CIRT is being signposted, however. First, current proposals underplay the reasons why first-generation Frankfurt School theorising failed; and, secondly, CIRT now risks throwing the Habermas/Linklater 'baby' out with the 'bathwater' at the very moment it has value. Put differently, I am concerned CIRT will turn its back on a truth-based normative project anchored in communicative/dialogic ethics when it is needed most. It is needed because (a) material challenges to human emancipation (e.g. climate change, health pandemics) require collective actions that also recognise the emancipatory value of cultural difference;[12] and (b) right-wing populism – which is itself a form of counter-hegemonic critique – 'subverts' the very concept of truth by mobilising the 'myths' of cultural 'authenticity' that make collective action even more difficult.[13]

[5]Albert C. Cano, Eva Leth Sørensen, and Shreya Bhattacharya, 'Remapping the critical: Imagining anti-hierarchical futures in International Studies', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 52:3 (2024), pp. 533–9.

[6]Beate Jahn, 'Critical Theory in crisis?', *European Journal of International Relations*, 27:4 (2021), pp. 1274–99; also Milja Kurki, 'The limitations of the critical edge', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 40:1 (2011), pp. 000–000 (p. 131); Philip Conway, 'Critical international politics at an impasse', *International Politics Reviews*, 9 (2021), pp. 213–238 (pp. 217–18).

[7]Jahn, 'Critical Theory', p. 1276.

[8]Schmid, 'The poverty', p. 167. Also Daniel J. Levine, *Recovering International Relations: The Promise of Sustainable Critique* (Oxford University Press, 2013) on the lack of 'sustainable critique' in contemporary CIRT and the need therefore to recover the theorising of first-generation Frankfurt School. On the 'two modes or faces [of Critical Theory] optimistic and pessimistic', Nicholas J. Rengger, 'Negative dialectic? Two modes of Critical Theory in world politics', in Richard Wyn Jones (ed.), *Critical Theory and World Politics* (Lynne Rienner, 2001), pp. 91–109 (p. 95).

[9]Schmid, 'The poverty', p. 160.

[10]Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Ayşe Zarakol, 'Struggles for recognition: The liberal international order and the merger of its discontents', *International Organization*, 75:2 (2021), pp. 611–34.

[11]Schmid 'The poverty', p. 208, charts Linklater's thought through *Beyond Realism and Marxism: Critical Theory and International Relations* (Macmillan, 1990); *The Transformation of Political Community* (Polity 1998); *The Problem of Harm in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[12]There is then sympathy with Latour's argument that critique has run 'out of steam' because 'it is complicit in relativising facts and therefore unable to confront the politically virulent scepticism of facts such as climate change'. Bruno Latour, 'Why has critique run out of steam?', *Critical Inquiry,* 30:2 (2004), pp. 225–48. As described by Sebastian Schindler 'The task of critique in times of post-truth politics', *Review of International Studies*, 46:3 (2020), pp. 376–394 (p. 378).

[13]Emanuel Adler and Alena Drieschova use 'truth-subversion' rather than 'post-truth politics' to avoid the latter's implication that 'an era of "truth politics" has been replaced'. Truth-subversion 'practitioners seek to dismantle the very notion of truth for the sake of power and domination'. See 'The epistemological challenge of truth subversion', *International Organization*, 75 (2021), pp. 359–386 (p. 369). Sebastian Schindler similarly argues that 'post-truth politics is (despite its name) marked by the

A way to reconcile the emphases of different Frankfurt School generations is therefore needed to help realise emancipatory change in the current situation.[14]

To address these concerns I too look back to pre-Habermasian Critical Theory, but I draw on the classical American Pragmatist philosophy and social theory of John Dewey.[15] This is consistent with the move to recover sources of 'the critical attitude … outside the orbit of the German idealists and Western Marxists'.[16] My motivation, however, is to explore the way Pragmatism combines a positive commitment to the communicative ethics that inspired Habermas and Linklater with a negative critique that meets the demands of the current moment. There is here not only a novel challenge to the binary between Critical and Traditional/Problem-solving theory,[17] which has been at the core of CIRT, but there is also an empirically grounded and politically engaged approach to theory and practice, one that addresses the concern about the impractical character of the Habermasian CIRT and the disconnected (or 'elitist') character of contemporary liberal/left-wing politics.

I have four sections. First, I examine the historical relationship between Pragmatism and the Frankfurt School. This is not a matter of historical curiosity; it is important for my argument. The Frankfurt School's dismissal of American Pragmatism was based on a narrow reading centred on the work of William James, and Dewey's use of it. This led to a misreading of Pragmatism as a subjective form of instrumentalist reason that perpetuated the harms of the capitalist order.[18] Had Horkheimer and Adorno (and by implication contemporary Critical Theorists) engaged with Dewey – especially his critique of Walter Lippmann's technocratic society – the relationship to Pragmatism would have been (and by implication could be) different. Indeed, we find in Deweyan Pragmatism not just a normative commitment to the communicative ethics that informed (through Peirce and Mead) the Habermasian emphasis on the 'public sphere'. We find a negative critique of the power structures of American capitalism and a political, almost partisan, commitment to support the 'publics' repressed by those structures.

Secondly, I demonstrate how this form of negative critique, which can address Jahn and Schmid's concerns, can be squared with the deliberative democratic ethos that emerged with CIRT's turn to communicative ethics.[19] Deweyan Pragmatism can, in other words, help CIRT identify 'publics' worthy of political support because they are engaged in a negative critique of those power structures that needlessly exclude affected stakeholders; but it can also offer a negative critique of groups who do not commit to the idea that the public interest emerges from an ongoing, inclusive, and deliberative process within the public sphere and for that reason cannot be called 'publics'. This

naturalization of one specific truth claim: namely, the cynical belief that self-interests [in an egoistic sense] are behind all public discourse'. See 'Post-truth politics and neoliberal competition', *International Theory*, 16:1 (2024), pp. 102–21.

[14]This is a variation on the theme Schindler identified when he wrote 'that the task of critique is to problematise two defects: uncritical belief in truth claims [as emphasised by first-generation theory] and the uncritical relativisation of all truth claims [as emphasised by second-generation]'. Schindler 'The task of critique', p. 377.

[15]Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (George Allen and Unwin, 1927); 'A critique of American civilization', first published in *World Tomorrow*, 11 (1928), pp. 391–5; republished in Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander (eds), *The Essential Dewey: Volume 1* (Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 316–22.

[16]Richard Devetak, *Critical International Theory. An Intellectual History* (Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 161.

[17]Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', in *Critical Theory*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Continuum, 1972 [1937]), pp. 188–243. This found similar expression in Robert Cox's problem-solving/critical theory: 'Social forces, states and world orders', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 10:2 (1981), pp. 126–55. For arguments that combine critical and problem-solving in pragmatic constructivism, see Emanuel Adler, 'Seizing the middle ground: Constructivism in world politics', *European Journal of International Relations*, 3:3 (1997), pp. 319–363 (p. 334); Alexander Wendt, 'What is International Relations for? Notes toward a post-critical view', in Richard Wyn Jones (ed.), *Critical Theory and World Politics* (Lynne Rienner, 2001), pp. 205–23. For more recent call to re-examine the divide, see Gëzim Visoka, 'Critique and alternativity in IR', *International Studies Review*, 21:4 (2019), pp. 678–704 (p. 679). For 'critical problem-solving' in global governance, see Vincent Pouliot and Jean-Philippe Thérien, *Global Policymaking* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 215–17.

[18]Hans Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 1993); Thomas Wheatland *The Frankfurt School in Exile* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Arvi Särkelä, 'American Pragmatism and Frankfurt School Critical Theory', and Kenneth W. Stikkers, 'American Pragmatism, sociology of knowledge and the early Frankfurt School', in Michael Festl (ed.), *Pragmatism and Social Philosophy* (Routledge, 2021) pp. 189–213 and pp. 162–88.

[19]Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism*; Linklater, *The Transformation*.

is especially important given the challenge of contemporary right-wing populism. Its tendency to mobilise falsehoods about material change (e.g. climate change, vaccines)[20] and to willingly misrecognise 'the other' forms part of a strategy to reclaim the privileges of social hierarchies that have otherwise been convincingly deconstructed.[21] Indeed, it would be unwise, given this concern about 'post-truth' politics and the antagonistic nature of political argument, for CIRT to now turn away from the discourse ethics of Habermas and Linklater.

Thirdly, I relate my argument to the *material* challenges of the current moment. While Deweyan Pragmatism shared Frankfurt School-type concerns about technocracy and instrumentalism, it avoids representing Critical and Traditional (or Problem-Solving) theory as binary opposites. Pragmatist meliorism was not averse to a negative critique of those systems (e.g. capitalism) that did not 'care for' those experiencing all its material consequences – and in this respect it has occasionally been associated with left-wing populism – but it did not, at least in Dewey's formulation, dismiss the importance of technical or expert knowledge to solving the material problems that otherwise harm lived experiences.[22] This, I suggest, reinforces CIRTs commitment to a democratic ethos that is deliberative. An ethos that can – as I illustrate with reference to a Pragmatist-informed assessment of IR Practice Theory and climate change governance – defend certain epistemic hierarchies against populist critique.[23]

Fourthly, I argue that CIRT should also look forward from second-generation Frankfurt School theory. In contrast to Schmid's dismissive approach, I argue CIRT should draw on the third-generation work of Axel Honneth.[24] Contained within Honneth's work is a Pragmatist-inspired emancipatory theory based on practices of mutual recognition that respond to the *ontological* insecurities created by the LIO, what Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Ayşe Zarakol call the problem of misrecognition.[25] Misrecognition is, as Charles Taylor reminds us, 'a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being'.[26] This should be enough for CIRT to be interested in the burgeoning research on ontological security, but to the extent that misrecognition is a consequence of the LIO's unwarranted social hierarchies *and* a driver of right-wing populism (which in turn is a reason why 'harm conventions' and communities of deliberative practice are currently so powerless), it is doubly significant for CIRT to engage with Honneth's theory. That way it can better speak to 'the struggles and wishes of the age', which – ironically – is one of Schmid's tests for the future of CIRT.[27]

American Pragmatism and the Frankfurt School[28]

My argument that the future of Frankfurt School-inspired CIRT involves the recovery of its American Pragmatist influences begs the question of what happened to create the 'family drama'

[20] Schindler, 'The task of critique', pp. 384–5.

[21] As Drolet and Williams put it, quoting Sam Francis, US palaeoconservatives looked to Gramsci to help 'take back its culture from those who have usurped it'. Drolet and Williams, 'From critique', p. 27.

[22] For Dewey, a public 'consists of all those who are affected by indirect consequences to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for'. Dewey, *The Public*, pp. 15–16. On meliorism, see David Hildebrand, 'Dewey's pragmatism', in Alan Malachowski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 55–82. On Deweyan Pragmatism and populism, see Thomas Spragens, 'Populist perfectionism. The other American liberalism', *Social Philosophy & Policy*, 24:1 (2007), pp. 141–63.

[23] Jason Ralph, *On Global Learning: Pragmatic Constructivism, International Practice and the Challenge of Global Governance* (Cambridge University Press, 2023). On right-wing populism as one 'of the most potent contemporary appropriations of many Critical ideas', see Drolet and Williams, 'From critique', p. 24.

[24] Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition* (Polity Press, 1995); *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Polity Press, 2007); *The I in We: Studies in the Theory of Recognition* (Polity Press, 2014). Schmid dismisses this because it is 'a supplement and development of Habermas's basic framework of critique, rather than a fundamental, paradigmatic alternative to it'. 'The poverty', p. 218.

[25] Adler-Nissen and Zarakol, 'Struggles'.

[26] Charles Taylor, 'The politics of recognition', in Charles Taylor (ed.), *Philosophical Arguments* (Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 225–257 (p. 225).

[27] Schmid, 'The poverty', p. 37, quoting Marx.

[28] Särkelä, 'American Pragmatism', p. 189.

that separated these two modes of thinking. Horkheimer argued that American Pragmatism was like Positivism. It was merely the 'subjective reason' (*Verstand*) of 'the ordinary man', which 'is essentially concerned … with the adequacy of procedures for purposes more or less taken for granted and supposedly self-explanatory'. As 'subjective reason', Pragmatism attached 'little importance to considering whether espoused purposes are reasonable'.[29] At its extreme, subjective reason can be a form of moral nihilism, enabling governments to better implement 'a new barbarism' (which of course led Horkheimer to leave Nazi Germany).[30] In its American context, Pragmatism was seen as serving the capitalist system. It enabled subjects to mitigate their problems without problematising what 'objective reason' (*Vernuft*) tells them they need to do if they are to fully realise themselves. Pragmatism 'formalized reason' so that an activity, including art and recreation, was valued 'only if it serves another purpose', which in the capitalist system meant 'yielding to manipulation'[31] and replenishing the subject's 'working power'.[32] Pragmatism thus helped objectify human subjects, turning them into tools of the system. In these circumstances, life was not living.[33] Emancipation required a different philosophy. It would be based on the negative critique of common-sense assumptions about the socio-economic system. That would expose the particular interests those assumptions served and how they repressed the human subject. Philosophical Pragmatism, in other words, had to be rejected in favour of Critical Theory.[34]

Horkheimer's understanding and criticism of American Pragmatism was based primarily on a reading of William James's work, and the claim that truth is found in statements that are useful to believe.[35] John Dewey is cited in the *Eclipse of Reason* but only with respect to his thoughts on this Jamesian argument.[36] Deeper engagement would have caused Horkheimer to reflect on Pragmatism's own critique of reason, which Dewey saw as potentially reflecting the epistemic preferences of a privileged intellectual class.[37] It would also have qualified the manner in which the 'subjective reason' of 'the ordinary man', or what contemporary vernacular might refer to as 'the lived experience', was valuable.[38] Indeed, classical Pragmatists valued the lived experience because it was a way of 'testing' the philosopher's (or any other elite's) claim to know what was good for people.[39] This kind of knowledge was subjective, but Pragmatists were *not* inviting subjects to

[29]Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013 [1947]), p. 3; Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', pp. 196–7, 206–7; Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, p. 48; Ray, 'Pragmatism and Critical Theory', p. 310.

[30]Horkheimer 'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 227. On Auschwitz as a symbol of suffering not only despite the rational advances of modernity, 'but partly in virtue of these advances', see Fabian Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 150.

[31]Alan How, *Critical Theory* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), p. 29.

[32]Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, pp. 28–9, Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Verso, 1997 [1944]), pp. 47–53. Also Arvi Särkelä, 'Vicious circles: Adorno, Dewey and disclosing critique of society', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 48:10 (2022), pp. 1369–1390 (p. 1370).

[33]Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 64.

[34]Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory'.

[35]William James, *Pragmatism* (DigiReads.com, 2019 [1907]); Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School*, loc. 1519–50.

[36]Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, pp. 28–39. 'This choice by Horkheimer … disclosed an ignorance of Deweyan Pragmatism', Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School*, loc. 1527. From that stemmed a 'superficial snub of the most ingenious strand of American thought'. Hans Joas, 'An underestimated alternative: America and the limits of "Critical Theory"', *Symbolic Interaction*, 15:3 (1992), pp. 261–275 (p. 264). Peter T. Manicas adds that the left's dismissal of Dewey as a science-obsessed technocrat 'cannot be sustained, even if Dewey did give ample room for misconstrual'. 'John Dewey and the problem of justice', *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 15:4 (1981), pp. 279–91.

[37]Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (George Allen and Unwin, 1929); *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Beacon Press, 1972 [1948]). See Molly Cochran, 'Deweyan Pragmatism and post-positivist social science in IR', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 31:3 (2002), pp. 525–48.

[38]On the Emersonian embrace of the 'ordinary' situated in 19th-century American democratic thought, see Colin Koopman, 'Pragmatism as a philosophy of hope', *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 20:2 (2006), pp. 106–16. On ameliorative knowledge at the margins of practice and the lived experience as 'the sole medium of expression for ethics', see Jane Addams, *Peace and Bread in Time of War* (Ebooks for Students, 2019 [1922]).

[39]There is an overlap here with Adorno's argument that objective fact lay in the materiality of human suffering. I argue below, however, that Pragmatism disagrees with Adorno when he dismisses discourse in the face of suffering as 'outrageous'.

unthinkingly accept common-sense understandings of political ends; nor were they blind to the way power constructed those understandings.[40] They were encouraging philosophers *and* ordinary people to reflect *together* on the experiential *consequences* of their truth claims, to positively defend those claims if they ameliorated the lived experiences of practice – including its indirect (or public) consequence – and to negatively critique those claims if they did not.[41] A theory that did not reflect on material consequences risked irrelevance; or worse, it risked justifying (absolute) force as the means of achieving the (philosopher's absolute) truth (at ordinary people's expense).[42]

Dewey called his approach 'experimentalism'; and as the 'permanent deposit' left by Hegelian dialectics, it might easily have been interpreted differently by Horkheimer.[43] As Wheatland puts it,

> the primary goals of Pragmatism were to identify social and natural problems that blocked human actions and potentials and then to develop ideas that could overcome these obstacles. Pragmatism, therefore, like Critical Theory, shared an overarching goal of making our understanding of the world more rational through a scientific methodology.[44]

Despite these commonalities Freud's 'narcissism of small differences' prevailed.[45] Horkheimer interpreted experimentalism as uncritical problem-solving and the Frankfurt School separated from American Pragmatism; at least, that is, until Habermasian discourse ethics drew on American Pragmatism and its conception of democracy as a form of social learning, which was itself influenced by Charles Peirce's claim that truth emerged from an ever-expanding, more inclusive, community of inquiry.[46] After that it was possible to argue, as Arvi Särkelä does, that 'many critical theorists are pragmatists and vice versa'.[47] I return to the Pragmatist relationship to Habermas's Critical Theory below. Before that, I need to establish my argument that Deweyan Pragmatism is relevant to the future of CIRT not just because it protects the Habermasian 'baby' but because it also demonstrates the value of negative critique in theory *and* practice.

That can be done in two ways. Firstly, Pragmatists collapsed the theory/practice binary and, in its most demanding form, 'vocationally' committed to a grounded form of political engagement, which included negating those exclusionary power structures that define which problems need to be solved and how to solve them.[48] Part of this was Dewey's critique of traditional education methods. Dewey argued that to encourage learning teachers needed to be sympathetic to (i.e. include)

Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 187. Discourse might not be needed to identify suffering, but it is valuable for mobilising appropriate responses.

[40]Horkheimer was not telling Dewey anything he did not know. He was acutely aware how every effort is made by the privileged class 'to identify the established order with the public good'. Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (Prometheus Book, 2000 [1935]), p. 69.

[41]Again, there are overlaps across Dewey's experimentalism and Adorno's commitment to 'a non-committal, suspended' mode of conduct, Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 65. However, where Dewey thought certain habits could ameliorate experience, and were therefore worth defending, Adorno insisted we could only live 'less wrongly' and thus insisted on relentless negative critique.

[42]In opposition to 'subjective reason', Horkheimer approvingly cited Kant for his view that 'scientific insight' was 'dependent upon transcendental, not upon empirical functions'. *Eclipse of Reason*, p. 29. Dewey, however, worried that Kantianism was 'a mere voice, which having nothing in particular say, said Law, Duty … [left] to the existing social order of the Prussia of Frederick the Great the congenial task of declaring just what was obligatory in the concrete.' *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* (Indiana University Press, 1965 [1908]), pp. 64–5. On the second point, Habermas noted, the consequences of 'historical objectivism' were 'unveiled in Stalinist terror'. *The Theory of Communicative Action Vol. 1* (Polity Press, 2004 [1981]), p. 364.

[43]Dewey, 'From absolutism to experimentalism', in Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander (eds), *The Essential Dewey: Volume 1* (Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 14–21 (p. 18). See Cochran, 'Deweyan Pragmatism', pp. 530–2. Adorno offered a more sympathetic reading of Deweyan experimentalism in *Negative Dialectics*. Särkelä, 'Vicious circles', p. 1375.

[44]Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School*, loc. 1441–2.

[45]Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School*, loc. 1427.

[46]Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Polity Press, 1996), pp. 14–16; Cochran 'Deweyan Pragmatism', pp. 544–5.

[47]Särkelä, 'American Pragmatism', p. 200.

[48]Kavi J. Abraham and Yoni Abramson, 'A pragmatist vocation for IR', *European Journal of International Relations*, 23:1 (2015), pp. 26–48.

the subject's experiential starting point rather than impose abstract knowledge on them. Where traditional education merely habitualised subjects, Dewey's progressive method tried to nurture critical capacity.[49] This approach was inspired by Jane Addams's work at Hull House, which brought together the working-class, African-American, immigrant families of Chicago in an attempt to encourage new thinking. It was a very engaged form of critical *praxis* (i.e. a process of reflection *and* action directed at changing society).[50] Contrary to Horkheimer's claims about the 'bourgeois savant', therefore, Dewey and Addams *did* unify the activities of the (problem-solving) scientist with the (critical) citizen.[51] Again, the difference is a small one of emphasis. Where Deweyan Pragmatism and Frankfurt School theories shared a fallibilist 'sense of their own artificiality',[52] and thus a commitment to *ongoing* inquiry, the latter's emphasis on the negative weighs more heavily and thus protects the former from complacency.

The second way to demonstrate the value of negative critique in Pragmatist thought is to examine Dewey's written work, especially *The Public and Its Problems* and *Critique of American Civilization*. Here, we see an engaged, political, almost partisan, negative critique of the power structures of American capitalism. In *The Public*, Dewey accepted that economic change had left communities alienated from a political system seemingly controlled by the formalised reason of the market. In this context, the public (if not reason) had been 'eclipsed'. That, however, was not a justification for the kind of technocracy that Walter Lippmann had famously advocated.[53] It was instead a reason to politically mobilise those experiencing the consequences of this new practice while being excluded from the communities of inquiry that rationalised it. Dewey called these 'publics', and their mobilisation was necessary if *the* public interest was to be rediscovered in new circumstances.[54] To form itself in that moment a new public had to

> break existing political forms. This is hard to do because these forms are themselves the regular means of instituting change. The public which generated political forms is passing away, but the power and lust of possession remains in the hands of the officers and agencies which the dying public instituted. This is why the change of form of states is so often only effected by revolution. … An epoch in which the needs of a newly forming public are counteracted by established forms of the state is one in which there is increasing disparagement and disregard of the state. General apathy, neglect and contempt find expression in resort to various short-cuts of direct action.[55]

Dewey of course did not commit to violent revolution. That would in practice lead to 'civil war', which would be 'the ruin of all parties and the destruction of civilized life'.[56] This, however, is hardly the language of someone who is unaware of how power exploits 'subjective reason', or someone who

[49]It belies Adorno and Horkheimer's description of Pragmatism as part of a system where the 'technologically educated masses [will] fall under the sway of any despotism': *Dialectic*, p. 17. Adorno's later saw 'education toward critical self-reflection' as a means of living less wrongly. Freyenhagen *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 18.

[50]See Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism* (University of Chicago Press, 1996); Aaron Pratt Shepherd, 'A new road to walk together: Lessons from Dewey's political activism', *Contemporary Pragmatism*, 16:2/3 (2019), pp. 147–67. On 'praxis' in relation to 'practice', see Gunter Hellmann and Jens Steffek, 'Introduction', in Gunther Hellmann and Jens Steffek (eds), *Praxis as a Perspective on International Politics* (Bristol University Press, 2020), pp. 1–4.

[51]Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', pp. 209–10.

[52]Levine, *Recovering International Relations*, p. 89. Levine adds that pragmatism can 'potentially resonate strongly with Adornian negative dialectics', p. 100.

[53]Walter Lippmann 2017 [1925] *The Phantom Public* [Online]. Taylor and Francis. Available from: https://www.perlego.com/book/1575941/the-phantom-public-pdf.

[54]Dewey's conceptualisation of the public and private as 'fluid categories constructed in social interaction and subject to historical transformation' anticipated criticism of Habermas, especially from within the feminist literature. Robert Asen, 'Multiple publics and permeable borders in John Dewey's theory of the public sphere', *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 39:3 (2003), pp. 174–188 (p. 176).

[55]Dewey, *The Public*, p. 290. See Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School*, loc. 1623, who notes that Dewey's reputation as a 'progressive, radical democrat and socialist' meant he should not have been mistaken as a defender of the status quo.

[56]Dewey, *Liberalism*, p. 85.

is politically 'neutral', which is how Schmid describes the Pragmatist-inspired Habermasian ethic.[57] In the *Critique*, moreover, Dewey asked 'which forces are to win'. Those 'that are organized, that know what they are after and that take systematic means to accomplish their end, or those that are spontaneous, private and scattered'.[58] He contrasted the 'tightening up and solidifying of the forces of reaction' with the rise of new voluntary associations, which he characterised as a 'working force of liberated individualities, experimenting in their own ways to find and realize their own ends'.[59] Again, this is not the language of someone who is neutral towards the capitalist (or any other) system. It is language that speaks to the politics of the current moment.

CIRT does not have to go back to the first-generation Frankfurt School to rediscover negative critique therefore. We find such arguments (and actions) in the work of contemporaneous Pragmatists. They combined a negative critique of problematic practices with a commitment to communication and deliberation as a means of positively reconstituting hegemonic conceptions of the public interest. This ability to combine the negative and the positive is important and speaks to the first of two reasons why CIRT *might not want to go back* to the first-generation Frankfurt School. Adorno's emphasis on the value of negative critique – even to the extent we resign ourselves to living 'less wrongly' because we can never discover the good – is important.[60] As noted, it prevents complacency; but even Adorno's defenders wonder if it is 'insufficiently motivating'.[61] The argument offered in defence of negativity, moreover, potentially blurs the normative problem of identifying a wrong and the political problem of responding to it. We might not need deliberative discourse to know that certain forms of suffering are normatively wrong,[62] but surely deliberative discourse – and its ameliorative promise – is integral to the political process that effectively mobilises collective action and prevents or corrects that wrong. Negative critique stops progressives becoming complacent, but Pragmatist meliorism also protects them against despondency and resignation, which can of course give way to the cynicism (and instrumental reasoning) of political Realism rather than the hope (and emancipatory reasoning) of Critical Theory.[63]

A second, related, reason why CIRT might not want to return to first-generation Frankfurt School thinking is its reputation for being elitist and 'aloof from politics'.[64] This perception emerged as a response to Adorno and Horkheimer's criticism of popular culture in capitalist America, which they saw as exploiting the masses instead of emancipating them from objectively repressive structures.[65] The emphasis Adorno placed on an *avant-garde* form of art was, of course, anti-authoritarian. The dissonances it created acted as a negative critique of Stalinist and Fascist aesthetics.[66] As 'an experimentor, open-endedly defying dogma',[67] moreover, the *avant-garde* artist might even be described as a Deweyan Pragmatist. The problem was that this kind of critical consciousness was focused on the artist (and theorist), not on their audiences. Nurturing a broader understanding was not its purpose. That did not mean it had no political effect, however. Understanding this form of critique required access to the gallery and its theory of art; and

[57] Schmid, 'The poverty', p. 90.

[58] Dewey, *Critique*, p. 321.

[59] Dewey, *Critique*, p. 322.

[60] As Alan How put it, just because Adorno was 'an old sourpuss, doesn't mean he was wrong', *Critical Theory*, p. 172. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this specific point.

[61] Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 222.

[62] Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 187.

[63] For an argument that Adorno's negativity was not totalising but merely one part of a dialectic, see Peter E. Gordon, *A Precarious Happiness: Adorno and the Source of Normativity* (University of Chicago Press, 2023), p. 25. Negative critique first broke up the illusion of a normative whole and then freed us 'to experience … instances of promise or possibility that point the way beyond our present condition to a future of human flourishing'.

[64] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (The Harvester Press, 1977), p. 34.

[65] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, pp. 145–99.

[66] Buck-Morss, *The Origin*, pp. 32–42.

[67] Buck-Morss, *The Origin*, p. 32. Also Gordon, who argues Adorno's treatment of music and literature 'cannot be dismissed as a bourgeois indulgence'. Rather, it is an example of 'the interpretive principle of dialectical immanence'. *A Precarious Happiness*, p. 35; and How, *Critical Theory*, pp. 34–9, 175.

when those that did not have such access were represented as having false consciousness, it created the impression of intellectual hubris and elitism.[68] That is grist for the populist's mill. Indeed, a kind of anti-intellectualism is evident in today's right-wing discourse, and that is a problem to the extent it enables a dangerous form of post-truth politics. This is why I caution against a return to first-generation Frankfurt School thinking.

Dewey, of course, shared a concern about the disabling effects of culture, but he transposed his 'pedagogic creed' onto a very different analysis of art. For Dewey, a critical culture capable of social learning could be nurtured but that involved breaking down (rather than setting up) the social hierarchies that separated art and the everyday. This Emersonian approach encouraged as art any activity that 'vivified'[69] life and 'refreshed attitude(s) toward the circumstances and exigencies of ordinary experience'.[70] The goal was to celebrate modes of expression that recognised marginalised emotions as both valid and reflective, and to educate people's sentiments rather than pander or dictate to them.[71] Popular art was not necessarily anaesthetising, therefore. It could nurture a form self-realisation, growth, and agency, enable a politically significant negative critique, and, by nurturing a sense of solidarity and collective will, positively reconstruct social norms and structures. Adorno's concern – that in search of popularity such an artist (or theorist) would 'submit to the demand of what presently exists and thereby, despite collective appearances, forget the social demands [of negative critique] which come out of his own aesthetic sphere' – is important.[72] It reminds us of what Pragmatists accept is a matter of political judgement. By retreating to the 'solitary works' of their 'own aesthetic sphere', however, Adorno's artists/theorists simply avoid that dilemma in a way that 'abrogate[s] political utility'.[73] They may remain loyal to their own truth, but they do little to change the fact that it is – as Dewey reminds us – the 'practical men' or the 'men of executive habits' that shape social truths.[74]

Critical international relations theory and its 'crisis of critique'

For Habermas, the first generation of Frankfurt School theory got to a position that was contradictory and dangerous. In making this argument, Habermas focused on Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which he described as 'an odd book' that offered an 'astoundingly'

[68]See Buck-Morss, *The Origin*, pp. 41–2, 108–9; also pp. 34–5 quoting the avant-garde composer Arnold Schönberg as saying he 'put up with' audiences but 'could get by without them'. Adorno defended the critical value of such art despite it having 'absolutely no appeal for a working-class audience'. The improvisation and popularity of jazz on the other hand, which pragmatists in search of creativity celebrated, was dismissed by Adorno. The jazz subject's improvisation was represented as merely a break in the ritual of a collective shackled to the demands of the market. Buck-Morss, *The Origin*, pp. 104–10. On pragmatism and jazz, see Walton M. Muymba, *The Shadow and the Act: Black Intellectual Practice, Jazz Improvisation and Philosophical Pragmatism* (Chicago University Press, 2009). For a reading that goes beyond Adorno's Eurocentric and racially blind negative view to identify both critique and rejuvenation in jazz, a reading that is informed by the pragmatism of W. E. B. Du Bois and the inevitability of the black person's 'double consciousness', see Fumi Okiji, *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited* (Stanford University Press, 2018). On Adorno's elitism, see Bruce Baugh, 'Left-wing elitism: Adorno on popular culture', *Philosophy and Literature*, 14:1 (1990), pp. 65–78; Chris Brown '"Our side?" Critical Theory and IR', in Richard Wyn Jones (ed.), *Critical Theory and World Politics* (Lynne Rienner, 2001), pp. 191–205 (pp. 202–3). For a charge of epistemological authoritarianism levelled at the false consciousness argument, see Schindler, 'The task of critique', pp. 389–90.

[69]Dewey, 'Existence, value and criticism', from *Experience and Nature*, in Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander (eds), *The Essential Dewey: Vol. 1.* (Indiana University Press, 1998 [1925]), p. 99. Also: 'The production of a work of art throws a light upon the mystery of humanity'. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature and Other Essays* (Gibbs Smith, 2019 [1836]), pp. 14–15.

[70]Dewey *Art as Experience* (Penguin 2004 [1935]), p. 145. Similarly, Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 1*, pp. 340; 371–2. For discussion see Brent J. Steele, *Defacing Power* (University of Michigan Press, 2010) pp. 38–43.

[71]Richard Rorty 'Human rights, rationality and sentimentality', in Stephen Shute and Susan L. Hurley (eds), *On Human Rights* (Basic Books, 1993) pp. 111–34. Also Schindler: 'the task of critique … is to point us in the direction of a society in which people are capable of taking their own stance in the world rather than giving in and giving up'. 'The task of critique', p. 393.

[72]Buck-Morss quoting Adorno in *The Origins*, p. 41; Rengger 'Negative dialectic', pp. 104–6.

[73]Buck-Morss quoting Adorno in *The Origins*, pp. 41 and 189.

[74]Dewey, 'Intelligence and morals', p. 74.

oversimplified image of modernity.[75] In *Dialectic*, Adorno and Horkheimer had continued their attack against the 'blindly pragmatized' reason of capitalist society.[76] Reason, they claimed, had diverted the repressed from the truth, and art had numbed the spirit of critique. As the servant of power, the age of enlightenment had become what it was meant to transcend: myth. For Habermas, this argument was 'paradoxical'. This is because Adorno and Horkheimer could still (somehow) claim to know the existence of an emancipatory truth even if all they offered was the scepticism of negative critique.[77] This 'aporia'[78] was dangerous because in merely exposing power as the servant of subjective reason it offered nothing to divert power from its path. There was no way of moving through Nietzsche's state of nihilism, therefore; no reason to work towards emancipation and growth instead of (mythical) authenticity and domination.[79]

Habermas insisted, however, that modernity was more complex than 'the cramped optics' of Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis.[80]

> I am thinking here of the specific theoretical dynamic that continually pushes the sciences, and even the self-reflection of the sciences, beyond merely engendering technically useful knowledge; I am referring, further, to the universalistic foundations of law and morality that have also been incorporated (in however distorted and incomplete a fashion) into the institutions of constitutional government, into the forms of democratic will formation, and into individualist patterns of identity formation; I have in mind, finally, the productivity and explosive power of basic aesthetic experiences that a subjectivity liberated from the imperative of purposive activity and from conventions of quotidian perception gains from its own decentering experiences.[81]

Habermas did not reference Dewey in this passage, but its understanding of 'science', 'democratic will formation', 'identity formation', and 'basic aesthetic experiences' is clearly Deweyan, an influence Habermas acknowledged elsewhere.[82] Habermas also ended his lecture on the *Dialectic* with an indication of how the Frankfurt School would build on modernity's complexity to recover the link between reason and emancipation. As modernity was more complex and pluralistic than Adorno and Horkheimer had imagined, Habermas shifted our attention to argumentation. In this space, immanent critique was 'entwined' with communicative theory. The negative and positive were two sides of the same coin. Argumentation would never be entirely free from power, but 'the spell of mythic thinking', and the hold it had over Adorno and Horkheimer, could only be broken by grounding argumentation in communicative ethics.[83] This too was influenced by classical American Pragmatism, in particular the Peirceian idea that learning and truth was found

[75] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Wiley 2018 [1985]), pp. 106, 113. Also described as an 'ironic affair', *Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 1*, p. 383. On Habermas's misreading of *Dialectic* as 'a comprehensive argument and not as a series of "philosophical fragments"', see Gordon, *A Precarious Happiness*, p. 9.

[76] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, p. 17.

[77] Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 1*, pp. 377, 382; *The Philosophical Discourse*, p. 114. See Schindler on the risks of 'more and more relativisation' and the 'risks inherent in the continuous radicalisation of critique?': Schindler 'The task of critique', p. 382.

[78] Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 1*, p. 384.

[79] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse*, pp. 123–6; *Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 1,* p. 349; How, *Critical Theory*, pp. 39–42.

[80] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse*, p. 129; *Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 1*, pp. 354–61; 366–400.

[81] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse*, p. 113.

[82] Dewey's argument on everyday democracy, where majorities are formed antecedent to the deliberative formal deliberations, was influential. 'No one has worked out this view more energetically than Dewey': Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 304.

[83] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse*, p. 130. Again, the difference can be overstated. Adorno 'would not so much reject Habermas's insight on consensuality, as he would convict it of eclipsing additional insights, without which it is insufficient for soliciting what is highest in humans – namely a more receptive dialogical activity'. Romand Coles, 'Identity and difference in the ethical positions of Adorno and Habermas', in Stephen White (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 19–45 (p. 34). On 'Adorno's anticipation of the appeal of communication as a resource for Critical

in the consensus of ever-expanding communities of inquiry. Mead's symbolic interactionism also featured strongly. It was Peirce who established 'not only the ideal moment of concept formation, which establishes generality, but also the idealizing moment of forming true judgements, which triumphs over time';[84] and it was Mead who provided the 'basic conceptual framework of normatively regulated and linguistically mediated interaction'.[85]

From Schmid's perspective, however, this Habermasian turn simply exchanged one 'cul-de-sac' for another.[86] The problem was not necessarily Habermas's adoption of the philosophical Pragmatist's consensus (as opposed to correspondence) version of truth, it was the way he ontologically separated the 'system' – e.g. the market or (in IR terms) anarchy – from the 'lifeworld' – e.g. the 'ensemble of cultural resources, values and traditions'.[87] While the latter was characterised by communicative action, the former remained governed by instrumental action. This led to a damaging shift in methodology. Critical Theory (and subsequently CIRT) would concentrate on the normative task of finding – through discourse ethics – an intersubjective consensus to anchor the public interest. A commitment to communicative rationality would resist the system's 'colonisation' of the lifeworld, but, by leaving the instrumental rationality of the 'system' untouched, the Habermasian bifurcation of capitalism and democracy cut short the Frankfurt School's promise.[88] For Schmid, the Habermasian turn offered a reified and depoliticised account of systems (e.g. capitalism, international anarchy) as norm-free, re-naturalised and necessary social orders.[89]

On my reading, CIRT's crisis and the frustrations of the historical moment lie not in the Habermasian turn, but in a methodological failure to build on its praxeological implications, a failure that I think recent developments in IR – especially the research agendas around Practice Theory and Ontological Security Studies (OSS) – can help us address.[90] I expand on that in the following sections. Before that, however, I complete this section by making three points: first, the ontological bifurcation that Schmid identifies in Habermasian theory was not as stark as he argues, and the Deweyan concept of 'publics' (Habermas preferred 'social movements') can return CIRT's methodological focus on to the role *praxis* plays at the 'seams' of system and lifeworld.[91] Second, Deweyan Pragmatism can also help us distinguish publics worthy of political support from groups who are committed to a negative critique but not to the 'reconciliation'[92] of competing positions, nor to the idea that the public interest emerges from an inclusive and deliberative process. Third, the Pragmatist focus on problem-solving as a form of ameliorative action means we can give more weight to experts with technical problem-solving knowledge of systems while simultaneously holding a critical theory that 'bursts open encapsulated expert cultures'.[93]

Habermas was clear that a 'system' based on instrumental reason and a 'lifeworld' based on communicative reason did not work separately. They mutually constituted 'society' and there was nothing inevitable about how they did that. There was indeed a risk that the lifeworld 'taken by itself … remains blind to causes, connections, and consequences that lie beyond the horizon of everyday practice', but that is not how Habermas conceived the distinction.

Theorists', and his warning that it alone was not the basis for *praxis*, which was found in a materialist concept of human suffering, see Matthew Fluck, 'The best there is? Communication, objectivity and the future of Critical IR Theory', *European Journal of International Relations*, 20:1 (2014), pp. 66–76. Dewey's naturalist view of 'experience' made the same point. It provided the reason to challenge an established consensus. Richard Bernstein, *Pragmatic Naturalism* (Graduate faculty Philosophy Journal, 2020).

[84]Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, p. 14.

[85]Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 2* (Polity Press: 2006 [1987]), p. 2. How, *Critical Theory*, pp. 46–9.

[86]Schmid, 'The poverty', p. 85.

[87]Schmid, 'The poverty', p. 79.

[88]Schmid, 'The poverty', p. 87.

[89]Schmid, 'The poverty', p. 90.

[90]Wendt anticipated the 'relative neglect of critical praxeology' in 2001. 'What is International Relations for?', p. 222.

[91]Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 2*, p. 395.

[92]Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 1*, pp. 373–4.

[93]Thomas McCarthy, 'Translator's introduction', In *Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 1*, loc. 662.

> The two levels do not simply lie parallel to one another, they are interconnected: systemic mechanisms have to be anchored in the lifeworld, that is, institutionalized. More specifically, the rationalization of the lifeworld – particularly of law and morality – is a necessary condition for the institutionalization of new mechanisms of system integration – in the modern era, of formally organized subsystems of purposive-rational economic and administrative action.[94]

In other words, whether the system is anarchy, capitalism, or the climate, the implication is the same: the system should work for the ends that emerge from the lifeworld that is (or should be) guided by communicative ethics. The complexity of modern systems demands technical knowledge (e.g. strategic studies, economics, climate science), but in contrast to Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas insisted we need not 'infer linear dependencies' in the direction of knowledge and influence. Technical knowledge of the system could influence the lifeworld, but the reverse was also true. The norms that emerge from the lifeworld could influence the system.

> Both are conceivable: the institutions that anchor steering mechanisms like money and power in the lifeworld might channel either the influence of the lifeworld on formally organized domains of action or, conversely, the influence of the system on communicatively structured contexts of action. In one case they would function as the institutional framework that subordinated system maintenance to the normative restrictions of the lifeworld, in the other case as the basis that subordinated the lifeworld to the systemic constraints of material reproduction.[95]

There was therefore nothing in Habermas's ontological bifurcation that, as Schmid puts it, naturalised the system and put it beyond politics. In fact, the direction a society took hinged on the ability of 'social movements' to 'blow apart expert cultures' with a form of negative or immanent critique. At this point, I think there is added value in the Deweyan concept of publics, and how it enables theorists to identify social movements with emancipatory intent. That in turn helps Pragmatists avoid the kind of neutrality that Schmid associates with Habermasian-informed CIRT. As noted, Deweyan publics were engaged in negative critique of existing practice and the expert cultures that underpinned them. But what separated 'publics' from 'private' associations was that their negative critique was combined with a creative approach that sought to *reconcile* otherwise fixed and competing positions.[96] Publics represented particular interests that were being overlooked by power, but they did so in ways that complemented the search for *the* public interest.[97] This is not at odds with the Habermasian approach, but it is perhaps more explicit in the concept of 'publics'. That concept encourages CIRT to associate not simply with a neutral *process* of inclusion and deliberation, it demands CIRT *substantively* disassociate from (and politically oppose) movements whose negative critique takes the form of 'dogmatic cynicism' and is designed to empower a particular (i.e. fixed and exclusionary) subjectivity.[98]

Dewey was critical of institutions that did not 'conscientiously reflect' on the consequences of accepted truths; and, as noted, he was committed to a pedagogy and politics that broke down the exclusionary hierarchies that prevented learning. For these reasons, Deweyan thought has been associated with populism, but it can also be read as rejecting populism on the grounds that it is unsuited to solving the problems it highlights. Dewey captured this in *The Public* when explaining

[94] McCarthy, 'Translator's introduction', loc. 507.

[95] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 2*, p. 185.

[96] While Frega suggests Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems* is elusive, he notes Dewey's *Lectures in China* clearly reflects on the 'emancipatory function of organized collective action'. A public is 'a collective of individuals which mobilizes to solve a public problem, hence satisfying interests which also affect those who reside beyond its boundaries'. *Pragmatism*, pp. 198–9.

[97] Molly Cochran, 'A democratic critique of cosmopolitan democracy: Pragmatism from the bottom-up', *European Journal of International Relations*, 8:4 (2002), pp. 517–548 (pp. 531–2).

[98] Schindler distinguishes social critique from what he calls 'dogmatic cynicism', which insists self-interest is behind all public discourse and 'pretends to have definite answers beyond all reasonable doubt'. Schindler, 'Post-truth politics', p. 103.

what James Bohman later called the 'cognitive division of labour' in the Pragmatist conception of democracy.[99] A democratic ethos of inclusion was 'educative', Dewey wrote, because 'it forces a recognition that there are common interests [in associated living], even though the recognition of *what* they are is confused'. The need 'it enforces of discussion and publicity', or what Habermas would later refer to as communicative ethics, 'brings about some clarification of what they are'. Indiscriminate inclusion leading to the marginalisation of systemic expertise will not, however, emancipate subjects because that reduces the likelihood of solving practical problems. Knowledge that improved the lived experience was, in other words, co-constituted. 'The man who wears the shoe', Dewey wrote, 'knows best that it pinches and where it pinches.' But, he added, 'the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied'.[100]

The populism that gives voice to the lived experience of the 'ordinary' person is thus well placed to offer a negative critique, but just as Pragmatism is critical of technocracy, it is also critical of populism. Hilary Putnam captured this when recalling Dewey's 'epistemological justification for democracy'. The ability to 'criticize, is fundamental. But thinking for oneself does not exclude – indeed it requires – learning when and where we seek expert knowledge.'[101] We might conclude this section therefore by saying CIRT does need negative critique to 'blow apart' *the complacency of* 'expert cultures', but it should also recall that technical expertise has a particular contribution to make in the communicative process that reconstructs, in a more humane way, what has been blown apart. On this basis, I think the CIRT that is informed by Pragmatism distinguishes itself clearly from the negative critique of contemporary right-wing populists. The latter too easily portrays technical experts as being part of an out-of-touch and exploitative cosmopolitan elite because that fits its political purpose, which is to (materially and ontologically) revive, mobilise, and secure a fixed, exclusionary and (supposedly) authentic subjectivity.[102] I will now explain more specifically how Pragmatism informs a future research agenda for CIRT.

To 'blow apart expert cultures': practice theory and the Pragmatist critique

> An attitude which aims at such an emancipation and at an alteration of society as whole might well be of service in theoretical work carried out within reality as presently ordered. But it lacks the pragmatic character which attaches to traditional thought as a socially useful professional activity.[103]

With this Horkheimer (albeit briefly) flipped his critique of traditional theory to shine a spotlight on those critical thinkers who limited their discoveries to exposing 'the relationship that exists between intellectual positions and their social location'. To expose common sense or hegemonic assumptions behind problem-solving theory, and to give theory a more emancipatory purpose, was not enough.[104] Critical Theory's 'real function' could only emerge when the 'concrete historical situation' was studied empirically in a way that stimulated change. Furthermore, it would always be the case that 'society must come to grips with nature'. The 'intellectual technology' of traditional, problem-solving theory would never be irrelevant, therefore. On the contrary, technical expertise

[99]James Bohman, 'Democracy as inquiry, inquiry as democratic', *American Journal of Political Science*, 43:2 (1999), pp. 590–607; also James Bohman, 'How to make a social science practical. Pragmatism, Critical Social Science and Multiperspectival Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 31:3 (2002), pp. 499–524.

[100]Dewey, *The Public*, p. 207.

[101]Hilary Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology* (Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 104.

[102]Eric Merkley, 'Anti-intellectualism, populism, and motivated resistance to expert consensus', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 84:1 (2020), pp. 24–48. Also Drolet and Williams, 'From critique', p. 29 on the role the 'New Class' of technical administrators and academics plays in the right-wing narratives.

[103]Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 208.

[104]'Horkheimer's greater concern with the gap between "imputed" and empirical proletariat consciousness' made him more concerned with questions of political praxis than Adorno. Buck-Morss, *The Origin*, p. 67.

had to be developed 'as fully as possible'.[105] Critical Theory and Problem-solving Theory were two sides of the same coin in other words; and Critical Theory had to be 'as rigorous as the deductions in a specialized scientific theory' because 'each is an element in the building up of a comprehensive judgement'.[106]

I take five points from this and the preceding discussion. First, that Horkheimer, like Deweyan Pragmatism, saw the need for an epistemic division of (expert and everyday) labour if knowledge, and the way society treated it, was to be emancipatory. Neither Traditional nor Critical Theory was 'self-sufficient and separable from struggle'.[107] Second, Horkheimer's Critical Theory, again like the Pragmatist theory of Dewey and Addams, shared a commitment to *praxis*, i.e. a vocational commitment that combined theoretical reflexivity with a grounded, engaged, and activist commitment to the empirical research of systems.[108] Third, Habermas, like Dewey, was able to move beyond the scepticism of Adorno and Horkheimer not, as Schmid claims, by *only* concentrating on the lifeworld and theoretical task of discovering the public good through deliberative dialogue, but by focusing empirically on the practice of 'expert cultures' at the 'seams' of system and lifeworld.[109]

Fourth – and this is a new point – Linklater's later work on the evolution of cosmopolitan harm conventions was part of his commitment to a Frankfurt School-inspired critical international theory based on normative, sociological, *and* praxeological dimensions.[110] As historical sociology, this work obviously concentrated on the middle of these dimensions, but the implication is not that CIRT is guilty of system reification or of being apolitical and uncritical. The (sub-)system for CIRT (as opposed to critical political economy) is the anarchic one of sovereign nation-states, which under Waltzian neo-realism developed its own instrumental rationality. To challenge the meaning of 'citizenship' and 'national identity' in an (international/global) normative context, and to show how that critique has played out sociologically through time – as Linklater surely did – is an analysis that says something about *both* lifeworld and system-logics. Still, as I noted at the outset, there is reason to take seriously Schmid's concern that in the current moment the version of CIRT that is focused on norm construction is seemingly limited to offering a form of 'consolatory' cosmopolitanism.

That leads to my fifth point, which I develop in this section. The real problem for CIRT is not its supposed neglect of system analysis in favour of normative theory, or its favouring of second-generation Frankfurt School analysis over its first generation. The problem is that the praxeological dimension has lacked, as Horkheimer would put it, 'the pragmatic character of traditional theory'.

[105]Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory, pp. 215–16. Cox admitted the value problem-solving theory had 'as a technical-instrumental mode action, but only when guided by values expounded by the critical persona'. Devetak, *Critical International Theory*, p. 113. Also Charlotte Heath-Kelly, 'Critical Terrorism Studies, Critical Theory and the "naturalistic fallacy"', *Security Dialogue*, 41:3 (2010), pp. 235–54.

[106]Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 227. Also How, *Critical Theory*, p. 16.

[107]Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 216.

[108]See Brooke Ackerly, Luis Cabrera, Fonna Forman, Genevieve Fuji Johnson, Chris Tenove, and Antje Wiener, 'Unearthing grounded normative theory: practices and commitments of empirical research in political theory', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 27 (2021), pp. 156–82.

[109]Martin Weber anticipated Schmid's concern about CIRT's focus on normative theory but saw greater potential in Habermas's social theory, which constructed 'a position from which functionalist systems-integration can be studied *critically*'. 'The critical social theory of the Frankfurt School, and the "social turn" in IR', *Review of International Studies*, 31:1 (2005), pp. 195–209 (p. 200).

[110]Linklater, 'The problem of community in IR', *Alternatives*, 15:2 (1990), pp. 135–153; 'The changing contours of Critical IR Theory', in Richard Wyn Jones (ed.), *Critical Theory and World Politics* (Lynne Rienner, 2001), pp. 23–43. Schmid argues that the normative and sociological work emerged from the influence of Habermasian thought, but Linklater is clear that an embodied solidarity in the face of suffering was strong within first-generation thinking. Linklater, 'Towards a sociology of global morals with an "emancipatory intent"', *Review of International Studies*, 33:S1 (2007), pp. 135–150 (p. 144); also Fluck 'The best there is?', p. 65.

CIRT has long been accused of lacking practical policy relevance,[111] and now it (and its norm studies cousin) seem 'hollow' as result.[112] To address that, I think CIRT should 'reorient towards practice'[113] by following the lead of the practice turn in 'new constructivist' IR.[114] More specifically, it can focus on 'communities of practice', i.e. those 'spatial-organization platforms where practitioners interact, learn and end up creating and diffusing practices and promoting their adoption by future practitioners'.[115] This would be a pragmatic – and Pragmatist – adjustment to the previous focus on the normative and sociological process of norm building. It would give those interested in praxeology an empirical focus for both negative and (as Conway might say) 'reformist' critique.[116]

An immediate problem with this suggestion is that IR practice theory can be read as 'traditional theory' in the way Horkheimer used that phrase. On the one hand, its grounded focus on the everyday micro-practices of practitioners is useful in addressing the concern that the 'grand narratives' of contemporary CIRT are too far removed from praxeology. Indeed, some see the practice turn in IR as part of a wider Pragmatist arc for these reasons.[117] On the other hand, practice theory is potentially at odds with Critical Theory's emancipatory project if it loses 'sight of the nature of social domination'.[118] This is especially the case if practice theory focuses only on the struggles among practitioners to prove their 'competence' in performing practices, and if practice is defined merely as 'patterned actions that are embedded in particular organized contexts'. [119] This approach potentially produces knowledge of a system, and how practitioners define and realise its purpose, but it does not – to repeat Horkheimer – comment on 'whether the purposes as such are reasonable.'[120] Indeed, Horkheimer seemingly spoke directly to this when he expressed concern about the failure to challenge the social value of technical knowledge. It 'is one of the reasons why men who in particular scientific areas or in other professional activity are able to do extremely competent work, can show themselves quite limited and incompetent, despite good will, when it comes to questions concerning society as a whole'.[121]

Why then would the focus and methods of practice theory help CIRT? It can, I suggest, make that contribution if the (lower-case) pragmatic move to focus on practice is combined with the kind of (upper-case) Pragmatist critique I described above. Indeed, I have argued along these lines in previous work with Jess Gifkins. We looked at practice theory accounts of diplomacy at the United Nations Security Council, including its approach to cosmopolitan harm conventions like the Responsibility to Protect. While we do not directly speak to CIRT, the implication is clear. The purpose of practice theory should be to critique the competence claims of systemic practitioners (e.g. Security Council diplomats) according to the norms produced by the global 'lifeworld'.[122] I more recently expanded on this approach developing two normative tests to 'blow apart' the complacency of communities of practice. The first of these is 'inclusive reflexivity', which assesses the openness of communities of practice to Deweyan 'publics', i.e. those affected by a practice but otherwise excluded from the knowledge processes that notionally legitimises them. Whereas this acts

[111] Kurki, 'The limitations', p. 130; Richard Wyn Jones, 'On emancipation: Necessity, capacity and concrete utopias', in Ken Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (Lynne Reinner, 2001), pp. 215–35.

[112] Aidan Hehir, *Hollow Norms and the Responsibility to Protect* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

[113] Kurki, 'The limitations', p. 142.

[114] David McCourt, *The New Constructivism in International Relations Theory* (Bristol University Press, 2022).

[115] Emanuel Adler, *World Ordering: A Social Theory of Cognitive Evolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 41.

[116] Conway, 'Critical international politics', pp. 219–20.

[117] Hellmann and Steffek, 'Introduction', p. 3; Visoka, 'Critique', p. 696.

[118] Schindler, 'Microanalysis as ideology critique. The critical potential of 'zooming in' on everyday social practices', in Benjamin Martill and Sebastian Schindler (eds), *Theory and Ideology in International Relations* (Routledge, 2020), pp. 228–239 (p. 229).

[119] Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, *International Practices* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 6.

[120] Horkheimer, *Eclipse*, p. 3.

[121] Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 221.

[122] Jason Ralph and Jess Gifkins, 'The purpose of UN Security Council practice', *European Journal of International Relations*, 23:3 (2017), pp. 630–65.

as a form of negative critique (or what Visoka might term 'critique as alternative'), the second test – 'deliberative practical judgement' – reflects the Pragmatist commitment to problem-solving (or 'critique with alternative').[123] The emphasis on practical consequences means the Pragmatist will prudently take technical knowledge into account as it searches for that better alternative.

Together, these tests can, I suggest, inform the praxeological dimension of CIRT by addressing pressing challenges like climate change, for instance. Whether the purpose of theory is 'emancipation' of the human subject (as in Critical Theory), or 'amelioration' of the lived experience (as in Pragmatism), climate change presents a two-part challenge. The first is that the technical reason of a capitalist system, which values the exploitation of the environment and legitimises carbon-emitting practices for economic growth, contradicts the objective reason of climatologists who alert us to the catastrophic consequences of business-as-usual. The second challenge is that the technical reason of the climate system and the climatologists could conceivably colonise the lifeworld in ways that also threaten the human subject and harm the lived experience. In focusing on the communities of global practice that have emerged around the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – in particular the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Conference of Parties (COP) – I have situated Pragmatist analysis between these extremes.

After aplying the Pragmatist tests to these communities of practice for instance, I concluded that while the IPCC is a panel made up of scientific experts whose reasoning might be described as 'traditional', it is a community that CIRT should support, not least because its reasoning is 'deliberative' among people who understand the system in question (the climate), and because that acts as a counterweight against the populist claims of those subjective interests who are not so qualified. That does not mean, however, that 'inclusive reflexivity' is redundant in this case. If this community is to command 'epistemic authority', it has to be conscious of how its expert knowledge is received by those with a stake in the problem and those with an influence on problem-solving practice. This translates, for example, into a need for regional representation within a global panel of expertise.[124] Similarly, the over-representation of the fossil fuel industry at the annual COP meetings might lead to the argument that the technical and subjective reason of the capitalist system has indeed colonised global governance. The Pragmatist implication of this is a political commitment to greater involvement of 'publics' – in this case social movements and industries championing sustainable growth – to balance to the power of special or 'private' interests.[125]

Liberal misrecognition, the new right, and CIRT's future

Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Ayşe Zarakol argue that the rise of the populist right in the LIO's Western 'core', and its non-Western 'periphery', can be explained by misrecognition. Misrecognition is 'understood as the gap between an individual or group's desired identity and how that person or group experiences being seen by others'. In this way, misrecognition 'destabilizes' the self's identity.[126] It creates ontological insecurity. To recover or achieve 'the high status they believe they are entitled to', right-wing movements rebel against liberal norms, which they blame for their sense of alienation.[127] Drolet and Williams add that from this perspective the defenders of liberal norms, including much of Western academia, are part of a 'New Class' of administrators threatening 'authentic' ways of life and their social hierarchies. Drawing on the Critical Theory of, for example, Antonio Gramsci, this 'New Right' has successfully tapped into this sense of alienation to mobilise a 'counter-hegemony' against liberalism.[128] This includes, most obviously within the Western core, Donald Trump's 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) movement, which targets liberal norms

[123]Ralph, *On Global Learning*, pp. 144–53; Visoka, 'Critique', pp. 678–704.
[124]Ralph, *On Global Learning*, pp. 187–92.
[125]Ralph, *On Global Learning*, pp. 192–203.
[126]Adler-Nissen and Zarakol, 'Struggles', p. 614.
[127]Adler-Nissen and Zarakol, 'Struggles', p. 614.
[128]Drolet and Williams, 'From critique', pp. 25–8.

and their defenders to make some Americans feel secure in their conservative identities. At the periphery of the LIO, it has found expression in Russian imperialism and, by invading Ukraine, its attack on liberal norms like national self-determination.

It is against this backdrop that I think Schmid's dismissive approach toward third-generation Frankfurt School Critical Theory is unhelpful. Axel Honneth's theory of recognition is in fact important to the future of CIRT because it speaks to this challenge.[129] Through a recovery of Hegelian and American Pragmatist (especially Meadian) thought, Honneth took Frankfurt School Critical Theory beyond the Habermasian focus on discourse ethics and its procedural conception of deliberative democracy. His focus was on the role social recognition plays in emancipatory self-realisation. Inclusion in deliberative processes is not simply a response to the *epistemological* question of how to authenticate claims to know the public interest, (as discussed above), it is also a useful response to existential questions of *ontological* security. This is because the right to participate in the public sphere bestows social value on (i.e. recognises) those being included. In the language of ontological security studies – especially its recent (re)turn to psychoanalysis – routines that respect the rights of democratic inclusion can emancipate subjects from the anxiety that the alienated self otherwise experiences.[130]

Honneth's Pragmatist conception of self-realisation based on mutual recognition goes beyond the civil [international] rights of human [state] subjects, however. Mutual recognition based on legal personality does not go far enough for Honneth. This is because legal personality is precisely the one shared with all other members of the [international] community. It cannot therefore recognise the self *and its particular traits*. To properly secure the self, subjects need to 'assure themselves of the social significance of their individual capacities' in the light of a community's 'value-conviction'. Honneth labelled this 'esteem'.[131] Without socially endowed self-esteem, subjects will experience disrespect and ontological insecurity. This has implications for the emancipatory *praxis* of Pragmatist-informed CIRT. It values the practices of what Dewey called 'extended personalities', or those subjects who realise themselves in (international) societies that enable others to realise their selves.[132]

But is there a problem invoking Honneth's Critical Theory in the current moment when its focus on esteeming otherwise repressed identities has been blamed for its own form of misrecognition and for the rise of right-wing populism? Drolet and Williams capture this when they write:

> This new, multicultural politics of recognition asked for public affirmation of individual and group differences – not as pathological deviations to be accepted reluctantly by the majority, but as worthy ways of leading individual and collective life. In the eyes of its advocates, this

[129]CIRT has not followed through on the identification of 'an emerging trend to end the honeymoon with Habermas in favour of a reorientation toward Honneth'. Jürgen Haacke, 'The Frankfurt School and International Relations on the centrality of recognition', *Review of International Studies*, 31:1 (2005), pp. 181–194 (p. 181). For exceptions, see Volker Heins, 'Of persons and peoples: Internationalizing the critical theory of recognition', *Contemporary Political Theory,* 9:2 (2010), pp. 149–70; Shannon Brincat, 'The harm principle and recognition theory', *Critical Horizons*, 14:2 (2013), pp. 225–56.

[130]On the (re)turn to psychoanalysis, see C. Nicolai L. Gellwitzki, 'The positions of ontological (in)security in international relations: Object relations, unconscious phantasies, and anxiety management', *International Theory*, 17:1 (2025), pp. 118–50. Amy Allen criticises Honneth's psychoanalysis but argues that Melanie Klein 'offers critical theory a realistic conception of the person that [is not] … mired in pessimistic despair'. This conception 'serves as the foundation for creativity, reparation, and productive individual and social transformation'. *Critique on the Couch: Why Critical Theory Needs Psychoanalysis* (Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 24. For a discussion of early Frankfurt School engagement with Freudian theories on the unconscious as a form of resistance against the 'conditioning the subject receives at the hands of [Marcuse's] one-dimensional society', but also a realisation that society had the 'capacity to stay the same by producing ideologies that would meld the malleable aspects of the unconscious with the needs of the economy', see How, *Critical Theory*, pp. 57 and 33. Also Deborah Cook, *Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West* (Verso, 2018), p. 22 on Adorno's concept of 'non-identity' as a means of thinking about subjectivity without placing it in 'prefabricated' social categories.

[131]Honneth, *The Struggle*, p. 87, also pp. 111–13; *The I in We*, pp. 204–8.

[132]John Dewey, 'Moral judgment and knowledge', from *Ethics*, republished in Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander (eds), *The Essential Dewey. Volume 2: Ethics, Logic and Psychology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 328–341 (p. 333).

> turn to identity politics represented a fight for self-determination and human dignity against the false universalisms of the establishment and the hegemony of the heterosexual, White Anglo-Saxon majority culture. For the New Right, it was a self-defeating plunge into what Gottfried describes as 'theocratic politics in a new key', ironically intensifying liberal managerialism rather than resisting it. … Since identity is something to be accorded or withheld depending on needs and aspirations of existing political institutions, it became yet another instrument used selectively by the managerial elites to empower minorities at the expense of established majority cultures.[133]

To be sure, Drolet and Williams are trying to understand the rise of the New Right, their intention 'is not to somehow blame Critical perspectives'. That said, I think this interpretation does have a normative implication. It does not mean CIRT should dismiss Honneth's emphasis on identity and the emancipatory value of social recognition, but it does invite us to again think about praxeology and the resources offered by the American Pragmatism of John Dewey.

A Deweyan-inspired critique of Habermasian ethics, for instance, centres on the potentially alienating consequences of an approach that abstracts truth claims 'from the relationships of the situation'[134] and values 'reason' over 'emotion'. In this vein, Dmitri Shalin argued that Habermas's emphasis on 'disembodied reason' should be contrasted with Dewey's 'embodied reasonableness'. Reason in the theory of communicative action is primarily taken to be consciousness, understanding, cognition 'with no obvious relation to the human body and noncognitive processes (emotions, feelings, sentiments)'. What Pragmatists call 'experience' had, in Habermasian theory, 'shrivelled into verbal intellect'.[135] This is important here because the actual consequence of this kind of communicative practice may well be the reconstruction of an unhelpful social hierarchy based on the intellectual's misrecognition of certain groups as 'irrational' simply because they are 'sentimental'.[136] What Shalin describes as the 'embodied reasonableness' of Deweyan naturalism recognises the importance of emotions to human behaviours and, therefore, to solving social problems. It is less likely to deride the way sentiments, traditions, beliefs, myth (or other 'irrationalities') provide a sense of ontological security, and for that reason it is 'more easily justifiable and … more expansionable'.[137] The emphasis is on emotional and social 'intelligence', not reason, and that, I suggest, creates a more empathetic approach to those feeling (materially and ontologically) threatened by change.

Linklater's CIRT was not so tied to Habermas to miss this. His emancipatory sociology traced the evolution of ethical responses that were embodied to the extent that the 'emotions and constitution of impulses make agent compliance with social principles virtually automatic'.[138] My focus here, however, is on the praxeological implication. My point is that if an emancipatory politics of recognition is insensitive to the emotions that accompany change and loss – if it is 'condescending'[139] – then it is more likely to provoke a reaction that makes it difficult for the oppressed to gain the social recognition that is sought. Jack Snyder makes a similar point.[140] He notes how liberal activists critical of foreign regimes for not recognising the human rights of their citizens have not 'paid much attention to the emotional dynamics of the targeted group, and in particular to the emotions of shame and shaming'. Moral outrage, he continues, often 'plays into the hands of elites

[133] Drolet and Williams, 'From critique', p. 31.

[134] Cochran, 'Deweyan Pragmatism', p. 543.

[135] Dmitri Shalin, 'Critical theory and the pragmatist challenge', *American Journal of Sociology*, 98:2 (1992), pp. 237–279 (p. 254). On Adorno's warning that Habermasian IR excludes 'a range of human experiences and relationships from the realm of reason', see Fluck, 'The best there is?', p. 57. Also How, *Critical Theory*, pp. 57–8.

[136] Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, pp. 10–15.

[137] Cochran, 'Deweyan Pragmatism', p. 545.

[138] Linklater, 'Towards a sociology', p. 142.

[139] Drolet and Williams, 'From critique', p. 32.

[140] Jack Snyder, *Human Rights for Pragmatists* (Princeton University Press, 2022).

in a traditional power structure, drawing energy from outrage at loss of status in a way that motivates widespread popular backlash'. That leaves 'the progressive namers and shamers farther from their goals'.[141]

The Pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty made a similar point in relation to the emergence of identity politics at the core of the LIO. Writing in 1997, he noted how the American left's embrace of an emancipatory identity politics could backfire if that also involved shaming those who did not share this narrative of the American identity. The task was to achieve a more inclusive America, but that would not happen if Americans were alienated by change. If that happened then:

> something will crack. The nonsuburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for a strongman to vote for – someone willing to assure them that, once he is elected, the smug bureaucrats, tricky lawyers, overpaid bond salesman, and postmodernist professors will no longer be calling the shots. … One thing that is very likely to happen is that the gains made in the past forty years by black and brown Americans, and by homosexuals, will be wiped out. Jocular contempt for women will come back into fashion. [Racially offensive words] will once again be heard in the workplace. … All the resentment which badly educated Americans feel about having their manners dictated to them by college graduates will find an outlet.[142]

This is an amazingly prescient statement given the re-election of President Trump, but again the Pragmatist's point is not to blame a politics of recognition, nor to dismiss Honneth's Critical Theory as a form of emancipatory politics relevant to the age. Honneth after all drew on the classical Pragmatist works of Dewey and Mead (as did Rorty) in formulating his theory. The Pragmatist's point rather is to stress the importance of the *means* – the praxeology – by which the ontological security of self-realisation is pursued. The social change that is necessary for oppressed identities to feel recognised is no less anxiety-inducing for it being necessary. Progressive reformers will not acquire allies if they belittle that anxiety (or even – as Rorty does – use the language of 'gains' and 'losses').[143] In such situations, Dewey's commitment to empathy as a pedagogic tool is more likely to encourage sustainable change than the condescending stance of liberal moralism.[144] It may well be that in the US case it is too late for Critical Theory and the political left to act on Rorty's Pragmatist advice. But then, Rorty himself knew that sentimental education was in fact a generational process.[145] On that basis, Pragmatism can still signpost a future for CIRT.

Conclusion

I have tried to respond to a concern that the signposts directing CIRT out of its current 'crisis' are pointing in the wrong direction. While accepting the argument that CIRT can be too abstract and disengaged, I have argued that this is not because it took a wrong turn with Habermasian theory. CIRT has been on the right path, but it has not yet sufficiently developed a convincing account of emancipatory praxis. The normative and sociological branches of CIRT that Linklater developed from Habermasian dialogic ethics were not unhelpful moves. They have simply received more attention than the praxeological branch of Linklater's vision. There is then a danger in the

[141] Jack Snyder, 'Backlash against naming and shaming: The politics of status and emotion', *British Journal of Politics and International Studies*, 22:4 (2020), pp. 644–653 (p. 644).

[142] Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 90.

[143] See again Allen's use of Klein's psychoanalysis to inform a critical theory that diagnoses 'the dysfunctions of our politics, including the contemporary resurgence of right-wing authoritarian movements, without falling into the temptation to pathologize our political opponents': Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, p. 26.

[144] Empathy does not necessarily mean agreement. Open and clear disagreement may be the best way to express respect for a person. Schindler, 'The task of critique', p. 390.

[145] Rorty, 'Human rights'.

argument that CIRT's future lies in returning to the apparent 'inspirational' quality of Adorno and Horkheimer. The costs of that argument were experienced in the last century and arguably continue to be felt by the political left today. First-generation Frankfurt School theory may have inspired academics who railed against 'the system', but they were also perceived as elitist and out of touch with other sections of global society who saw those same academics a part of 'the system'. This sense of alienation from liberalism and the political left has created fertile ground for a right-wing counter-hegemonic bloc, which now threatens the emancipatory learning of the last century.

My argument, that CIRT should not turn its back on second-generation Frankfurt School theory and should in fact look forward from that to make more of the third-generation work on social recognition is not immune from similar criticism. I argue, however, that within its American Pragmatist influences there lies a response to this criticism. Pragmatism's anti-intellectualism, its commitment to inclusion and critique alongside expert knowledge as a form of practical problem-solving, and its sensitivity to the means an emancipatory politics of recognition employs, all signpost an alternative path. It is, I contend, a more compelling path to follow. There is of course a concern that by drawing on American philosophy this argument is out of step with the move to 'decolonise' IR and Critical Theory.[146] Does it work against the emancipatory goal of such a move? Not necessarily. American Pragmatism's emphasis on learning as emotional intelligence can, for instance, be read 'contrapuntally' alongside non-Western relationalism (as distinct from Western rationalism).[147] I would add that the moves to 'decolonise' the discipline by including non-Western voices can, and should, be done without neglecting national narratives within Western states. To do so risks further marginalisation from those sections of global society that are currently persuaded by right-wing populists; and that in turn risks the emancipatory project that CIRT is committed to.

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[146] John Hobson, 'Is critical theory always for the white West and for Western imperialism?', *Review of International Studies,* 33 (2007), pp. 91–116; Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Columbia University Press, 2016). Allen argues that Adorno's negativity is a way of avoiding the 'self-congratulatory' complacency of Western modernity, which she sees in Habermas's and Honneth's emphasis on learning and progress. Although see Okiji's argument in *Jazz as Critique* that Adorno was deaf to the way jazz gave expression to black subjectivity in Western modernity.

[147] Pinar Bilgin, 'Contrapuntal reading' as a method, an ethos, and a metaphor for Global IR', *International Studies Review*, 18:1 (2016), pp. 134–46.

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