Chapter 4

Scientific Realism and Critical Theory:

Structure, Ideology, and Emancipation

> *The conception I am proposing is that people, in their conscious activity, for the most part unconsciously reproduce (or occasionally, transform) the structures that govern their substantive activities of production. Thus people do not marry to reproduce the nuclear family, or work to reproduce the capitalist economy. But it is nevertheless the unintended consequence (and inexorable result) of, as it is also the necessary condition for, their activity.*
>
> —Roy Bhaskar[1]

Introduction

In addition to the empiricist search for strong causal relations among sense data variables and the hermeneutical interpretation of constitutive meanings, students of politics will at one time or another encounter the concept of *structures* and assertions of *critical social theory*. Among the most distinctive, bold, and influential of these assertions is that the goal of political analysis is not simply to describe the world, but to change it.[2] Changing the world for critical theory does not only require changing meanings; it requires changing *structures*. In the quotation below the title above, the philosopher of scientific realism, Roy Bhaskar, makes the crucial claim that structures *govern*, *are produced*, and *are reproduced* by human activities in ways about which human beings may not be aware, and that these structures are *transformable*.

[1]Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 80.
[2]Karl Marx. *The Communist Manifesto* (1848).

Although these structures may be unobservable as "sense data," they are nonetheless *real*, and they cause real material effects. Bhaskar's examples of the nuclear family and the capitalist economy, moreover, illustrate that such structures operate in a relatively permanent fashion in our lives in both our most intimate and our most public affairs. Our purpose in this chapter is to introduce the philosophical premises of the scientific realist account of reality, to show how it underlies the analytical and political aims of critical social theory, and to elaborate those aims as we have the aims of empiricism and hermeneutics.

Scientific realism contests the accuracy of empiricist accounts and offers an alternative way of viewing scientific analysis, one that takes seriously both the post-empiricist criticisms of empiricism *and* the insights of hermeneutics. As a result, the work you have done thus far in the book is essential to understanding the realist outlook on science. As you shall see, realism as a philosophy of science reintroduces the concepts of causality, the pursuit of the unification of the non-human natural and social sciences, and the relatively objective study of both. It further accepts that scientific knowledge is constituted and mediated through language, and works the hermeneutical category of meaning into its pursuit of causal explanations. Scientific realism may arguably underlie many modes of interpreting society and politics you have encountered in your studies and media exposure; here, we shall note how in one of its most prominent forms in political inquiry—critical social theory—it goes beyond the objectivist goals of empiricism and intersubjective goals of hermeneutics by claiming that objective knowledge and intersubjective understanding are, by themselves, insufficient. Using realist premises about structures that shape and can be transformed by human activity, critical theory articulates the goal of liberating human beings from structures that govern and produce reality in an oppressive and unjust fashion.

We shall start our discussion of realism and critical theory, as we did in our discussion of empiricism, with a broad outline of the philosophical premises of realism as an outlook on scientific practice. Then we shall, with the help of many illustrative examples, show how it underlies critical theoretical efforts to engage students of politics in *political action* so as to transform the structures that shape and govern activities in an unjust world.

Realism and Empiricism: Real Causal Mechanisms

In his critique of the empiricist aim to explain particular phenomena by showing how they are instances of larger causal patterns—as we have seen in Chapter One, the essence of explanation for scientific empiricism—the realist philosopher of science William Outhwaite, has written:

> If I ask why my train is late, I may be partially reassured to be told that the 8:55 is always late, but even British Rail would hardly dare to offer this statement as an *explanation*. The survival of what came to be called "covering law" [or deductive-nomological] conceptions of explanation is one of the great puzzles in the history of philosophy; it can only be explained by a pathological fear of ontology and, in particular, of notions of natural necessity.[3]

Herein lies the root of the realist problem with empiricism: theorizing strong correlations between observables in the world does not identify the real causes of the phenomenon in question. Thus, empiricism fails adequately to *explain* those phenomena. Identifying patterns in the relationships between observed variables in the world (class or group status and one's vote, for example) tells us that something will happen with a certain regularity, but it does not explain why that thing happens as it does. A prominent realist theorist of international politics, Alexander Wendt, has registered a similar objection to empiricism's account of explanation:

> [S]ubsumption under a [deductive-nomological covering] law is not really explanation at all, in the sense of answering *why* something occurred, but is simply a way of saying *that* it is an instance of a regularity. In what sense have we explained peace between the US and Canada by subsuming it under the generalization "democracies don't fight each other"? When what we really want to know is why democracies do not fight each other, to answer that question in terms of still higher-order laws merely pushes the question back one step. The general problem here is failing to distinguish the grounds from expecting an event to occur (being an instance of a regularity) with explaining why it occurs. Causation is a relation in nature, not in logic…. In order to answer the question "why?" we need to show how a causal process works, which depends on knowing [real causal] mechanisms.[4]

Wendt refers to causation "in nature," and Outhwaite refers to an empiricist "fear of ontology" and "notions of natural necessity." Realism is making a claim about *what exists*—an ontological claim that there is a reality that we are not able to sense directly. For realism, this reality is comprised of particu-

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[3]William Outhwaite. *New Philosophies of Social Science: Realism, Hermeneutics and Critical Theory*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 21.
[4]Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 81.

lar kinds of things called *causal mechanisms* or *structures*.[5] These mechanisms and structures *produce* or *generate effects* in the world. The effects—like the falling object, the vote, or the two-party system—are visible, but the structures—gravity or the economic, identitarian, or electoral structures that generate them—may not be. To exist or "to be," the realists maintain, is not to be perceived. Real things—causal mechanisms and structures—exist and cause social activities and practices. Hence, Outhwaite writes, "the most powerful reason for adopting a realist metatheory is to acquire a framework for the rational discussion of ontological questions"—questions about what causal mechanisms really exist to produce effects we observe in the world.[6]

Realism claims to provide a better account of how scientific explanation occurs, despite what empiricism says. Recall that, for empiricism, legitimate knowledge is founded on perceptions of sense data alone. Recall as well Thomas Kuhn's thesis that scientific knowledge is, fundamentally, what scientists agree it is, and that the paradigms within which two scientists operate might be so different that it makes sense at times to speak of them as operating within different worlds. According to realism, both empiricism and the critiques of empiricism fail to acknowledge the existence of a real world that exists independent of our sense perceptions and does not change even if scientists change their views of it. By accepting Kuhn's "different worlds" thesis, the critique of the empiricist foundations of knowledge has made a tremendously misguided turn in the direction of relativism.

Like empiricism, realism maintains that causal explanation is possible, but unlike empiricism, realism does not seek to identify relations of dependence among variables. Rather it theorizes the existence of causal mechanisms or structures that generate effects. These effects are perceived through the senses but the real mechanisms or structures that are posited to generate them are not. What scientists say may change, but reality will not. This is especially the case in the study of non-human nature, wherein, realism claims that causes are *enduring* ones of "natural necessity," as mentioned in Outhwaite's statement above. Gravity—which is not observable through the senses—is enduring and naturally necessary. As part of a reality that functions to consistently produce the same effects, it cannot be expected to change over time.

By contrast, realism operating in the social sciences—our primary domain of consideration—observes that practices change over time, thus the causal mechanisms or structures that generate them are not enduring and necessary. They are *relatively enduring*, meaning that they endure but can and do change over time. Feudal economic structures that produced lords and serfs

[5]Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Philosophy of Science* (London: Verso Books, 1975), p. 51.
[6]Outhwaite, *op. cit*., p. 59.

were, for example, neither directly observable through the senses nor fully enduring. They were relatively enduring, as their transformation into capitalist structures in many places in the world has shown. Noting that some causal structures in science sometimes change as well, Outhwaite further describes the relatively enduring structures of the social world as "messy and fluid." We shall return to these qualities of social structures shortly.

The study of structures or causal mechanisms in both non-human natural and social reality aims not simply to discover single mechanisms operating at any given time. The mechanisms may function in a multiple and overlapping manner; the structures of capitalism and the structures of a two party system may jointly produce a single effect, e.g., elections influenced by money. Moreover, to say that they are permanently operating implies that no alteration in our existing empirical observations needs to occur to say that causal mechanisms are at work. Again, we quote from Outhwaite's helpful discussion:

> The objects on my writing table are all subject to gravitational attraction, but they are prevented from falling to the ground by the resistance offered by the table. The open window is buffeted by the wind, but is held in place by the metal bar. The healthy state of my body is the outcome of a continual violent combat within it.[7]

The flame of the Bunsen burner does not burn the ceiling because of the causal structures of heat and oxygen. Note that when "nothing happens"—the ceiling does not burn—causes still exist, and effects still occur. In this regard, empiricism is, from a realist viewpoint, overly fascinated with dynamic events that occur as the result of antecedent causes. Realism, by contrast, stipulates the existence of causality even when nothing seems to happen.

Realism therefore suggests that science ought to proceed by observing the effects of causal mechanisms, and then theorizing backwards, so to speak, about what those mechanisms may be. These mechanisms are often multiple, functioning at the same time, and producing many, sometimes even contrary, effects. Causal structures may both produce events and they may produce non-events. That is, they both produce and limit, or enable and constrain, what occurs in the social world. The structure of the capitalist economy produces monetary exchanges for profit at the same as it limits bartering, for example. The structures of the nuclear family produce monogamy, and they limit or constrain polygamy and polygyny.

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[7]Outhwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

Now, realism stipulates that these mechanisms exist independently of our theorizing about them (because they are real), but it also acknowledges that scientific knowledge is constituted in and through the theories we have about the world. In this regard, it essentially agrees with Kuhn that science is dependent on the prevailing concepts of the scientific community at the time, and is thus a social convention. It wants to avoid the relativist implications of the "different worlds" thesis by saying that there is a real world out there about which scientists aim to speak. In addition, unlike hermeneutics, realism maintains an interest in causality, but like hermeneutics, realism accepts that social structures are partly constituted by the meanings human beings give to them. We say partly here because structures are, for realism, also and mainly causal. In fact, the interest in causality is so definitive to realism that it sees constitutive meanings, that are central in hermeneutical inquiry, as generating effects as well. We shall show several detailed examples below. Before doing so, let us make a few more specific points about the character of causality in both the natural and social realms of realist scientific inquiry.

Causal Mechanisms in the Social World

Realism pursues the unity of the natural and social sciences, with the qualification that the kinds of causal mechanisms or structures found in the social world are relatively enduring, and thus subject to change. What Outhwaite describes as the "messiness" of structures operating in the social world stems, in part, from the hermeneutical point that structures—like those of marriage or capitalism—are constituted by the meaningful purposes of their participants. Thus realism accepts the "double hermeneutical" condition of all explanation, namely that the structures it posits are constituted both in and through the languages of science (Kuhn) and by their participants (hermeneutics). Rather than seeking to understand differently through conversational inquiry, however, the realist seeks to explain the causal powers of these structures or mechanisms. Realism does this by observing the effects of structures and working backwards, so to speak, to theorizing or positing the structures that cause them. This messiness of the relation between structure and human action is actually quite fascinating.

Structures *mediate* social practices. By mediate, we mean structures are both productive of and reproduced by human activity. They are both the causal preconditions and effected consequences of social practices. Take the example of this book: our present activity of writing this book (a social practice) is produced by and reproduces the structures of the publishing economy. Your buying and reading this book (another social practice) is produced by and reproduces those structures as well, along with many

structures of education that are causing our work together right now! An important dimension of this mediation, something stated in the opening quote of this chapter by Roy Bhaskar, is that neither we nor you *consciously* intend to reproduce the structures, but they are nonetheless reproduced by our actions. We do not, for example, consciously aim to reproduce the structures of the publishing economy in writing this book. Our conscious aim, presently, is to convey the ideas of realism in a way that makes sense to you, the reader. And you don't mean—your subjective intention is not—to reproduce the structures of learning through printed material, but the structures of the publishing economy are part of the causal mechanisms generating both our writing and your reading, *and* both our writing and your reading reproduces those structures. Structures thus mediate human activity. They make these activities happen (they cause or produce them). In these ways, structures both set the condition for our activities and are outcomes or consequences of our activities.

The mediating quality of structures has implications for thinking about human freedom or *agency*. From a realist perspective, we do not approach the task of writing a book, and you do not approach the task of reading it, as totally free agents. Our very purposes in writing and reading are themselves caused by structures. To focus for the moment only on our writing—the book we are writing is not the only caused effect of the structures of publishing. Both the *idea* and the activities involved in writing a book are as much products (and reproductive) of the structures of the publishing economy as the book is. Those structures do not exist independently of our shared (intersubjective) intention to write a book. Thus realism accounts for meanings in several senses: it shows how the meanings we have about the world are produced by structures that, in turn, reproduce those structures; and it suggests that structures themselves are, therefore, constituted in part by human meaning. The causal structure(s) of the publishing economy are partly constituted by intersubjective meanings. To say otherwise would reify the structure (as we discussed in the last chapter): It would make it seem as if the structure resides outside of the realm of human meaning. But realism accepts that social structures are partly constituted by the meanings the participants have of them. The latter point is important, because the recognition that causal structures are constituted opens the door to their reconstitution through contestation, and thus change.

Examples of Structural Causality

Let us clarify these theoretical points through the classic realist example of the relationship between structure and practice by analyzing the struc-

ture of the nuclear family. When a couple getting married says, "I do" their intentional action (to get married) is causally generated by the structures of marriage and the nuclear family. Their conscious intentional action also unconsciously reproduces these structures as an unintended consequence. By getting married, they reproduce other structures as well, such as those of ritual celebrations or state practice, depending on the character of the wedding. All of these structures mediate, set the conditions for, and are the consequence of their "I do."

Another related, contemporary example is the political movement to legalize same-sex marriages. This movement is also produced by the structures of marriage and the nuclear family. Of course, as structures, marriage and the nuclear family cause social phenomena at two different levels of consciousness. This is evidenced by the high level of awareness of and contestation over the gender conventions governing marriage, versus the lack of contestation over the nuclear family. The nuclear family appears to be a more deeply rooted structure. We can compare it to structures of economic hierarchies (classes or castes), structures of religious belief and faith, or structures of architectural design. These deeper structures are extremely powerful; they mediate, set the conditions for, and are consequences of a range of human activity. Think of all the "I dos" that are generated as a result of these structures! These human activities are, in theoretical terms, further conceptualized as either *produced and restricted*, or *enabled and constrained* by these structures. We shall return to these dimensions shortly.

Because social structures mediate, produce, and are reproduced by human beings in their meaningful experience in the world, they are also *contestable* and thus subject to potential alteration. This is how the "same-sex marriage" movement can be seen: as contesting aspects of the constitutive content of the structure of marriage, without as such, contesting the structure of marriage itself. This is a result of the fact that the movement is partly produced by the structure of marriage, and marriage as a structure gets reproduced by the movement's goal of legitimizing same-sex marriage. That is, the movement's goal is to legalize same-sex marriage, not to do away with marriage or its influence in society. It is not an anti-marriage movement. Nor does it aim to contest the structures of the nuclear family, which also appear to be causally producing the same-sex marriage movement, but at a deeper level. There have been changes to the nuclear family over time without fundamentally altering its structure as a meaningfully constituted form of human habitation. Those changes—such as practices of adoption, family planning strategies and regulations—have occurred as a result of a great deal of political activity to contest and then modify the structures that govern the nuclear family.

Contestation is really never out of the question, although it is often *limited* in the very functioning of the structure: rarely do couples question saying "I do" when getting married. Yet contestation is not out of the question. Plato, for example, questioned conventional nuclear family arrangements, arguing that at least one class in his ideal republic ought to nurture and raise children communally. In a similar way, contemporary feminist movements have questioned, reconceptualized, and in many cases restructured gender roles within the nuclear family. The causal mechanism of the nuclear family both constrains and enables such alternative possibilities. The structure keeps alternative possibilities from emerging in particular ways (constrains) and it shapes them as they emerge (enables). Structures *constrain at the same time as they enable, and enable even as they constrain*, such that when things proceed in the world of the nuclear family as if nothing unusual is happening, *something is happening*: the causal power of the nuclear family is generating effects, such as marital engagements, "I do's" at the altar, struggles among people and movements in society ito be able to say "I do," and changing gender roles and identities.

In the United States, the same-sex marriage movement has been, in a realist view, further generated because of structural deficiencies of policies that have granted some privileges to heterosexual, single-partnered married couples and withheld them from single-partnered, same-sex couples. These policies, upheld in both public law and private business codes, are excellent examples of realist structures. In fact, policies and laws are, in general perfect examples of structures. They are meaning-constituted mechanisms that generate, mediate, set the conditions for and are consequences of, produce, limit, enable and constrain human activities in the world. Policies that enable hospital visitation rights to heterosexual married couples simultaneously withhold or constrain such rights for same-sex couples.

Similarly, as we saw in our examination of Duverger's law on two-party systems, laws may be seen as causal mechanisms that generate particular forms of political activity (two-party systems) and not others (proportional representation). We reconstructed Duverger's model according to the tenets of empiricism, but realism believes it provides an even better account of what empiricists are doing when they are explaining things. Realist laws stipulate regularities between structures and the events they produce, not invariable relations between observable variables. The point of science is to theorize the real causal structures—in this case the laws, and perhaps human psychological structures that prefer a smaller rather than a larger range of political choices—that produce, are reproduced, and in principle are transformable by human activity.

Structures and Social Change

The degree to which structures may be subject to change obviously depends on the level of their causal efficacy. We note with Bhaskar that transformation is "occasional." Indeed, transformation depends not only on the position people occupy within the hierarchies of the social structures, but also on other structures that are also causing social reality. For example, it might be very difficult to contest and alter the social structures of marriage and the nuclear family when people who have been produced literally out of the structure of the nuclear family have been excluded from the structure of marriage and are battling to get in, while others are battling to keep them out. The debate over marriage in the United States has been just this kind of debate, with one side seeking to gain inclusion through altering the law, while the other side tries to make the exclusion permanent through, for example, a structural amendment to the Constitution that would define marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman (a view that is, itself, causally produced for many by religious scriptures, customs, and laws—all viewable here as causal mechanisms). Transformation in the very structure of marriage, say in the direction of multiples husbands or wives, or its elimination altogether, seems less likely, then, given the configuration of the causal forces seeking to defend or join it. In fact, on realist terms, such transformation resides in the realm of the "unthinkable" as an effect of the causal mechanisms that produce marriage and the nuclear family as the structures of desire in the United States.

Note that when structures change, the effects they generate change as well. Again, alterations in the law are excellent examples. Consider environmental regulations put into place to prevent deforestation or the killing of rare species. These may be seen as efforts to create causal mechanisms that will enable (generate and produce) and constrain (limit and restrict) activities: enable protection of forests, for example, where forests are being denuded, and constrain human practices and activities from clearing them for either business or human settlement purposes.

In the case of global warming, one could argue that the enduring structures of nature's ecosystems are generating human political action to alter how human beings live in the world. Laws regarding emission standards, for example, may be seen as relatively enduring social structures to ensure human habitation on the planet *and* as effects of nature's enduring ecological structures. The laws are relatively enduring social structures that cause—produce and limit, enable and constrain—human beings to act in some ways and not others. Or, consider another example in the context of political rights: the profound changes brought about by transforming the legal structure of

the United States in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This act outlawed discrimination based on race or sex and profoundly changed US society because, in realist terms, it now both constrained discriminatory practices and enabled practices of equal treatment under the law. Prior to that, for example, practices included various forms of humiliating and violent, social and political exclusion and segregation against people of color in the United States. After the Civil Rights Act, those actions were criminalized, and, as an effect of the new structure, the actions of the citizenry and government changed.

Another example of legal structures and their dynamic effects may be seen in the politics of migration. In 2010, for example, the state of Arizona, a United States state sharing a territorial border with Mexico, passed a bill called, Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act 1070. SB1070, as it came to be known, was constituted to create a structure that would produce the effect of reducing "illegal immigration" in the state. The bill effectively criminalized being in Arizona without documents proving citizenship or legal residency of some kind. After it passed, but before it went into effect, opponents challenged the law in the federal court system. Without even taking effect, however, the very passing of the law had one of its intended effects: the threat of arrest, detention, and deportation posed in the structures of SB 1070 produced a mass exodus of migrant workers from Arizona, the great majority of them Latin American. The law had other effects, too. The mass exodus of undocumented residents—an intended goal of the law—led to a shortage in the supply of labor for the jobs left vacant by the workers who departed. The shortage of labor was also an effect of the new legal structure.

To address this lack of labor supply for local businesses, state senators from both main political parties proposed a new guest-worker program. Their proposal was an effect of the new legal and economic structures, and it sought to put into place a new legal structure in the form of a new program for migrant workers. The new program sought to allow Arizona to recruit low-wage agricultural workers via the Mexican Consulate to work and pay taxes without receiving any benefits or many of the basic rights afforded by temporary visa programs in the past, much less rights of full citizenship.[8] An elected representative who co-authored SB1070 described the more "immigrant-friendly" version of the program as follows:

> Businesses have to certify that they can't find American workers. Then they send a recruiter to Mexico to find the kind of workers

[8]Ted Robbins. "Arizona Proposes Bill to Stop Losses of Migrant Workers," *National Public Radio.* April 1, 2008. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89266085>

> they needed, and those people are fingerprinted, photographed, they're background checked in both the United States and the country of Mexico before they're issued their legal card.

We have researched these practices extensively. These state policies sought to put back into place federal legal structures similar to a 1940s agreement between the US and Mexico to create a temporary worker program, and they mirror "guest worker" practices in other states in the United States, as well as other countries in the world. In that regard the bill for guest workers was an effect of the structures of immigration management that have been causally effective in the United States for decades. A bill with similar content and the goal of creating a "kind of flexible, market-based visa program designed to better meet economic demand" was proposed by the United States Senator Jeff Flake from Arizona in 2016.[9]

There is much to say about immigration laws in this context. Our point here is to underscore the causal effects of the passing of SB1070. The new law/structure produced effects, including the departure of "illegal immigrants" and a shortage in the supply of labor relative to the demand by local businesses. The first effect was seemingly desirable to those who supported the law; the second was seemingly undesirable for those who may have supported or opposed the law. Local businesses had, in fact, benefitted from the prior structures that enabled the employment of undocumented migrant laborers. The economic structure of a labor shortage generated actions on the part of the political representatives to seek to alter the structures once again. They proposed legislation—the first step in creating new policy structures—to allow workers to come to Arizona without citizenship rights, or the hope of acquiring such rights in the future.

A deeper structure productive of policies and legal measures in the management of immigration, comparable to the structure of the nuclear family in contestations over marriage, is the structure of the territorially bordered nation-state. Borders are definitely structures that produce all sorts of effects—defense, monitoring, political debate—effects that in turn, reproduce the structure of the border. This point has relevance well beyond the Arizona-Mexico context. One may think of a concrete or steel wall along the border between the United States and Mexico—or between Israel and the Palestinian West Bank, Morocco and Western Sahara, or Turkey and Syria—as structures intended to generate different effects than barbed wire. The

[9] "Flake Introduces Bill to Establish Guest-Worker Pilot Program," http://www.flake.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2016/flake-introduces-bill-to-establish-flexible-guest-worker-pilot-program, accessed December 15, 2016.

sheer visual blockage is an effect produced by a solid barrier that, in turn, has additional effects on both border guarding and border crossing. In many cases such walls have completely segregated communities (an effect) and divided lives and worlds that were once interconnected (an effect). These are *real* changes—effects—of the causal powers of new structures.

The realist understanding of this change is important to underscore. When a structure changes, different material effects occur *as a result* of the causal powers of the new structure. The different effects of a new structure—the exodus of migrants in the case of SB1070, or segregated communities in the case of border walls—are not simply changes in the constitutive understandings of material practices. They are changes produced in the lived and felt material structures of experience.

To take another set of examples, consider the time-related structures of the seven-day week or 365-day year, and consider how they produce all sorts of activity that reproduces them as time structures. Most time or temporal structures—like the college or university class schedule to which you conform when, for instance, you attend your classes—are not given in nature, and there is no natural necessity to organize the calendar in ways that human societies need to have five-, or six-, or seven-day workweeks. But these facts do not make the existing, relatively enduring structures of time any less causally efficacious, for "in their conscious activity, [human beings] for the most part unconsciously reproduce" (Bhaskar) those structures. Think of all the activities in which people engage to make it to class or work "on time," from setting the alarm to preparing yourself to go, to departing at a certain hour, etc. Human beings occasionally, transform these time structures: they shift hours, schedule vacation time, legislate family medical leaves, and so forth. But these structures govern their substantive activities of production in a relatively enduring fashion. Indeed, workweek structures are the unintended consequence and inexorable result of, as they are also the necessary condition for, their activity.

The causal powers of the common five- or six-day workweek are such that such transformation is infrequent. This is the case with most social structures. Their causal powers produce how we live in profoundly enduring ways. Note how many of your actions and the actions of those around you are causally produced by the registrar's class schedule at your school or the structure of the workweek. According to a realist view, you and your professor showing up to class at a particular time, or you and your colleagues showing up to work at a particular time, etc. are regular effects of those causally operating structures.

Ideational Structures

Before we illustrate this concept in some greater detail and apply it to the domain of critical social theory, there is one more quality of social structures that deserves attention. This concerns an additional comparison with hermeneutics. As we discussed, hermeneutics is fundamentally concerned with the constitutive character of meanings. Realism, as we have seen here, revives the concern for causality in the explanation of social life.

Realism extends its thinking about causality to the domain of concepts and meanings. For realism, meanings need to be seen not only as constitutive, but also as causal. To be more explicit, this means that purposes, reasons, and meanings—such as "I commit myself to be a responsible spouse," or "I am building a wall to protect the homeland"—may be said, according to realism, to be both effects of causal mechanisms *and causes* of actions and practices. This class of causes may be given the shorthand of *ideational* causes—causes that exist in the realm of human ideas, including meanings, ideas, ideologies, values, and representations. For realism, these function as causal structures, not only constitutive meanings.

For example, when a doctor orders a special test or examination for a patient, what is the cause? From a realist view it may be the doctor's sense of responsibility for the welfare of her or his patients. That sense of responsibility functions as a causal structure and thus one of the overlapping causes of the doctor's order. Similarly, the actions of voters can be seen as causally generated not only by the legal structures that govern electoral practices, but also by the specific purposes that motivate them when they go to the polls. Votes for politically liberal and socialist parties may be seen as caused, in part, by the idea that the government ought to take a very active role in the economy. Votes for conservative parties may be seen as caused, in part, by the idea that cultural traditions are important and worthy of protection. In the United States, the successes of the Tea Party and President Donald J. Trump in the last decade may be attributed in causal terms by realism to the purposeful idea that their supporters want "to take our country back" to "make America great again"—intersubjective meanings constitutive of the Tea Party movement and of Trump's electoral success. Again, in a realist view, the purposes are not simply constitutive. They have the causal power to produce action, that is, to make human beings act—vote, protest, etc.—in some ways and not others.

Regarding the massacre that occurred in Norway in 2011 that we discussed in the prior chapter, the realist might say that the *idea* of eliminating multiculturalism in Europe along with the active *memory* of the crusades *caused* the murderer's actions. Here you have anti-multicultural ideological

structures along with structures of political memory *producing* the effect of killing supporters of multiculturalism and/or opponents of a contemporary crusade. The construction of memorial sites for victims of such political violence may be seen as causally produced in part by ideational commitments "not to forget" the tragic human victims of such violence.

Identities or subjective understandings may also serve as good examples of ideational concepts as structures. Structures of national identity, for example, produce all sorts of interesting effects. From a realist perspective, they function as mechanisms that cause people to rally around the flag or country in times of crisis. The protests of what has come to be known as the Arab Spring in the countries of the Arab world in 2010–2011 were said to be caused not only by the "desire for freedom" but also by "love of the nation and country." People risked their lives, gathered in protests, for "freedom for the nation" from tyrannical regimes, some of which had been in power for close to forty years.

A realist might also point out that the cries and willingness to die for freedom were effects produced by the constraints of the restrictive political structures and, on many accounts, by the constraints produced by a lack of economic opportunity in the lives of especially young people facing a future of either unemployment or highly unsatisfactory employment. The condition was powerfully demonstrated in the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor whose humiliation and arbitrary treatment by bribe-seeking political authorities in 2010 sparked the mass protests against the tyrannical regime, leading to its overthrow. From a realist standpoint, Mr. Bouazizi's action illustrates the causal power of structures of political repression—they caused his self-immolation, which in turn made him an inspiration to others. This inspiration may be seen, under realism, as an ideational structure that propelled others into taking to the streets in Tunisia and then throughout the world to demand change.

As another example, followers of the news in the United States will notice that whenever there is a disaster, tragedy, or attack outside the country, the news—a structure of journalism as shaped by broader economic structures—reports how many Americans were injured or killed as a main feature of the story. Hardly any other nationality is ever mentioned. This is a phenomenon, we understand, that occurs in other countries as well. The concept of national identity seems to generate this effect; the identities of the reporters are produced by nationalism and they unconsciously reproduce it in their reporting on national terms. This also happens, for example, during the Olympics and other international sports competitions. The lead story is almost invariably about how the nation fared. Hence the news is hardly "objective": it is often national news, news of the nation, produced by the structures of national

identity. The structure of nationalist journalism may be invisible as such, but we can find this structure by observing its effects and working backwards, tracing these effects to the structural causes that produced them. Similarly, borders and property lines are causally produced not only through structures of law and governmental power, but also through subjective understandings of concepts such as "national citizen" and "property owner." The border itself is an outcome of multiple and overlapping legal and ideational structures, as is the act of crossing the border for work.

More broadly, personal identities as self-understandings—perhaps one's understanding of one's class or professional status, or one's gender, racial, ethnic, or religious identification, to name a few of the most common examples—may be seen as structurally causing activities and practices. It is not uncommon to see someone act in a certain way because one is a lawyer or journalist, to take examples of professional identities. Identities also produce associative practices, causing persons who identify in one way perhaps to associate more often with people they understand to be "like them" and less with people they understand to be "unlike them." For realism, these self-understandings are not simply constitutive meanings, as in hermeneutics. They are also powerful social structures. Identities, produced by other causal mechanisms, produce and constrain certain actions, all of which reproduce those identities as structures governing our activities.

Underlying these self-understandings might be further structures, like psychological ones we hinted at with the example of marriage as an effect of a structure of desire. Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) theory of the unconscious is a perfect example of an underlying causal mechanism that produces effects. Freud posited the unobservable unconscious to explain observable conscious actions. A person might, for example, want to spend the rest of his or her life with someone as a result of the functioning of an unconscious need for companionship, something shaped through earlier experience in a loving family, a traumatic experience of loss, or a fear of loneliness and vulnerability of a solitary life. Another person might be reluctant to enter relationships for other psychological reasons residing in the unconscious. The unconscious, as a structure, thus may be said to *cause* certain effects of the most intimate kind. We shall have more to say about the dynamics and structures of psychoanalysis below.

Marxian Realism

One noteworthy illustration in modern realist political thought is the analysis of capitalism found in the work of Karl Marx (1818–1883). With the current absence of a dominant Marxist actor on the global stage, many consider his

work to be passé or irrelevant, but we disagree, not only because we think his analysis contains important analytical insights about the nature of capitalism, but also because the absence of a revolution as he and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) expected does not render their critical observations of capitalism any less relevant to students of political life.

Marx wrote in the language of science, and, in recent times, there have been important debates about the underlying mode of interpretation that constituted Marx's thinking about science. In his close reading of Marx's account of science and the character of his theses on capitalism, the contemporary political theorist James Farr has convincingly argued that Marx's philosophical presuppositions and analytical aims exhibited realist scientific underpinnings.[10] Marx sees capitalism differently than the presently dominant definition of the market, defined by "neoclassical economists," as a self-equilibrating system and guarantor of human economic freedom. For Marx, capitalism is an economic system built on the competitive pursuit for profit and large scale property that is founded on a fundamental division between two primary classes: the bourgeoisie that owns the means of production and the proletariat that owns only its power to labor, which it must sell to the bourgeoisie. In this sense alone, capitalism is not freedom for the majority of people, because the workers are forced to sell their labor power to the members of another class to survive. Farr has argued that undergirding Marx's realist account of capitalism is the basic structure of what Marx called *surplus value*.

The surplus value structure is part of the labor theory of value—a theory that suggests that the value of an object is equal to the amount of labor a person puts into it. Marx works within this theory and shows how it has important implications for thinking about the oppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. For him, surplus value is the amount of labor a member of the bourgeoisie extracts from members of the working proletariat above and beyond what they are compensated for. Labor value is always greater than the compensation, the difference being surplus value. For example, suppose the worker puts ten units of value into the production process, the owner will compensate them for less than ten. How much depends on fluctuations in the supply of labor relative to its demand, but it is always less, for the difference between the value generated and the labor (and other costs) is the profit the owner will make by selling the product on the market. The structure of surplus value is, therefore, the source of profit and the locus of the

[10]James Farr, "Marx, Science, and the Dialectical Method," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1987, p. 221–232; "Marx's Laws," *Political Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1986, pp. 202–222; Marx No Empiricist, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1983, pp. 465–472.

class division under capitalism. It is the very structure that, for Marx, makes capitalism what it is—a fundamentally class-based clash between capital and labor.

Importantly, as a relatively enduring social structure, surplus value is also the mechanism that will ultimately produce an effort to overthrow capitalism by the proletariat and to initiate a new form of economic organization (socialism and communism) where structures producing a class-based society will be transformed into structures that ensure a classless society. Surplus value may be eliminated, or where labor is shared on a rotation principle, the surplus may be collectively shared—that is, it may be transformed so as not to be a site of systematic and permanent exploitation of one class by another. In slightly more detail, Marx and Engels theorized that over time, fluctuations in the amount of surplus value along with changes in the proportion of humans to machines in the workplace would create a small demand for labor relative to the supply. This dynamic would force the wages of the growing working class down, increase their numbers and their already pervasive alienation from their forced life activity, make them miserable, and, eventually, produce a sense among them of their power as a class to overthrow capitalism. Thus the structure of surplus value would effectively produce, initially, huge profits and prosperity of enormous proportions for one class (the bourgeoisie), along with alienation and the hope for prosperity within capitalism for the other (the proletariat). In the longer run, however, it would lead to its own demise by producing tremendous misery and, ultimately, revolution by a class-conscious, anti-capitalist proletariat. Class-consciousness among the members of the proletariat was a crucial effect of capitalist structures. Workers would cease to accept the ideological illusion that capitalism was a system from which they could eventually benefit, that it would involve the spreading and trickling down of wealth. That is, they would reject the *ideology*—the illusions or false beliefs created by the bourgeoisie to preserve their domination—of capitalism, and adopt a new revolutionary interpretation: that their survival and well-being depended upon destroying capitalism and founding a new society based on egalitarian structures.

To apply the concepts of realism to this analysis, it is important to note that the extractive structure of surplus value is not a causal mechanism that works according to *natural* necessity. It does not happen naturally. In this regard, the interpretation of capitalism offered by Marx and Engels contrasts with classical political economy that views capitalism as naturally necessary given the naturally egotistical propensities of human beings. Capitalism is not naturally necessary and inevitable, Marx maintained: the relatively enduring social structure of surplus value emerged out of particular human conditions, was endowed with particular human purposes, and has been

causally efficacious in producing an entire (capitalist) world. Moreover, persons living under capitalism whose activities are produced by the structure of surplus value reproduce it, unconsciously for the most part, as an unintended consequence of activities that may be intended to produce other effects. That is, in their conscious life activities, they intend, for example, to invest to increase savings, to compete to earn a living, to provide for their family, and so forth. They do not, for the most part, intend to reproduce the structure of surplus value. Nonetheless, the structure of surplus value (like the structures of marriage and the nuclear family) mediates the activities of workers and people living under capitalism: surplus value produces and is reproduced by those activities. And, given that surplus value is socially produced rather than natural, the structure of surplus value can, in principle, be transformed, along with all of its effects. This potential for transformation was central to the revolutionary goals of Marx and Engels. They both anticipated and promoted the collectivization of surplus value through the abolition of private property and the class system upon which it depends. The core structure of surplus value under capitalism would be eliminated, and transcended, once and for all. Surplus value is thus the structural precondition for both capitalism and a revolution to overthrow it.

Whether or not there would or will be a revolution depends upon the conditions emerging for the proletariat to see itself as a class, and its corresponding recognition to use its power as a class to overthrow capitalism and usher in a new order—either violently, or as also noted by Marx, through the ballot box. Capitalism would thus become one specific historical formation, not the necessary, inevitable, and universal system of economic organization for all times. Like feudalism that preceded it and communism that would succeed it, capitalism would one day disappear through the conscious transformative acts of human beings seeking a genuinely egalitarian society. Thus, the causally generative structure of surplus value, Farr writes, "is the essence of the capitalist mode of production, an essence from which, scientifically, all else (Marx thinks) can be explained, and from which, politically, capitalist society can be exposed, criticized and transcended."[11] Yes, even the criticisms of Marx and Engels were effects of surplus value.

The Realist Model of Interpreting Politics

So, how to think of the model of explanation offered by the realist mode of interpreting politics? Realism offers a tremendously open and creative space for theorizing underlying causal mechanisms. Essentially the idea is to con-

[11]James Farr, "Marx, Science, and the Dialectical Method," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1987, p. 231.

sider our empirical observations of human activities and practices as effects of some structure and then to work backwards to comprehend and "posit" the structures generating those effects. Freud posited the unconscious as a causal mechanism by working backward from observations about the conscious activities and conscious understandings of human beings to theorize a deeper, non-observable structure productive of human activity. So, too, with Marx and the extractive labor structure of surplus value: Observing a two-class system, Marx worked backward to posit surplus value as the essential causal mechanism for capitalism and its overthrow. And we have seen how government policies and laws can be seen as causal mechanisms producing human activity. We quote Roy Bhaskar once more:

> My transformational model asserts that at any moment of time we are heavily constrained by pre-existing structures. Just what are these pre-existing structures? Well, they are the buildings we have, the stock market, the whole financial system; they are *everything that there is before any given voluntaristic act* (emphasis added).[12]

With his examples of buildings, the stock market, and financial system, Bhaskar emphasizes, like Marx, a material, not ideational character of structures, but realism may place emphasis on either. This analytical flexibility may be seen in the context of a realist interpretation of inter-state politics. In one of his influential essays on interpreting international politics in a realist fashion, the theorist of international relations, Alexander Wendt, places heavy emphasis on the ideational character of structures in political relations between states. For Wendt, social structures include material structures ("like gold and tanks") but they are, firstly, "in part, shared understandings, expectations, or knowledge" that "constitute the actors in a situation and the nature of their relationships, whether cooperative or conflictual." He writes that material structures "only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded."[13] He offers two examples of ideational structures—what he calls a security dilemma and a security community:

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[12]Roy Bhaskar, "How to Change Reality: Story v. Structure—A Debate between Rom Harré and Roy Bhaskar," in José López and Garry Potter, eds., *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism* (London: The Athlone Press, 2001), p. 30.
[13]Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer, 1995), p. 73.

> A *security dilemma*, for example, is a social structure composed of intersubjective understandings in which states are so distrustful that they make worst-case assumptions about each others' intentions, and as a result define their interests in self-help terms. A *security community* is a different social structure, one composed of shared knowledge in which states trust one another to resolve disputes without war.[14]

Note that the *structures*—either the security dilemma or the security community—are unobservable causal mechanisms that produce both particular intentions and interests among state actors as well as particular effects in their relations, such as war or peace. These social structures are largely, if not entirely, the intersubjective understandings of participants in the practices of international politics. These understandings may be embedded further in institutional structures, like regional security organizations (e.g., NATO), which, as additional structures, can produce additional effects that may alter or sustain a particular order of state power internationally.

Note that when nothing is happening in the international order, something is still being caused by the ideational structures of security. Moreover, note that the actors may alter the structures. If states whose practices in relation to each other are produced by a structure of a security community suddenly or over a long period of time militarize, "others will be threatened and arm themselves, creating security dilemmas"—note how one structure may produce another structure as an effect.[15] "But if they engage in policies of reassurance… this will have a different effect on the structure of shared knowledge, moving it toward a security community."[16] As we have seen in other examples above, the actions and actors that are produced by structures can affect those structures.

Structures may be changed, therefore, by the purposeful or *agentic* actions of those whose activities are produced by structures. Like Bhaskar, however, Wendt asserts that change occurs only occasionally. "Sometimes social structures so constrain action, that transformative strategies are impossible. This goes back to the collective nature of social structures; structural change depends on changing a system of expectations that may be mutually reinforcing."[17] Social structures, that is, may not be naturally *necessary* but they are relatively—read significantly—*enduring*. Changes in them require wide-scale shifts in ideational structures ("expectations"). Such appears to

[14]Ibid.
[15]Ibid., p. 77.
[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid., p. 80.

be the case in relations between states in international politics, as it does with marriage and the nuclear family, as it does with capitalism, and as it does with many other structures.

Now that we have covered the theoretical presuppositions of realism, we encourage you at this point to try to think as a realist. Take a few moments and consider our first study question at the end of this chapter. Try to imagine entering the realist frame of thinking as you did for empiricism and hermeneutics. Remember, structures in the social world are relatively enduring; they are meaning-endowed causal mechanisms that both produce and are reproduced by human activities that produce them; and they are potentially transformable by being reconstituted with different meanings and thus different causal powers.

Contemporary Critical Theory

Marx and Engels' call to pursue a revolution by generating an awareness of the oppressive effects of capitalist structures lies behind the more general demand in contemporary critical theory that the interpretation of politics should pursue something more than explanation or understanding. It must pursue knowledge that enables the production of more *just* governing structures in society. This thesis has been adopted in several schools of critical social theory that have incorporated the Marxian need for a social theory of progressive change, but it has departed from Marxism's central focus on an analysis of class antagonism under capitalism. These schools include radical democratic theory, feminism, critical race theory, environmentalism or green politics, to name just a few. Not all manifestations of these movements are explicitly *critical-theoretical*, but there are important strands within all of them that are.

To understand the critical theoretical presuppositions and their aims, as we have those of empiricism, hermeneutics, and realism, we turn to the classic, ground-breaking and provocative exploration of these aims in the work of the philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1929–). In the Appendix to his 1971 work, *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Habermas distinquished what he called the knowledge constitutive interests of empiricism, hermeneutics, and critical theory. A discussion of Habermas's account of these distinct interests not only helps to clarify the goals of critical social theory. It also serves as an important comparative review and fruitful extension of our thinking about empiricism and hermeneutics. More to the point, understanding the material we have covered thus far is crucial to understanding the *critical* aims of critical social theory, as well as how a *realist philosophy of science* underlies those aims.

Knowledge and Human Interests

Recalling a classical Greek tradition, Habermas begins the *Appendix* with a critique of the modern objectivist tendency to separate the pursuit of objective knowledge from its relation to action in the world. In its classical Greek context, theorization of objective universal truths was tied to action in the world. For example, in Plato's *Republic*, to *know* the true, objective and universal form of the Good was to *do* the good: knowledge provided the basis for correct action in the world. By contrast, Habermas maintains, contemporary theory has split knowledge and action. Under the domination of the modern empiricist sciences, objective knowledge has been posited as neutral in relation to particular ways of acting in the world. Knowledge has been decoupled from its old, intimate relation with action. We have seen this separation between knowledge and action in our review of empiricism. Empiricist knowledge claims not to be tied to any particular way of acting or intervening in the world. Its knowledge is "value-free" and can be used to explain and predict phenomena in a way that is neutral with regard to outcomes.

Participating in the critique of empiricism, Habermas argued that this view is mistaken, but he did so on slightly different terms than the critics we have studied in the chapter "Internal Tensions." Rather than pointing out how the concepts (theories, paradigms, prejudgments, etc.) we have of the world constitute our observations of it, Habermas argued that all forms of knowledge have particular *interests* embedded in them. Empiricist knowledge—as we have noted in our review of empiricism and shall elaborate further in greater detail below—is constituted by an interest in technical control over what it sees as objectified processes. Empiricism is not, therefore, neutral with regard to interests—it seeks to *control* outcomes of causally theorized relations of dependence between variables. For Habermas and critical social theory, empiricism's claim to provide "value-free knowledge" amounts to an *ideological* masking of its location in the structures of human interests. Habermas also analyzed the knowledge-constitutive interests of hermeneutics. In hermeneutics, he saw a kind of modern objectivism underlying what it offered as knowledge. His critiques of empiricism and hermeneutics set the stage for distinguishing the *emancipatory* interests of critical theory.

In what follows, we will first review Habermas's critical reading of empiricism and hermeneutics and then, using some of Habermas's other writings on power, we will illuminate the constitutive goals of a critical social theory, especially its central *critique of ideology*. We review Habermas's understanding of empiricism, hermeneutics, and critical theory in detail, partly because Habermas offers philosophical and political insight about each mode of

interpreting politics beyond what we have discussed thus far. It serves both as an important review and an extension of our study.

Empiricism and the Human Interest in Technical Control

Habermas wrote *Knowledge and Human Interests* in philosophically dense German, and the translation to which we shall refer is faithful to the sophistication of the original text. Still, it helps to quote his remarks at length both to see how deeply Habermas was in conversation with what we have discussed in our prior chapters, and to see precisely where critical social theory departs from empiricism and hermeneutics. Let us begin with his comments on empiricism, what he calls "the empirical-analytic sciences."

> In the empirical-analytic sciences, the frame of reference that prejudges the meaning of possible statements establishes rules both for the construction of theories and for their critical testing. Theories comprise hypothetic-deductive connections of propositions, which permit the deduction of law-like hypotheses with empirical content. The latter can be interpreted as statements about the covariance of observable events; given a set of initial conditions, they make predictions possible. Empirical-analytic knowledge is thus possible predictive knowledge. However the meaning of such predictions, that is their technical exploitability, is established only by the rules according to which we apply theories to reality.
>
> In controlled observation, which often takes the form of an experiment, we generate initial conditions and measure the results of operations carried out under these conditions. Empiricism attempts to ground the objectivist illusion in observations expressed in basic statements. These observations are supposed to be reliable in providing immediate evidence without the admixture of subjectivity. In reality basic statements are not simple representations of facts in themselves, but express the success or failure of our operations. We can say that facts and the relations between them are apprehended descriptively. But this way of talking must not conceal that as such the facts relevant to the empirical sciences are first constituted through an *a priori* organization of our experience in the behavior system of instrumental action.
>
> Taken together, these two factors, that is the logical structure of admissible systems of propositions and the type of conditions

> for corroboration suggest that theories of the empirical sciences disclose reality subject to the constitutive interest in the possible securing and expansion, through information, of feedback-monitored action. This is the cognitive interest in technical control over objectified processes.[18]

Dense as this writing is, it might not surprise you to know that, if you have followed our discussion thus far, Habermas is saying things we have already addressed. Let us go over what we have already come to understand. Keep in mind that we are reconsidering these themes both by way of review and by way of learning the analytical aspirations of critical theory.

Habermas begins above by suggesting, in almost hermeneutical fashion, that there is a "frame of reference" in empiricism that prejudges the meaning of admissible scientific statements with rules for both theory building and testing. We have discussed some of the rules in this "frame of reference"—rules like operationalization and intersubjective verifiability—and we noted that these rules do in fact determine admissible scientific statements. All legitimate knowledge in empiricism must be conceptualized in ways that conform to these rules, because these rules essentially ground empiricist knowledge in sense data observation. Operationalization ties concepts to the data; intersubjective verifiability establishes the fact status of observations. These rules constitute the prejudgments, in the hermeneutical sense, for admissible knowledge under empiricism.

In addition, Habermas notes the analytical objective of theory production may be reconstructed in the terms of the deductive nomological model, which he refers to as "hypothetical-deductive connections of propositions which permit the deduction of law-like hypotheses with empirical content." Think of the different premises of the deductive nomological model: the first set of premises expresses relations among variables in their most general terms. These terms in principle have empirical content, meaning they are ultimately based on empirical observations. For example, the theory, "lower class members of frequently oppressed ethnic or racial minorities tend to vote for parties to the left of the political spectrum," is based on primary empirical observations and their repeated testing. Therefore, the law-like statement has "empirical content."

The remainder of the first paragraph above indicates the character of the predictive logic of the empiricist model of explanation. There, Habermas re-asserts that the meaning or purpose of the predictive knowledge of empiricism is what he calls the technical exploitability of the knowledge. He

[18]Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 308–309.

is already referring to what he states more explicitly in the final paragraph, namely the extent to which empiricist knowledge serves to control outcomes. We have already discussed control (through the manipulation of variables) as one of the central aims of empiricist knowledge.

This purpose, Habermas is saying, is not established objectively. The technical interest in control is not neutral with regard to values, nor is it something that exists outside of the realm of science as an objective truth. Rather, Habermas asserts, the technical interest in control is established "only by the rules according to which we apply theories to reality." That is to say that empiricist knowledge is shaped in and through the rules that empiricists bring to their study of the world. That sentence could have been written by Thomas Kuhn. Recall that rules and procedures are components of what Kuhn called paradigms, and these paradigms shift over time. They are not objective or interest-free; rather they are established by the conventions scientists use as they study the world. Their study of the world and the knowledge about reality that they produce are disciplined by these rules.

In the second paragraph, Habermas further unmasks the empiricist claim to objective knowledge by asserting that "empiricism attempts to ground the objectivist illusion in observations expressed in basic statements." For Habermas, empiricism's claim to objectivity is an illusion that must be *unmasked*. More formally, Habermas thinks of the objectivist claim as an "ideology" in the critical theory sense of the meaning of ideology: an illusion outfitted with the power of common conviction. We shall return to this central concept several times in our proceeding discussion. For now, we note that Habermas is reiterating that empiricist knowledge is not objective because, as we know from his argument, all forms of knowledge have particular interests embedded in them. For empiricism, this interest is technical control. Empiricists don't approach their work "objectively." The approach it aiming to acquire technical control.

By "basic statements," we may understand "statements of facts." Habermas describes these as "immediate evidence without the admixture of subjectivity." When we discussed empiricism, we described such evidence as facts. Facts were observations that individuals subjectively perceived and intersubjectively verified. The empiricist criterion of intersubjective verifiability is said to remove any "admixture of subjectivity." Habermas joins the critiques of empiricism precisely here, when he asserts that, "in reality," these so-called "basic statements" are "not simple representations of the facts," but rather "express the success or failure of our operations." That is, these statements are not without any admixture: they are derived from series of experiences of success or failure in our scientific experiments. Facts qualify as facts based on our testing of them in the world. These tests occur

according to rules of scientific rigor that are agreed upon by scientists seeking technical control over causal processes. They are not neutral with regard to the interests of science.

Therefore, as much as "we" might want to "say that facts and the relations between them are apprehended descriptively"—meaning as neutral descriptions of what is observed—"this way of talking must not conceal that as such the facts relevant to the empirical sciences are first constituted through an *a priori* organization of our experience" in the context of our successful or unsuccessful scientific experience. Kuhn would have said facts are preconstituted within a paradigm. In short, facts do not exist objectively. Facts are preconstituted and posited in and through the concepts derived from the gathered experience of the scientific community of observers.

The logical structure of empiricist knowledge, and the rules that govern its development of theories, are thus neither neutral nor objective. They have a *constitutive interest*. Habermas calls this constitutive interest the "cognitive interest in technical control over [what are seen as] objectified processes." In the third paragraph, Habermas states this point in the complex formulation that empiricist theories "disclose reality subject to the constitutive interest in the possible securing and expansion, through information, of feedback-monitored action." That is, empiricism seeks to show causal relations—the "reality" that empiricism seeks to "disclose"—with the interest in "securing and expanding" the scope of action in those causal relationships. "Feedback monitored action" refers to action undertaken as a consequence of possessing knowledge of the invariable (or highly probabilistic) relationship between variables in the world. These relationships have been scrutinized and tested across many cases. Thus action oriented to control the relationships between the variables emanates from feedback about their operation with each other. The "technical interest" in control is the constitutive interest of empiricist knowledge.

Habermas's discussion thus participates in the critiques of empiricism but elaborates those critiques by identifying an interest that is *built deeply into* the empiricist form of knowledge. Of course, Habermas's identification of empiricism's interest in control is not novel for us: In our discussion of empiricism, we had identified this constitutive interest as well. What differs about Habermas's point is that he expresses this observation in the context of the post-empiricist critical goal of unmasking empiricism's objectivist pretensions. Empiricist knowledge is interest driven, and not objective. Hopefully you can see how reviewing his thesis is helpful in bringing together the material we have studied. This is the case with what Habermas says about hermeneutics as well, with the qualification that some of what Habermas asserts about hermeneutics differs slightly from our presentation.

Hermeneutics and the Interest in Action-Orienting Mutual Understanding

Writing in the early 1970s as hermeneutics was only beginning to find expression in political inquiry, Habermas offered a critique of some objectivist tendencies in early hermeneutical work, before the conversational approach we have detailed in the prior chapter was more fully elaborated. As he did, he registered poignant observations about hermeneutics that we have not yet discussed, as a way of distinguishing what he called its *practical* interest from the technical interest of empiricism and the emancipatory interest of critical theory. Let us read closely his characterization of hermeneutics from Habermas' *Appendix*. The following excerpts follow the above excerpts on empiricism:

> The historical-hermeneutic sciences gain knowledge in a different methodological framework. Here the meaning of the validity of propositions is not constituted in the frame of reference of technical control… theories are not constructed deductively and experience is not organized with regard to the success of operations. Access to the facts is provided by the understanding of meaning, not observation.…
>
> It appears as though the interpreter transposes himself into the horizon of the world or language from which a text derives its meaning. But here, too, the facts are first constituted in relation to the standards that establish them. Just as positivist self-understanding does not take into account explicitly the connection between measurement operations and feedback control, so it [hermeneutics] eliminates from consideration the interpreter's pre-understanding. Hermeneutic knowledge is always mediated through this pre-understanding, which is derived from the interpreter's initial situation. The world of traditional meaning discloses itself to the interpreter only to the extent that his own world becomes clarified at the same time. The subject of understanding establishes communication between both worlds. He comprehends the substantive content of tradition by applying tradition to himself and his situation.
>
> If, however, methodological rules unite interpretation and application in this way, then this suggests that hermeneutic inquiry discloses reality subject to a constitutive interest in the preservation and expansion of the intersubjectivity of possible action-orienting mutual understanding. The understanding of

> meaning is directed in its very structure toward the attainment of possible consensus among actors in the framework of a self-understanding derived from tradition. This we shall call the practical cognitive interest, in contrast to the technical.[19]

Habermas begins by pointing out that hermeneutics and empiricism offer different methodological frameworks, especially insofar as "access" to what he calls "the facts"—of hermeneutics is provided by "the understanding of meaning," not sense data observation. Habermas's usage of the concept "facts" here is interesting. We believe his usage follows the post-empiricist critique; that is, by facts, he means the concept-dependent evidence that comprises the empirical subject matter of a hermeneutical study. Habermas's deeper point here is that "meanings" are derived from the hermeneutic interest in knowing them. That is, the goal of understanding meaning pre-constitutes the "meanings" *as* meanings, just as the empiricist goal of knowing causal relations pre-constitutes "facts" *as* "facts." This makes sense to us in the following way: hermeneutics, as we have shown, posits human beings as meaning-making creatures. It insists that to understand human experience, we must seek to understand the meanings constitutive of that experience. These are "the standards" that establish hermeneutical "facts" (meanings) as hermeneutical "facts." It makes sense, then, to say that hermeneutics posits meanings as empiricism posits sense data. Though differing in their conceptualization of inquiry, each approach pre-constitutes inquiry in particular terms.

For Habermas, this exposes an objectivist quality of hermeneutics. In his view, hermeneutics does not acknowledge how its form of knowledge is, therefore, "always mediated through this pre-understanding." Hermeneutics makes inquiry appear as if the interpreter is objectively entering the horizon of meaning of the interpreted, without acknowledging this pre-constitutive dimension. "Hermeneutic knowledge is always mediated through this pre-understanding, which is derived from the interpreter's initial situation."

Here is where we slightly disagree with Habermas. Or, put in another way, we believe his critique applies to some forms of hermeneutics, but not to all forms. It may apply to Weberian approaches that conceive of *verstehen* as a quasi-objectivist exercise of getting out of one's shoes into another's, but it does not apply to more conversational approaches. Recall from our discussion of more conversational hermeneutics that proponents of hermeneutical inquiry insist that the interpreter's initial situation is pre-constituted by the interpreter's prejudgements (foremeanings, etc.).

[19]Ibid., pp. 309–310.

Moreover, conversational hermeneutics emphasizes that understanding always occurs in and through the language of the interpreter, such that—to pick up the thread of Habermas's logic—the worlds of meaning that are disclosed to the interpreter, are disclosed only "to the extent that the interpreter's own world becomes clarified at the same time." This is what Habermas thinks that what may be called objectivist hermeneutics misses. It is precisely, however, what conversational hermeneutics grasps. Gadamer's maxim that, "one understands differently if one understands at all," means that an interpreter's understanding has altered when understanding the meanings constitutive of others' lives. The alteration is, moreover, not simply in the "subjective" meanings of the interpreter, but in those meanings as they have been shaped by the interpreter's *intersubjective* linguistic relationships.

For both Gadamer and Habermas, these intersubjective relationships may be thought of as the traditions within which an interpreter is initially situated. To take an example: The study of immigration politics is situated in traditions of state and border-making practices that reach deeply into the historical experience (traditions) of humanity. Thus, when Habermas writes that "[the interpreter] comprehends the substantive content of tradition by applying tradition to himself and his situation," we may understand "tradition" as the meaningful intersubjective concepts that the interpreter is seeking to understand (e.g., immigration, secularism, *ahimsa*, freedom, prayer, style, etc.). "Applying" is strong language, but, in relation to our prior discussion, it is more than apt. Interpreters seeking to understand meaning must aim to affect a change in their understanding. They must aim for some alteration, some form of understanding differently. The outcome of a hermeneutical engagement is to genuinely see the world, or, more precisely, the worlds of meaning that comprise it, differently. The difference may be subtle or nuanced, or it may be grand and profound, but this difference must entail a transformation constitutive of the understanding of the interpreter—applied in this sense. Insofar as one sees the world(s) differently, one's "situation"—one's meaningful habitation of the world—has changed as well.

In addition to this change in understanding, dialogical hermeneutical inquiry establishes communication between both the world of the interpreter and the world of the text. This is an extremely important point of focus for Habermas, one that leads him ultimately to see the knowledge constitutive interest of hermeneutics as related to political action. Habermas makes this connection in his third paragraph. He claims that, in establishing communication between worlds, the knowledge constitutive interest of hermeneutics lies in its ability to produce a "possibly action-orienting mutual understanding"—a working agreement or consensus—between interlocutors. Hermeneutics therefore "discloses reality subject to a constitutive inter-

est in the preservation and expansion of the intersubjectivity of possible action-orienting mutual understanding."

To see Habermas's point, imagine democratic citizens with different perspectives on an issue coming together to make a common policy. Imagine them trying to reach an agreement or consensus from perspectives that differ so much that it is as if they are speaking from different worlds. They come together, converse about their views, deliberate and endeavor to reach an understanding that will differ in content from the understanding they had prior to their deliberations. They don't do this willy nilly; they do this to discover a way, or ways, of acting together on an issue of common concern. This acting together expresses, for Habermas, the *practical* interest of hermeneutics. Just as the *technical* interest in control is built into the very structure of empiricism, the practical goal of consensus-based action is built into the very structure of the conversational model of hermeneutical inquiry into meanings. Being in an interlocutory relationship with the meanings constitutive of the worlds of others makes action based on some mutually-arrived-at understanding possible between worlds.

Recall that in our discussion of hermeneutics we did not say that agreement is a necessary outcome of hermeneutical dialogue. We only said that understanding differently is required, and we stated that this different understanding can take many forms. Habermas's point is different and well taken. In principle, hermeneutical conversation does not require agreement between interlocutors from meaningfully different worlds but it makes it possible.

There is one additional phrase in Habermas's final point about hermeneutics that requires clarification: He asserts that, "The understanding of meaning is directed in its very structure toward the attainment of possible consensus among actors in the framework of a self-understanding derived from tradition." The phrase, "self-understanding derived from tradition" is another way of saying: subjective meaning derived from the intersubjective languages one inhabits. To make sense of this, imagine members of two very differently situated groups entering into a dialogue to reach a consensus. Any consensus they reach would be an expression of their self-understandings as those are derived from their respective traditions. To make this concrete: imagine members of the anti-immigration movement, such as the Minutemen in the United States, and members of the Migrant Safe House movement that supports migrants attempting to reach a consensus. That consensus would be an expression of their self-understandings, as those understandings are derived from the traditions of meaning that they inhabit. The Minutemen might point to their patriotic duty to defend the independence of the United States from external threats at the border; while the members of the Migrant

Safe House movement might appeal to their obligation to aid the needy and suffering. "Patriotic duty" and "obligation to aid the needy" are not simply the subjective meanings of the members of the respective movements: they are intersubjective meanings constitutive of the traditions that the individual members of these movements inhabit. This is how the self-understandings of members of each movement are derived from traditions.

Habermas is pointing out that any possible consensus reached between these movements—or any interlocutors—would emerge out of understandings in the traditions in which deliberative interlocutors are embedded, that is, out of the understandings derived from their tradition(s). This is how consensus formation in democratic theory happens: people from different traditions come together and attempt to reach a common consensus that is derived from the terms of the different traditions from which they speak. The Minutemen Militia may speak of defending independence; while the Migrant Safe House movement may speak of aiding the needy and suffering. Consensus formation would require the expression of their views, openness to being altered by the views of others, and a pursuit of some common ground—a mutual agreement upon which they could, possibly, act in concert. Perhaps they could agree on the importance of reducing the most perniciously exploitative practices of migration management, practices that subject migrants to violence and danger of all kinds. If they were able to reach such an understanding, it would form the basis of their common policy. Policy is a kind of action in concert between citizens. For Habermas, the practical interest of hermeneutics is precisely what enables such democratic practice.

For Habermas, however, both the technical interest of empiricism and the practical interest of hermeneutics fall short of the aims of *critical social theory*. Neither control nor consensus will do, Habermas maintains, when too many forms of control (the empiricist interest) are exercised over populations in unjust ways and too many forms of consensus reached by citizens (the hermeneutical interest) are unjust violations of fully legitimate democratic practice.

Autonomy, Responsibility, and Critical Social Science

Because modern political practices constrain robust democratic practice, to understand the emancipatory goals of a critical social theory we must understand one of its foundational philosophical presuppositions. Habermas describes this as the *a priori* necessity of the principles of autonomy and responsibility. Autonomy refers to the human capacity for self-reflection. To be autonomous, the self must reflect upon its experiences and relation-

ships in the world and reach judgments in accordance with its *own* reflective consciousness or awareness, its own reason and will. Responsibility refers to the obligation each has toward others to preserve and respect their autonomy. Responsibility is especially important when entering into processes of consensus formation where reaching a collective agreement out of diverse judgments is held as an attainable ideal. In such contexts, one must be responsible not only to others as deliberative interlocutors, one must be responsible to their autonomy as well. Autonomy and responsibility go hand in hand. In genuine democratic arrangements, citizens are both autonomous and responsible, where responsibility includes being responsible for the autonomy of others. For Habermas,

> The human interest in autonomy and responsibility is not mere fancy, for it can be apprehended *a priori*. What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: language. Through its structure autonomy and responsibility are posited for us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus.[20]

Our first sentence in language expresses, according to Habermas, our inherent natural capacity to express an autonomous experience in the world, simultaneously with the responsibility of others to respect that autonomy and to receive what we say as the basis for common action. Think of a person's first attempt to communicate a full sentence: the experience of the world and the effort to convey that experience to others and the expectation that others will receive it responsibily, as it is meant by the person attempting to communicate it.

Habermas draws on this ideal notion of communicative possibility to underscore the importance of autonomy and responsibility as foundations for legitimate democratic practice. He is aware, however, that too often these essential aspects of what it means to be a human being are frustrated in what he describes as "ideologically frozen relations of dependence." Such ideological relations appear in both modern social science *and* in modern politics, where Habermas thinks that the autonomy and responsibility of citizens is systematically constrained by what he calls *structural violence*. Such violence "deforms repeated attempts at dialogue and recurrently closes off the path to unconstrained communication."[21] To address these constraints—constraints ultimately on legitimate, communicative relationships among citizens in a democracy—he posits the *critique of ideology*.

[20]Ibid, p. 314.
[21]Ibid., p. 315.

The critique of ideology is the key to emancipating citizens from relations that systematically restrict their innate capacities to live in autonomous and responsible relations with one another. Let us continue our review of his comments in the *Appendix* and then unpack what he says as we have done with regard to the constitutive interests of empiricism and hermeneutics. The following paragraphs immediately follow the above paragraphs on hermeneutics. He begins by first distinguishing critical social science from what he calls the "systematic sciences of social action."

> The systematic sciences of social action, that is economics, sociology, and political science, have the goal, as do the empirical-analytic [empiricist] sciences, of producing nomological knowledge. A critical social science, however, will not remain satisfied with this. It is concerned with going beyond this goal to determine when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such and when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed. To the extent that this is the case, the critique of ideology, as well, moreover, as psychoanalysis, takes into account that information about law-like connections sets off a process of reflection in the consciousness of those whom the laws are about. Thus the level of unreflected consciousness, which is one of the initial conditions of such laws, can be transformed. Of course, to this end a critically mediated knowledge of laws cannot through reflection alone render a law itself inoperative, but it can render it inapplicable.
>
> The methodological framework that determines the meaning of the validity of critical propositions of this category is established by the concept of self-reflection. The latter releases the subject from dependence on hypostatized powers. Self-reflection is determined by an emancipatory cognitive interest.[22]

There is much of both substance and controversy to clarify in these assertions. Let us begin with Habermas's clear statement that critical social science (note the usage of *science* here) does not find the empiricist goal of nomological knowledge to be a sufficient end of social and political inquiry. "A critical social science will not remain satisfied with this." Critical social theory does not rule out general knowledge; it only says that inquiry must "go beyond this" in a particular way, namely to distinguish between "when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such

[22]Ibid., p. 310.

and when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed." We take this to mean that, consequently, the critical theorist will examine propositions regarding nomological relations between variables in the world offered by social science and ask a question about them: Do these propositions grasp invariant regularities in social life as such, or are these propositions expressing a kind of ideologically frozen relation that can be transformed? What Habermas means by the latter is at the heart of the emancipatory goals of critical theory.

Recall that Habermas views autonomy and responsibility as the foundations for any genuinely democratic society. Pause and think about what this means: Habermas is saying that in relations where either your autonomy is not ensured, or you or others are not acting with responsibility toward the autonomy of others as equals, something is very wrong with the organization of power in society. That is to say, your liberty and the liberty of others are illusory. Such a condition, by definition, prevents you from coming together as equals to make decisions and policies that will govern your affairs.

Critical theory's question about nomological propositions can be read therefore, as an effort to ascertain whether statements about law-like relations between variables hold under conditions of autonomy and responsibility, or not. Statements that show law-like relations under conditions of autonomy and responsibility are true about humanity *as such*. Statements about ideologically frozen relations are only true when the natural human capacities for autonomy and responsibility are restricted or constrained. We shall demonstrate this in an example momentarily, but first let us try to clarify several of the underlying theoretical premises.

For Habermas, relations in which autonomy and responsibility are restricted (ideologically frozen relations) occur routinely in modern life *but are not invariable*. Rather, they are *transformable* through critical theory's efforts of producing *emancipatory knowledge*. Their transformability rests upon a greater self-consciousness among the human beings whom the laws are about. Habermas implies this at the end of the first paragraph where he says that one of the conditions for law-like statements reflecting transformable relations is "the level of unreflective consciousness" in those who those statements are about. What this means is that the persons whom the social scientific laws are about are only said to be acting the way they act because they are acting under conditions in which their autonomy and responsibility are constrained. Their lack of autonomy and responsibility is thus a hidden initial condition for such statements to be true. (That condition could be added to premise two of the D-N model where the initial and boundary conditions for certain behavior are said to occur.)

To illustrate this using the one of our examples from Chapter One, recall the empiricist theory about voting behavior that stated, "lower class members of frequently oppressed ethnic or racial groups tend to vote for parties to the left of the political spectrum." What Habermas is saying is that the critical theorist will examine this proposition by asking a very specific question about it: is it a law-like relation *as such,* or does it reflect an ideologically frozen relation of dependence such that a hidden implicit additional premise is the unreflective consciousness of the voters (those whom the "law-like relation" is about)? The critical theorist wants to ask this question because if it is the latter, then the apparently invariable correlation between the variables (power and group status that are said to *cause* the vote) is *not* invariable. Instead, it can be transformed. In such a case, the so-called "law" is no law at all, for it is dependent on a low-level of autonomous reflective consciousness of the voters.

The theory we are addressing is in some ways a perfect illustration. It addresses the all-important vote of an individual, the vote that will determine which party will govern and to what ends. The critical theorist wants to know what kind of knowledge is the theory that "lower class members of frequently oppressed ethnic or racial groups tend to vote for parties to the left of the political spectrum." Is it knowledge as such, where the *natural* human interests in autonomy and responsibility are satisfied, or is it knowledge of some ideologically frozen relation of dependence that supports an unjust condition of life, where people are acting on the basis of something other than their autonomous and responsible judgment?

In response to this question, we would like to suggest that, in the case of this theory, the critical theoretical answer to the question is that this is knowledge that reflects ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed. This may seem counterintuitive because the theory looks complete and is about votes for left-oriented politics, which might, to some, seem more "democratic" than right-oriented politics. But partisanship should not get in the way of an evaluation of the status of the theory in critical theoretical terms. This theory clearly explains the individual's vote as the outcome of the cause-and-effect power of what are posited as "objectively discernable" variables, not as an outcome of self-reflective judgments of those whom the law is about. It says a voter will vote for left parties because of their position in relations of power ("frequently oppressed") and class ("lower") and group ("ethnic or racial") status, not because they have autonomously judged the left party to best represent their views. The voter's vote is *not*, according to this theory, an outcome of the voter's self-reflective, autonomous and responsible judgment about their experience. The theory does *not* say that the voter uses their reason and will to determine the ends

toward which government should act. The theory says that the vote has been caused by external variables.

Thus one *hidden,* initial condition for this law is a low level of reflective consciousness among the voters. Their votes are caused by external factors—this is what the theory says—not by a high level of reflective political consciousness. In fact, the theory mentions nothing about reflective consciousness. It implicitly assumes a low level of consciousness because it stipulates the causal force of external factors. Therefore, for the critical theorist, this theory does not express invariable law-like relations about social action as such; it expresses ideological frozen ones that can be transformed with a high level of reflective consciousness among the voters. Their high level of reflective consciousness would transform the theory because their vote would then be partly an outcome of their autonomous and responsible judgment as participants in democratic politics.

Now, positing autonomy and responsibility as causal considerations requires departing from empiricist understandings of causality, where the facts are observed through the senses. It requires embracing realist understandings of causality, where the structural mechanisms are by definition unobservable through the senses. Critical Theory assumes the causal power of *structures of autonomy and responsibility is given in the nature of the human being*. These structures, when not frustrated by ideology, can (along with other *social* structures) produce democratic action. When autonomy and responsibility are not systematically restricted, that is, when they set the conditions for democratic political action, and produce and reproduce democratic results through consensus, they structurally mediate democratic politics.

The theoretical process that links ideologically frozen relations of causality with transformed, emancipatory relations of democratic life is what Habermas describes as the *critique of ideology*. Let us unpack the meaning of this complex idea—we'll do so in two parts. First, we shall elaborate the meaning of the critique of ideology in the context of the critical evaluation of social scientific knowledge, and then proceed to discuss the critique of ideology in broader social and political relations through the critique of *structural violence*.

The Critique of Ideology in Social Science Research

The critique of ideology in social scientific work involves a serious effort to demonstrate to scholars and students of social life that a great deal of contemporary social theory is not true *as such*, but rather reflects knowledge ascertained under ideologically frozen conditions, where the democratic

capacities of human beings have been systematically constrained. Beyond its importance as a guide for building institutions and procedures that enable participatory democratic deliberations, critical theory aspires to support and encourage robustly democratic sensibilities and ways of life. As a mode of interpreting politics, it envisions a process where the critical theorist takes their conclusions about ideologically frozen relationships to the people whom the empiricist laws are about to suggest that their actions are being explained as outcomes of external causes, not as they might believe, as a result of their own capacities for autonomous and responsible democratic participation. Note that critical theorists believe that they have a certain kind of knowledge, *free from ideology*, that has the potential to emancipate people from ideology. Such *critically mediated knowledge* is presented to social actors on the belief that, once enlightened to the reality of how their action is conditioned upon their low level of reflective consciousness, they will alter their actions and live more autonomous and responsible lives. As such, critical theorists aims to take their premises about ideologically frozen relations to the people caught in those relations, and to have them transform those relations into more legitimate democratic ones. How is this done? Easy: critical theorists are teachers and researchers who teach classes in schools to students (whom the laws are about); conduct seminars in public settings with audiences (whom the laws are about); testify in public hearings to representatives (whom the laws are about); write books, editorials, and articles for media (newspapers, magazines, blogs, etc.); and lead, participate, and attend many kinds of political assemblies and events.

An important question emerges here. In the ongoing encounter between critical theorists and would-be emancipated democratic people, who ultimately determines what Habermas calls "the meaning of the validity" of the propositions promoted by critical theory? According to Habermas, the people themselves ought to determine the validity of the proposals made by the critical theorists. Habermas is quite clear about this: "the methodological framework that determines the meaning of the validity of critical propositions of this category is established by the concept of self-reflection." The critical theorists make a determination about what theories or practices are ideologically frozen and thus require *critique*, but the critical theorists are not the final judges and arbiters of their critical propositions. Again, "[t]he methodological framework that determines the meaning of the validity of critical propositions of this category is established by the concept of self-reflection." We take this to mean that, when the critical theorist brings critically mediated knowledge to social actors, *the meaning* of the validity of the critical theoretical proposition is determined through the autonomous and responsible judgment of the social actors.

The phrase, "the meaning of the validity of critical propositions" is quite profound. Because *meaning* is invoked, think of it in hermeneutical terms: The person receiving critical theoretical knowledge is the ultimate judge of the meaning of the validity of critical theory's knowledge. This is important to emphasize because the word "critical" in "critical social theory" often implies that the theorist is going to criticize the beliefs of social actors. To a certain extent this is the case: the critical theorist wants to say that social actors can be mistaken in the belief that their actions are autonomous and responsible. Their actions, in reality, may be shaped in relations that are restricting their autonomy and responsibility, and, moreover, those relations can be transformed to make them more autonomous and responsible. But the expertise of the critical theorist does not cancel out the role of self-reflection in determining the validity of critical theoretical observations.

The critical theoretical process that Habermas imagines is complicated, but not incomprehensible. He likens the procedures of the critique of ideology to psychoanalysis. This analogy is extremely fruitful. In psychoanalysis, the analyst (therapist) and the analysand (patient) carry out a serious and often long-term dialogue in which the analyst learns about the past experiences of the analysand, experiences that are constraining the analysand in some emotionally significant way. Therapists eventually offer propositions about how their analysands might release themselves from those constraints so as to live more self-reflective, autonomous, responsible, and emotionally healthy lives. From the perspective of the analysand, the constraints they face might appear to be to be "hypostatized" or fixed and reified emotional or psychological states. People often enter psychoanalysis after experiencing extreme and long-term patterns of emotional difficulties that are subjectively experienced as extremely hard to change. Think of someone who, for example, bears some deep anger or suffers from a deep fear of entering emotionally open and honest relationships as a result of suffering some early life trauma (abuse, loss, or abandonment, for example). For the analysand, the relations may *appear* invariable; that is, the person suffering from the anger and fear may feel as if these are permanent, constantly occurring, and unchangeable emotional experiences. But it is precisely to transform their experience that they may enter psychoanalysis, because the goal of psychoanalysis is, ultimately, to offer suggestions about how these patterns are not *invariable* but rather *transformable*.

The central premise of psychoanalysis is that the analysand can be freed from the grip of patterned painful experiences of the past and live a more autonomous *and* responsible life of meaningful, participatory emotional relationships with others in the world. For example, the apparently invariable relationship between trauma and anger or trauma and fear of relationships (like

the relationship between power and class status and the vote) is not invariable. It is transformable. Moreover, that relation only holds under the condition of the constrained autonomy of the analysand. Habermas calls this the "low level of consciousness" among those the laws are about, similar to what is called "learned helplessness" in modern psychological terms. Raising the person's consciousness about the constraints that have been placed on their living a fully autonomous and responsible emotional life gives them the ability to transform their relations and thus *emancipate* themselves from the grasp of the ideologically frozen illegitimate, emotional relations of dependence. Those prior relations may be seen as illegitimate because some of the initial causes of anger or fear—abuse and other childhood traumas, for example—are clear violations of the principles of autonomy and responsibility in relationships among equals. In short, psychoanalytical knowledge is constituted by the belief that painful or destructive relationships are not invariable; they can in principle be transformed when the analysand is enlightened about the reality of the causal mechanisms producing their condition, a condition that is exacerbated by their low level of reflective consciousness (i.e., that their natural structures of autonomy and responsibility are being systematically restricted).

Crucially, the psychoanalyst carries out this treatment in responsible dialogue wherein the analysand determines the meaning of the validity of the psychoanalyst's suggestion according to the principle of autonomy. "I think you may be afraid to talk to your sister who is dying because of the fear you still have about your father's death," a psychoanalyst might say. Or, "Your trauma has caused so much paralysis that you are unable to talk directly with the person you most need to talk with." Note the imputation to a prior trauma, and the presupposition that the trauma is causing a problem in the present. (In psychoanalysis, there may of course be causal factors other than trauma; we use this only as an example.) In *responsible* psychoanalysis, where the therapist is not violating the autonomy of the analysand by imposing her or his diagnosis on the patient, the critical proposition—to quote from Habermas above—"sets off a process of reflection in the consciousness" in the latter who, crucially, gets to judge the meaning of the validity of that proposition in ongoing dialogue. Psychoanalytical treatment is extensive and sometimes takes years of work. Habermas's analogy between critical theory and psychoanalysis suggests that the work of the critical theorist is hardly facile.

In the critique of ideology in the context of social scientific inquiry, then, critical theory essentially seeks to produce knowledge, that when read or absorbed in some other form by students or the wider public, will set off a process of reflection in their consciousness about the political relations and structures that mediate their social activity *to the end* of enabling greater

autonomy and responsibility, and thus more genuinely democratic outcomes. As in psychoanalysis, because the methodological framework that determines the validity of the critical theorist's propositions "is established by the concept of self-reflection," the principle in critical theory is to leave the judgment about the *meaning* of the validity of the critical propositions to the individuals receiving those propositions according to the principle of autonomy. As noted above, critical theory is not out to simply "criticize" what people think. Rather, it seeks to create and expand the range of autonomous and responsible action. "Self-reflection is determined by an emancipatory cognitive interest" of critical social theory. In other words, the goal of self-reflection is the emancipation of the human being.

Unlike empiricism, the goal of critical theory is not simply an explanation of the causal relations human beings inhabit, and, unlike hermeneutics, it is not simply action-orienting intersubjective understanding through the production of a consensus. Any consensus produced among human beings whose capacities for autonomy and responsibility have been restricted is not a legitimate consensus. A consensus—even the outcome of an election—is not legitimate *if* it results from human behavior caused, in part or in full, by mechanisms other than autonomy and responsibility. Therefore, as in psychoanalysis, the critical theorist seeks to enlighten people about the seemingly fixed but transformable unjust social and political relations they inhabit. The ultimate goal is to create conditions for greater autonomous and responsible, democratic social and political relations. The emancipatory interest places the critical theorist in dialogue with society—aiming to emancipate individuals from what may appear to them to be fixed relations they inhabit, relations that are in principle transformable in more egalitarian and just ways.

Below we will show how the critique of ideology works itself out very explicitly in the context of social and political life. Now that we have elaborated more fully the concept of the critique of ideology, let us return to the theory of voting behavior we have discussed and illustrate what the critique of ideology implies in relation to such social scientific knowledge.

In the case of an individual's vote that is explained by variables other than the autonomous and responsible decision of a citizen, the critical theorist might take the current theoretical knowledge to the voters for their consideration. The critical theorist who studies voting behavior finds, for example, that, according to some social science theories, some individuals are said to vote on the basis of their power and class status. The critical theorist might add that other theories posit the political orientation of one's family or the amount of media exposure one has to a candidate or party as additional causes of the vote. According to the process of the critique of ideology, the

critical theorist would take this "knowledge" to the people and essentially point out, like a psychoanalyst, that the social scientists say that your vote is an outcome of your power and class status, your family's party identification, or your repeated exposure to partisan media, what do you think about that? The hope would be that the proposition would "set off a process of reflection in the consciousness" of the voters who would reflect on whether or not their vote is an outcome of their power and class position, their family's political preferences, the amount of media exposure they have had, etc. *o*r of their capacity for autonomous and responsible judgment (perhaps in some combination with the former).

We include both autonomy and responsibility here, not only autonomy, because under the robust democratic premises Habermas suggests, voters ought not simply vote out of their "self-interest." They ought to vote on the basis of their capacity for self-reflection *and* out of their responsibility both to respect the autonomy of others and to enter into processes of consensus formation with them. Indeed, in principle, voting ought to be a private form of consensus formation. In more deliberative forums, where people meet and speak with each other, they ought to enter those conversations with judgments that can, in principle, be transformed in the context of a dialogue with their fellow citizens. In such deliberative or participatory democratic contexts, an individual may but is not expected to enter and exit the deliberations with the same "self-interest." They are expected to being open to receiving the judgments of others and having their judgments altered, in an autonomous fashion (not imposed upon), in the course of the deliberations.

In any case, let's assume that the people who are the subjects of voting theories reflect upon the conditions of their vote along with the critical theoretical proposition, and they agree with the critical theoretical proposition that their vote appears to be an outcome of factors external to their human capacities for autonomous and responsible judgment. They come to realize that their vote is based on a low level of reflective consciousness—that they are voting on the basis of external causes, not their capacity for reflective awareness, and, as a result, might *alter* their action. An alteration in their action entailing a higher level of reflective consciousness would entail a transformation in the presumed social scientific causal relations, a step towards greater autonomy and responsibility on the part of the individual, and more democratic practices within the social and political relations that the individual inhabits.

Thus the prior theory of voting behavior may be seen as *not* expressing an invariant relation of dependence between various independent variables and the vote, despite its nomological appearance. The vote expresses a relation that holds under the implicit condition of the low level of reflective consciousness by the voter. Having been *emancipated* from the grip of that strong

correlation, the voter can now act differently, more autonomously and more responsibly, and thus the causal relation determining the vote can be altered. The individual's vote will no longer be determined by external factors, or the external factors that correlate with a low level of reflective consciousness; it will be produced by the structures of autonomy and responsibility (along with, perhaps, other social structures, like electoral laws, campaign information, etc.).

Inapplicable but Not Inoperative

With such ideal emancipatory goals, Habermas is more humble about the reach of critical theory than one might expect. At the end of the second paragraph in the lengthy passage about critical social science above, he notes that "critically mediated knowledge of laws cannot through reflection alone render a law itself inoperative, but it can render it inapplicable." We take this to mean that the knowledge proposed through critical theory research cannot alone end the workings of illegitimate causal relations. People may still vote based upon external factors, including ideologies produced by the powerful, through structural violence that we shall discuss below. Where the interpretations of critical theory reach students and others through extensive and long-term dialogical efforts by critical theorists, however, it is possible to render a set of ideologically frozen relations of dependence *inapplicable* in their specific cases. It is possible to release the subjects from dependence on relationships that are at odds with their given human potential to live truly democratic, autonomous, responsible, equal lives in which the agreements they form with others—even if only through the ballot box—are truly outcomes of a robust democratic life.

To take another brief example at the level of social scientific research, consider the relationship between money and politics, or more specifically between campaign contributions and the votes of representatives in the United States Congress. Much of the social scientific literature has shown little relationship between financial contributions and votes, especially on high profile political issues, partly because large campaign contributors often contribute to both major candidates in the United States two-party system. But in a study guided by empiricist standards, the political scientists Matthew C. Fellowes and Patrick J. Wolf showed a strong correlation between campaign contributions and congressional votes on a particularly important area of business policy. "Our empirical results show," they write, "that aggregate business campaign contributions influence macro-level pro-business tax and regulatory policy votes—much more than mere access into the policy process

or an occasional low-profile vote."[23] Put more simply, they find a strong correlation between campaign contributions by big business and the votes of representatives on "tax and regulatory policy." In short, money influences their votes in this particularly important policy area. We raise this as an example for scrutiny under the analytical presuppositions and emancipatory goals of critical theory.

As we have seen above, the critical theorist would take this theoretical finding and ask whether it expresses an invariable social relation as such or whether it expresses an ideologically frozen relation that holds only under the condition of a low level of autonomous and responsible reflectiveness of those whom the theory is about. In this case, the theory is about the vote of congressional representatives. The theory basically says that their vote is an outcome not of their autonomous and responsible judgment, but rather of the causal impact of the financial contributions that large corporations give them. The critical theorist would take this knowledge to the representatives, in the hope that it would set off a process of reflection in their consciousness about whether or not their actions are consistent with the human ideals of autonomy and responsibility. More specifically, critical theory would point out that that there is an apparently invariable relationship between the money from corporations they received and their votes on tax and regulatory policy—in the hope of setting off a process of reflection in which the representatives would see that such a pattern was at odds with the democratic principles of autonomy and responsibility. Yes, they may be acting in a way that is responsible to their campaign donors, but are they acting autonomously or responsibly in relation to the equal autonomy of others? We cannot predict how the representatives would judge the meaning of the validity of the critical theoretical propositions. We will see below, for critical theory, whether the contemporary politician routinely acts in ways inconsistent with autonomy and responsibility.

However, were they to accept the critical theoretical proposition and act differently, it would not render the theory inoperative, because many representatives (throughout the world) might still allow their votes to be bought, so to speak, but it may render it inapplicable. If the political actions of enough representatives were altered, not only would it render the theory inapplicable, it may *transform* the social pattern from one in which money causes votes on issues of tax and regulatory policy to one in which the *structures of human autonomy and responsibility* produce more democratic life by producing more autonomous and responsible judgments by the people's

[23]Matthew C. Fellowes and Patrick J. Wolf, "Funding Mechanisms and Policy Instruments: How Business Campaign Contributions Influence Congressional Vote," *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (2004), pp. 321.

representatives when they are making public tax and regulatory policy. We hasten to point out that tax and regulatory policies on big corporations in the United States are central to the workings of the world economy, so this is no trivial or solely domestic issue. More important to our present purposes, this example illustrates critical theory's engagement with social scientific theory. Note that it is not satisfied with learning strong correlations between variables in the social world; it wants to go beyond this knowledge-as-such-goal to knowledge for the purposes of emancipating people from ideologically frozen relations in which their capacities—and the capacities of others—to live a fully autonomous and responsible life have been constrained.

Also important to note here is that the concept of ideology in these examples refers to the theoretical proposition about the apparently invariable relations between variables. The critical theorist is essentially saying that the theory that voters, be they citizens or representatives, vote as an outcome of external variables such as power, class, group, or economic factors is *not true* as such. It is the dominant ideological theory of voting behavior in social science that holds only under the condition of the low level of unreflective consciousness among those whom the laws are about. The fact that many social scientists maintain this theory to be true shows that it is truly an ideology, which, for Habermas is by definition, "an illusion outfitted with the power of common conviction." We explore this further below. In experiment after experiment, empiricists work to expand the scope of this theory, taking it to be true and objective, but, from the perspective of critical theory, it is not true: It is nothing but the dominant ideology about voting behavior in politics.

Critical theory applies this critique of ideology not only to the domain of social scientific thinking but also to the realm of political life more generally through an examination of the constraints placed on legitimate consensus formation. The key to understanding this dimension of critical theory is the concept of structural violence.

The Critique of Ideology and Political Life: Structural Violence

Structural violence refers to a process in which modern *strategic actors*, who, by definition, *compete to acquire, maintain, and keep others from acquiring positions of power in power structures*, use their positions of power to produce ideologies that will support their continued power. Ideologies, you may recall, are illusions backed by common conviction. Structurally violent modern strategic actors produce ideologies by using the *systems of power* they command to produce illusory beliefs about political, social, economic, or cultural (etc.) issues among other participants in those systems, beliefs that are designed to ensure both the strategic actor's power and the power of the system. Accord-

ing to Habermas, in the formation of such beliefs, the strategic actors exert "psychic constraint"[24] over the will of those over whom they exercise power. The strategic actors do this precisely to produce their will as the will of others such that when the latter gather together to deliberate or vote upon issues of shared concern, it is the will of the powerful that has determined the consensus, not the will of those acting in concert.

Habermas says that structural violence occurs in all modern structures, not only governmental ones, and we are certain that if you think about the concept in different institutional settings, you will find many examples. We shall elaborate the concept in the context of familiar dynamics of representative democratic politics. Habermas essentially posits a view of modern politicians, who are highly networked within various systems of political, economic, and media power. As strategic actors who seek to acquire and maintain power within those systems, the "production" of their power "appears as a problem that can be solved" by using those systems to exert influence over the will of the population they represent.

> [T]he production of power appears as a problem that can be solved by a stronger influence on the will of the population exerted by the political leadership…. this takes place by means of psychic constraint, by persuasion and manipulation…[25]

This is to say that, from the perspective of those who are competing to acquire *and* maintain their positions of power, the production of a consensus among the public looks like something that can be done through some form of psychic constraint. The power of the strategic actors may be produced through a consensus that *they influence* by making their will—through persuasion and manipulation—the will of those producing the consensus. Of course, there are times when politicians are honest and engage in practices of persuasion with good intentions. That might be called *responsible* leadership. But critical theory wants to enlighten people about what is happening much more of the time—when there is a combination of persuasion *and* manipulation, and not only in government, but in many hierarchically organized systems of power. And what is happening most of the time is structural *violence*: strategic actors are using their positions of power to produce *ideologies*, such that when those under their power come together to act politically, they do so not on the basis of their own autonomous judgments reached through

[24]Jürgen Habermas, "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power," in Steven Lukes, ed., *Power* (New York: New York University Press, 1985), p. 86.
[25]Ibid.

their own reflective consciousness, but rather on the basis of the judgments of the powerful who have made the people's will conform to their will.

Habermas astutely notes that, especially given the size of modern structures, this kind of power has become institutionalized in modern systems. Campaigns during elections or major policy initiatives by already-elected representatives are perfect examples of institutionalized processes that enable structural violence to occur. "Promises" made during the campaigns often appear, in hindsight, as the strategic production of illusions for the purpose of gaining support among voters. "Winning" amounts to successfully influencing the will of those who cast their ballots through various methods of psychic constraint, such as television commercials, scripted speeches, and so forth.

A crucial part of structural violence is that it goes "unperceived" by those who are its victims. Because of the free and open appearances of modern democratic political systems, the "blocks" that modern strategic actors place in the communication between people through the formation of ideology are "inconspicuous." That is, when people act politically, they do so "subjectively free from constraint," Habermas says, but this is part of the illusion, because the ideas upon which they act have been essentially fed to them by the powerful.

> Such an hypothesis about inconspicuously working communication blocks can explain, perhaps, the formation of ideologies; with it one can give a plausible account of how convictions are formed in which the subjects deceive themselves about themselves and their situation. Ideologies are, after all, illusions that are outfitted with the power of common convictions.… In systematically restricted communication, those involved form convictions subjectively free from constraint, convictions which are, however, illusory. They thereby communicatively generate a power which, as soon as it is institutionalized, can also be used against them.[26]

For Habermas, legitimate consensus can only be formed by unrestricted communication between autonomous and responsible citizens. Structural violence produces the opposite.

The proposition about structural violence may sound cynical, but it is not. Modern social, political, and corporate power holders, within many institutions and at many levels of society, frequently seek to maintain the power that they have secured through strategic action by engaging in the production of ideology. We suspect you may have already been exposed to structural

[26]Ibid., p. 88.

violence of different kinds. We shall delineate a macro-level example from the political world in some detail below. In the corporate world, there are many examples, perhaps the most classic one is the belief promoted by the tobacco companies for many years that nicotine is not addictive. Famously, in April of 1994, seven executives of the top tobacco companies swore as much under oath, even though internal research produced in their own companies showed results to the contrary. Continued cigarette sales were like votes: they ensured the long-term power of the strategic actors and their systems of power. The political key to the belief that nicotine is not addictive is that the uses of tobacco products, like smoking cigarettes, and their consequences would be seen as a matter of choice, not necessity (addiction). Similar forms of ideological production occur in relation to debates over other products as well as major public issues like global warming or climate change, in which corporations and their official representatives are public participants.

When considering critical theory's premise about structural violence, one must keep in mind that, in large modern structures—governmental or of many other kinds—people often leave the decision-making powers to those in positions of power and *trust* that they are making responsible decisions. Those who have acquired those positions of power often have the credentials, experience, and so forth to produce such trust, or at least the appearance of such trust. Strategic political actors come to see the production of consensus as something that they have a responsibility, as leaders, to influence, given their credentials, experience, reputation, and so forth.

Habermas's theory of structural violence, however, points to the ever-present danger of such a situation, because by definition modern political actors are *strategic* competitors for positions of power. They seek not only to hold on to those positions; they seek as well to maintain the power of the system in which those positions exist. As such, their influence upon the will of the population reflects their strategic goals of preserving their power and the power of the system. They *intervene* in the production of consensus in an illegitimate fashion (violating the principle of autonomy) by producing ideologies, by making the people's will conform to theirs, such that when the people vote or consume products, for example, they do so, thinking that they are casting their vote or consuming on the basis of their autonomous judgment; in reality, their autonomy has been systematically restricted by ideological domination. Structural violence thus refers to how modern strategic actors systematically frustrate democratic life by producing ideologies that constrain the people's autonomy and responsibility precisely at the point of autonomous action—which, politically, as we have seen, is the precondition for legitimate consensus formation.

As Habermas points out above, in addition to creating illegitimate consensus, one of the worst consequences of structural violence is that when that consensus is institutionalized, it can be used against the people who created it. Think of how governmental policy *vis-à-vis* smoking cigarettes would be different if the ideology that "nicotine is not addictive" were institutionalized in power, or the ideology that global warming is a hoax.

In essence, structural violence *systematically restricts* the structures of autonomy *and* responsibility that are, for critical theory, given in the nature of the human being. Ideologies are *real causal mechanisms* that generate or produce blocks in communication among citizens whose deliberations ought to be produced by the structures of autonomy and responsibility. Unconstrained by structural violence, the people will act autonomously and responsibly to produce, through consensus, legitimate policies to govern their lives. This is no simple or easy process, but it is, from the perspective of critical theory, within the realm of human possibility, especially in the modern era wherein democratic life is considered a desirable and achievable ideal. Let us elaborate the various dimensions of structural violence and the critique of ideology through an extended example.

Structural Violence: Sanctions or War

Our example concerns international politics and is drawn from the foreign policy of the administration of United States President George Herbert Walker Bush in response to Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait in August of 1990. Shortly after the invasion, the Bush administration announced its determination to reverse the occupation, and its readiness to use every means at its disposal to do so, by first organizing sanctions and then a military coalition to reverse the invasion. Sanctions for violating international law were imposed on Iraq by the United Nations Security Council, in UN Resolution 661 that was passed four days after the invasion.

The basic theory underlying sanctions at the time was not only punitive. It was also thought that the pressure created by economically severing Iraq's ties with the world would produce one of two possibilities. Either Iraq's ruler, Saddam Hussein, the head of its single party regime, would withdraw his army from Kuwait, *or* some form of internal opposition, either among those closest to Saddam Hussein or from the people, would emerge, overthrow the regime, and alter Iraq's policy in Kuwait. When Iraq demonstrated its unwillingness to comply with the UN Resolutions, the UN passed another Resolution, Resolution 678 (November 29, 1990), permitting the use of "all means necessary" to reverse Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The politics

surrounding the Bush administration's efforts to gain support for this resolution in the United States is the focus of our example.

Following the passing of Resolution 678, the Bush administration sought Congressional approval for going to war. The formal constitutive rules of war-making in the United States require Congress to declare war. From a critical theory perspective, the Bush administration's campaign in the United States to secure such approval, led by the President himself, can only be described as a massive, successful effort of ideological formation through structural violence. President Bush is not—we hasten to mention as well—the only United States president to have engaged in such structural violence to secure and extend his power, or the power of the systems within which the United States president occupies a central position of power. We offer the case of his administration's successful campaign for war as an extremely clear example that demonstrates each facet of structural violence we have discussed.

The campaign for war in the fall of 1990 coincided with the United States congressional campaign season and, both before and after the elections, the Bush administration did everything it its strategic power to generate the support of the people and the United States Congress through the production of an ideology for necessary war. We say ideology here confidently, because the Bush administration demonstrably exerted various forms of psychic constraint over the population to make the will of the people conform to its will. It did this not only with the intention to maintain its power, but also and more importantly in this example, to maintain the political and economic power of the United States in the global political and economic structures of the petroleum economy centered in the Persian/Arabian Gulf. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait would have given the strategic actor Saddam Hussein control over the largest pool of proven oil reserves in the world—a combination of Iraq and Kuwait's oil fields. In the minds of the Bush administration, the invasion of Kuwait was thus essential to reverse to preserve the power of the United States within a set of political and economic structures that allowed the U.S. to exert a great deal of influence over the global petroleum economy through its close protectorate relations with the states in the Gulf.[27]

[27]It was the same logic that led prior administrations to oppose the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the late 70s. In the so-called "Carter Doctrine," President Jimmy Carter famously declared that "the free flow of oil" in the oil rich Persian/Arabian Gulf was a "vital national interest" of the United States. Hence the support of both the Carter and Reagan administrations for both the Afghan resistance to the Soviet Union and a major infusion of U.S. military power in the Gulf, including intensified defense support for the state of Saudi Arabia. The latter policy was also influenced by the successful anti-colonial revolution against U.S. power in Iran in 1979, a popular revolution that was taken over by the radical Islamists whose revolutionary fervor, U.S. policy makers worried at the time, would spread across the Gulf region.

To generate domestic support for war, the Bush administration produced a series of illusions outfitted with the power of common conviction such that, when the people gathered *either* to support or oppose the war, they did so on the terms the administration had provided through the structures of an especially compliant media. Media coverage focused almost solely on the Bush administration's case for war and the strategic goals necessary to achieve it. We will offer just a few examples of the production of ideology here. One is the repeated demonization of Saddam Hussein by comparing him to Adolf Hitler and simultaneous construction of an analogy between what Saddam Hussein's regime was dong in Kuwait and what Adolf Hitler's army did in Poland during WWII. The comparison between "Saddam"—as he was commonly referred to—and Hitler had some merit in terms of the cruel forms of violence each was willing to use, but it concealed prior cooperation over the years between the Iraqi leader and Washington, including the Bush administration, especially the extent to which the United States supported Saddam's battles against both communism in Iraq and Islamist radicalism in the region. Moreover, by comparing what Iraq was doing in Kuwait with what the Nazis did in Poland, United States officials steered popular attention away from the immediate causal and political reasons for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. In fact, President Bush did this himself when he described the invasion on many occasions, as "naked" and "without excuse." "Naked" meant having no political purpose. As such, the administration made it appear as if a crazy man like Hitler had done in Kuwait what Hitler did in Poland. These are just three of the most prominent emphases in the administration's strategic rhetoric. Their successful effect was to draw popular attention to European conflicts during World War II and away from the pre-existing political and economic conflicts between Iraq and Kuwait that, if one were to look at its long and short term causes, led to Iraq's invasion. This concealment of the immediate political causes relates to an additional dimension of the ideology for war, but let us first briefly review a few of these causes, for they help to make sense of the importance of this additional dimension.

Among the immediate causes that were never publicly disclosed by the Bush administration were the pre-invasion disputes between Iraq and Kuwait related to oil production. Iraq, which had been trying to rebuild its economy after a decade-long war with Iran, charged Kuwait with purposefully overproducing beyond the agreed-upon production quotas, to keep revenues low, thus slowing Iraq's rebuilding efforts. Iraq suspected this was a coordinated strategy with other powers, including the United States. Iraq also charged Kuwait with using slant-drilling technologies to draw oil from Iraq's oil fields under the territorial border between Iraq and Kuwait. In addition, in terms of long-term causes, it had been a central theme of Iraqi nationalist ideology since the founding of Iraq that Kuwait was not a legiti-

mately independent state, but a province of Iraq that had been unjustly cut out of Iraq under British colonial rule. The area of Kuwait was part of the pre-Iraqi Ottoman province governed from Basra, a major city in southern Iraq. The British, Iraqi nationalists have argued for a long time, created Kuwait to preserve for themselves an outpost at the strategically important head of the oil-rich Persian/Arabian Gulf and to purposefully deprive Iraq of extensive access to the gulf. Many of the existing borders in the area, including Iraq's other borders, were determined by post-World War II British colonial policy. In fact, the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990 was not the first time Iraq had asserted its claim to Kuwait. It was not even the first time Western powers had sent military to the Gulf to protect Kuwait. In 1963, the British sent forces to protect Kuwait from a threatened Iraqi invasion. Little of this was known or discussed in the United States debate in 1990–1991 over whether to go to war or not. Little of it is known or discussed today, even though the U.S. has been actively militarily involved with Iraq and its neighbors since 1990. From the perspective of the critique of ideology, it is truly amazing that, to this day, very few people in the United States are aware of most of the immediate and long term causes of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and thus of the contestable, contextual sources of hostility between the United States and Iraq. The *absence* of this understanding, especially insofar as it distorted communication among citizens as they debated US policy vis-à-vis Iraq, may be accounted for within the terms of critical theory by the successful structural violence of the Bush administration.

In this context, perhaps the most important additional element of the Bush administration's ideology for war in 1990–1991 concerned its public interpretation of the will of the United Nations. The third of four articles in the United Nations Resolution passed on the day of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Resolution 660, stated in no uncertain terms that the Security Council "Calls upon Iraq and Kuwait to begin immediately intensive negotiations for the resolution of their differences and supports all efforts in this regard, and especially those of the League of Arab States." Yet, despite this, the Bush administration repeatedly defined the will of the United Nations as demanding a non-negotiated, immediate, and unconditional withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait. We have studied these documents extensively. Mr. Bush was never asked by reporters directly about the UN call for "intensive negotiations for the resolution of" the "differences" between Iraq and Kuwait, but the President frequently declared that "there's no room for compromise" (8/22/90). Once asked less directly whether anything was "negotiable," or whether the objective of United States policy was Iraq's unconditional surrender, he reiterated his administration's narrow reading of the will of the UN resolutions. "Well, certainly not the UN position," he stated. "The position of the

international law is not negotiable…. The United Nations has spoken.… So there's no room for compromise" (8/22/91). "Unconditional [withdrawal], is what the United Nations is calling for, and that's what the United States [seeks]—so there's no flexibility there" (10/1/90). All talk about a "negotiated settlement" is "clearly unacceptable" (11/19/90). "There can and will be no negotiations for concessions and no rewards for aggression" (12/17/90). No compromise, no negotiations. "That's not what the UN resolutions are about":

> There is a determination on the part of the rest of the world to see those United Nations resolutions implemented to a 'T' without concession, without giving. That's not what the UN resolutions are about. They are very, very clear. And the United States will do its part to fulfill every single one of them. (12/27/90)

Members of the President's administration delivered the same "message"—that the will of the UN required Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait without negotiations. In this way, the Bush administration systematically restricted thinking and belief about both the political causes of the conflict between Iraq and Kuwait *and* "the will" of the United Nations. The effect was to close off public consideration of alternative possibilities—besides continued sanctions or war—*in the minds of the people who debated whether or not the United States should go to war.* This deliberate narrowing of the public's thinking through psychic constraint, persuasion and manipulation, of course, is only one dimension of the critical theoretical account of structural violence. For structural violence to be taking place, the ideology produced by the strategic actors must be shown to have blocked the communication of the people who, in Habermas's words, are ultimately the producers of the leadership's power. It is the people who deliberate and vote their representatives into power, and it is ultimately with their consent that policies are made.

To demonstrate the inconspicuously working communications blocks that were produced by the Bush administration's ideology for war, we must convey our direct observations during this period. Specifically, we shall describe observations and hermeneutically engaged conversations one of us had while attending protests during this period. (For ease of reading, we will continue to write as "we.")

The first several weeks of January 1991, just before the Congress voted to support the administration's position, was a time of great debate in the United States: planned and spontaneous protests on both sides occurred throughout the country, in various venues. There was a great deal of discussion among the citizenry about what the United States ought to do. It is

important to point out that this was a period before the Internet was in wide use. Alternative media sources were few. Because we were students of politics of the Middle East, we would regularly read the press from outside the United States and, therefore, had access to information that simply wasn't coming through in the American media, where the broadcasts and reports about the war focused on the administration's account of the strategic situation. Reports from outside the United States media, for example, described efforts sponsored by the Soviet Union and other regional actors to find a negotiated resolution to the conflict. These efforts were certainly in keeping with the will of United Nations as expressed in UN Resolution 660, but not as the Bush administration was narrowly constructing that will inside the United States, where it was aiming to influence the public's, and therefore, the Congress's view on the options available. The media was a major system of power involved in the production of the ideology, for it tended to give the political and military officials more time and credit than the voices of others.[28] Moreover, journalists with very little experience or knowledge of the politics of the area became "teachers" of sorts, offering some of the most superficial lessons about the geography of the Middle East, such as where Iraq was located relative to Kuwait, where the oil fields were, where the military buildup was occurring, etc. With the dominant focus being on strategic considerations about how to reverse the invasion (as opposed to understand its multiple causes and many possible solutions), slowly but surely, the structural violence became evident insofar as the people came to believe what the administration was saying about the options available—namely, that there were essentially two options: (continued) sanctions or war. Or, put in other words, coercion of one kind or coercion of another. Anything but "negotiations." The politicians offered this message, the media relayed it, and many experts—the kind that focus only on strategic considerations in the moment of conflict—analyzed it.

Evidence for the blocks that the ideology produced in the communication among citizens was not hard to find at all: in the rallies that took place right before the congressional vote, large groups gathered across the United States to voice support for one position or another. For those who supported war, they backed the President, saying sanctions had been given enough time and it was necessary to liberate Kuwait from Iraq's brutal occupation. They were persuaded, for among other reasons, that the "dictator of Iraq" should not control the oil supplies, or, as Secretary James A. Baker simplified it for the country, that the war was necessary for "jobs, jobs, jobs"—shorthand to pre-

[28]For important observations on the limits of the exchange of ideas within the media during this period, see, e.g., Edward Said, "Ignorant Armies Clash by Night," *The Nation*, February 1991.

serve the existing order of power in the petroleum economy (oil prices, etc.) in which the United States enjoyed a position of prominence. For those who opposed the war, they backed "giving sanctions time to work." From a critical theoretical perspective, we can say that both sides were victims of structural violence, and one of the sides was a further victim of social scientific ideology as well.

One of us attended a huge protest in favor of the second option, just before the United States Congress voted on whether or not to support the use of all means necessary—meaning war—to end Iraq's seizure of Kuwait. The protest occurred in and outside Northrop Auditorium, the main concert hall at the University of Minnesota. Northrop was filled to capacity. Several Democratic Party Congressional representatives who were opposed to the war spoke against war, and their speeches were broadcast on television monitors into the hallway of the auditorium. The hallway was packed as well. Even the outside grounds of the building were filled with protesters, who had started a second rally. It is possible to say that thousands of people attended this rally, as people did across the country, to express their views about whether or not to go to war. There were protests for war in downtown Minneapolis as well.

At the anti-war protest, speaker after speaker registered their objections to the Bush administration's war policy and said that sanctions should be given time to work. During the rally, perplexed by the vast support for sanctions, we approached several individuals holding signs that said, "Sanctions not War" (a popular anti-war slogan at the time) and asked them, "Why do you believe that?" Their response, in conversations that proceeded, was, without exception, always the same, "Maybe the pressure will produce change." "It's certainly better than war." "There are no other options anyway." These were their responses.

Well, there were in fact more than two options. That the people acting politically to form a consensus believed that there were "no other options" suggests the presence of structural violence. That is, what we wish to suggest here is that most if not all the people who gathered together to express their judgments that sanctions should be given time, did so on terms set by the will of the successful strategic rhetorical action of the Bush administration. It's either sanctions or war (no negotiations), they all said. Purposefully narrow conceptions of the causes and alternatives to war (no mention, no understanding, whatsoever of the immediate or long-term causes of the invasion), including a consistent definition of the will of the UN in a way that was at odds with one of its own Resolutions, dominated people's thoughts and beliefs about the situation they were in. Gathering in a way that they believed were subjectively free from constraint—forming views they described as

their own, and no one broke up the protests—they were, in Habermas's critical theoretical terms, deceiving themselves about themselves in that particular way (as being free from constraint) and about the situation they faced.

Those who gathered to support the Bush administration's will for war were of course equally dominated through a combination of persuasion and manipulation: They came to believe that "Saddam" is another "Hitler," and, in the main, lacked any sense of the immediate or long-term political causes and circumstances of the war. They had come to the view that it was "either war or sanctions, and sanctions haven't worked"—another sign of the successful campaign to constrain their thinking to gain their support for war. Against the background of democratic principles of autonomy and responsibility, their wills had been shaped by the wills of the powerful and their communication systematically blocked. We had a conversation with one supporter of the war, a soldier who was preparing to be sent to the Gulf, who said it was the United States' responsibility to liberate and *restore* democracy in Kuwait. That there had been no democracy in Kuwait was besides the question, though an interesting conversation, informed in retrospect by the goals of critical theory, did follow. What was crucial was that the soldier somehow had come to believe he was off to fight to restore democracy in Kuwait. At the time, approximately four percent of the male population in Kuwait—governed by a monarchy—could be considered "citizens."

A set of debates occurred in 2003 as well, prior to the United States' invasion of Iraq on the assumption that Iraq possessed, or was in the process of making nuclear weapons, and therefore constituted an imminent threat to United States security. Many challenged the veracity of the case made by the United States administration at that time—that of the second President Bush, George W. Bush—which attempted to produce citizen support through a massive campaign for war. But the more successful episode of structural violence had occurred a decade earlier. In 2003, there was real questioning of the case and evidence for war. In 1991, there was questioning but the questioning of the president's will took place in the terms consistent with that will. To question war was to favor sanctions, because that was seen as the only alternative to war, when there were other options, including "negotiations." The communications blocks placed between the citizens by the structural violence of the Bush administration worked inconspicuously, such that when those who gathered to support or oppose war expressed their views, they were acting under the subjective view that they were free from constraint, but they were in reality being dominated by the administration's ideology for war.

We have conveyed this example in highly explicit critical theoretical terms in part to demonstrate what the critique of ideology looks like. It requires

taking critical observations about the way structural violence works to the people (in this case, to you, the reader) in the hope of setting off a process of reflection in the consciousness of citizens, such that they release themselves from the grasp that ideological domination has over them and transform their lives and relations with each other in more genuinely egalitarian and democratic ways, where the principles of autonomy and responsibility are fully respected. In the broad realm of social and political life, critical theory maintains that people are able to see through the illusions and false claims of ideology so as to act and produce institutions and relationships that are consistent with the principled ideals of autonomy, responsibility, and equality.

An important aspect of this structural violence on the side of those who supported sanctions in the 1991 debate over war in Iraq relates directly to our discussion above about the role of critical theory in social science. As we have noted, the logic of the sanctions was that an economic embargo would produce deprivation that would in turn lead to political change. When implemented, President Bush endorsed the sanctions enthusiastically. In fact, at the time, the issue of curiosity in the American media was whether or not the sanctions would "bite," a term that the President did not challenge when a reporter used it in a question and answer session several days after the invasion, on August 8, 1990. In his response, the President implicitly accepted that characterization and offered up the additional concept of "feeling the pinch" of the sanctions, since "nobody can stand up forever to total economic deprivation" (8/8). Initially, then, the goal was a total blockade, including medicine and food, to induce a change in the Iraqi regime's behavior. Sanctions were what the President called the "peaceful" option, the option that he would "prefer" above all other means: "I'd love to see the economic sanctions be so successful that the forces could be withdrawn," the President said. "And I think," he said early in the conflict, "they will be successful" (8/10/90).

Note how the president's assertion presumed a causal link between sanctions or economic deprivation and a policy change. Research into the causes of rebellion and political change suggests that critical social theorists of revolt would without doubt question this causal theory and describe it as another example of ideology. To understand this, one must consider the character of Iraq's regime at the time. Iraq's political system was one of the most totalitarian regimes in the world: by definition, it was organized to prevent political action and association for the purposes of dissent. People known to or suspected of opposing the regime were arrested, killed, tortured, collectively punished, etc. The price of opposition one could say was very, very high, for oneself, one's friends, and one's family. Due to oil revenues and a movement seeking to modernize society, Iraq had become a prosperous society, but this was achieved under huge political constraints of strict one-party and

one-man rule. This was known widely to scholars and policy makers in the early 1990s, but not very well known otherwise. The people of the United States would come to better understand the nature of the Iraqi regime in 2003 when the second President Bush used this information to generate another ideology for war against Iraq. In 1990, to distract attention from prior Iraqi-United States cooperation in the context of the Cold War, the first President Bush simplified the account of the political workings of Iraq, speaking often about how it was simply wrong and a violation of international law for Iraq to "bully" and occupy its neighbors.

Saddam had committed so much violence when he assumed power and was so threatening to those around him that when those closest to him thought he was in error, even they hesitated to speak against his will. The story is told that his closest advisor, the former Foreign Minister of the regime, Tariq Aziz, suggested before the invasion of Kuwait that Saddam consider taking not only Kuwait but all of Saudi Arabia as well. Aziz was apparently attempting to get Saddam to rethink his plans for invading Kuwait, but only by appealing to his megalomanical power aspirations. Open disagreement, open revolt was impossible under Saddam, and—here's the key point—*this was well known among the peoples of Iraq.* They had much experience with the regime; they knew the violent extent the regime would go to suppress dissent and thwart its potential opposition.

The theory that sanctions would produce political change in Iraq was thus based on a set of false understandings about the causality of sanctions in context of totalitarian rule. Important to note here is that theories of revolution *as such*, as the critical theorist might say, have suggested that revolutions do not occur under conditions of deprivation unless and until a plausible and known alternative to the current regime arises. Herein lies the real rub in the popular assumption about the role sanctions could play in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Iraq's regime had been organized for years *precisely* and *effectively* to prevent the rise of such a plausible and known alternative.

In this context, the refrain heard during the debate over war in January 1991 that, "maybe the people of Iraq will rise up and overthrow the regime," was a groundless ideologically frozen belief. The entire logic of letting sanctions "bite" or "work," held mainly by those who opposed war, was ideology, not truth. Under conditions of the totalitarian political system of Iraq, sanctions—as causal mechanisms—had several real effects: first, rather than induce a revolt against a regime that was always prepared for rebellion, people accepted supplies that the regime had stored-up to deliver to them. Second, the sanctions caused severe disruption, destruction, and harm to people who relied upon supplies that were prohibited under the terms of the sanctions. This included many medical supplies that were considered

"dual usage" that is, usable for both medicine and weapons development. Third, the sanctions contributed to the rise of intense anti-American *and* anti-UN sentiment among the population. Indeed, the Iraqi population suffered greatly, though the regime did not, and the distance between the two was more or less preserved by the violence the regime was always unhesitatingly willing to use against its population. The sanctions made the situation worse for those who were expected to overthrow Saddam, and successful revolt—from within or outside the regime—was far from possible. Indeed, Saddam maintained power all through the period of the sanctions, many of which were lifted only after the United States occupation of Iraq in 2003.

Back in January of 1991, the United States Congress voted to support the Bush administration's request to authorize the use of force to evict Iraq from Kuwait. In a news conference the same day, January 12, 1991, President Bush stated the following: "What appears to be the will of the American people is in keeping with my will and how I feel about this." Note his use of the term "will," and recall Habermas's formulation of structural violence: "the production of power appears as a problem that can be solved by a stronger influence on the will of the population exerted by the political leadership…. this takes place by means of psychic constraint, by persuasion and manipulation." At the end of the President's news conference, he and his colleagues may have congratulated themselves, for they had achieved what they wanted: the representatives of the American people voted to support their will and launch the United States into a major military confrontation in the Gulf. Supporters of the President still refer to this as a classic exemplary case of "leadership" during a time of war. A critical theorist, however, employing the critique of ideology, would point out, as we have tried to illustrate here, that "the will of the American people" was a product of structural violence. Strategic actors used their power and networking positions in large power structures to reproduce both their power and the power of the system by exerting psychic constraints over the people, such that when the people gathered to protest—*either* to oppose war in favor of sanctions *or* to support war—their communication was systematically blocked by inconspicuously working communications blocks produced by ideology.

Here, as we have alluded above, is one of the most important philosophically realist causal dimensions of structural violence. The ideology, which is produced through intentional acts of strategic actors, functions like a causal mechanism that blocks communications among citizens. Note that *ideology* is an unobservable, relatively enduring social structure that generates, in this case, illegitimate consensus formation. In addition to the restriction of the democratic principles of autonomy and responsibility, the problem, as

Habermas emphasizes at the end of the passage on the aims of critical theory we have quoted, is that once the power produced through structural violence is institutionalized—take, for example, the policy to go to war as the only alternative to sanctions—it may be used against those who produced it as a consensus, in this case the public. And, despite the fact that many non-critical theoretical historians still honor the first Bush administration's leadership, no better evidence exists of how the illegitimate structural violence of the Bush administration was used against those who produced it than the body bags that came back from the war in Kuwait, or the years of suffering among veterans of the war caused by Gulf War Syndrome, or the long-term consequences of the war for the build-up of United States military force in the region which was to generate further opposition to its presence, including opposition that contributed to the ongoing war between the United States and its Islamist opponents. Few of these policies have been the subject of ideologically unconstrained debate and deliberation in the United States, and probably will not as long as crucial episodes in the history of its battles over petroleum rich areas in the world are not rethought in terms of the critique of ideology. In 1991, political options were constrained by the will of powerful strategic actors. The people's thinking about their situation was systematically narrowed in ways that were, from the perspective of the critique of ideology, highly contestable. For critical theory, where the powerful limit the terms of thought, belief and debate, they act irresponsibly on democratic terms, and those to whom they act irresponsibly will suffer the consequences. One may only wonder what other futures would have been possible if the United States had supported the will of the UN that called for negotiations between Iraq and Kuwait. Unfortunately, Habermas did not write about the consequences for those outside the realm of the citizenry, but in the case of the war against Iraq, the power that was institutionalized was used against the American people in the sense that it brought them into what would appear to be endless war with those who oppose United States influence in the Persian/Arabian Gulf. It also created much harm and destruction in the lives of the Iraqi population.

"Deadly Silences" and Critical Race Theory

For analysts of critical theory, communications blocks produced by structural violence can, indeed, significantly harm those whose lives are made most vulnerable by unequal structures of power. For this reason, the contemporary political theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw fittingly describes the silence produced by structural violence as "deadly." In her seminal history of critical race theory, "Twenty Years of Critical Race Theory: Looking

Back to Move Forward," she demonstrates the critique of ideology in relation the "deadly silence" produced by "colorblind" and "post-racial" ideologies in the United States, where structures of systemic racism disproportionately advantage or privilege white people and disadvantage or adversely affect people of color.[29] Critical race theory analyzes, contests, and seeks to transform these structures—political, social, and economic—that privilege and offer white people greater life chances and adversely subject people of color to ongoing, unjust forms of segregation, discrimination, exclusion, and inequality.

Central to the critique of ideology in critical race theory is demonstrating how communications blocks produced by ideologies of colorblindness and post-racialism foreclose and constrain race conscious research, analysis, discussion, and policy debate. As George Lipsitz puts it in his aptly entitled essay, "The Sounds of Silence," in a society plagued by pervasive racial stratification and subordination, "race-bound problems require race-based remedies."[30] Yet, colorblind ideologies produce citizens and a public that refuses to think or organize the fundamental issues at stake in terms of race.

Colorblindness reflects the long standing philosophically liberal position in the United States—shared by ideological liberals and conservatives alike—that all citizens should be treated equally as individuals regardless of the color of their skin. Colorblind ideologies envision a society in which opportunities are distributed solely according to merit, not race. Civil Rights era legislation, judicial decisions, and executive orders were based partly on this proposition and, therefore, also partly on the idea that state power ought to be used to promote the opportunities of individuals who are disadvantaged due to their gender, race, religion, or national origin. Affirmative action policies, for example, endorsed the use of race, gender, religion, national origin, and veteran status as criteria for employment and school admission. For critical race theory, such structural changes were the beginning, not the end of necessary structural reform.

Since the civil rights era, however, colorblind ideologies have attempted to promote the idea that the structural playing field has been made more or less even, characterize efforts to promote greater equality as "reverse discrimination," and argue that the present generation should not be held responsible for past injustices. Critical race theory contests each of these

[29]Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Twenty Years of Critical Race Theory: Looking Back to Move Forward," *Connecticut Law Review*, 43:5 (July 2011), p. 1337.
[30]George Lipsitz, "The Sounds of Silence: How Race Neutrality Preserves White Supremacy," in Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and George Lipsitz, editors, *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines*. Oakland: The University of California Press, 2019, pp. 23.

ideologically generated illusions by showing the persistence and enduring quality of structures of racial injustice. Shifts in the composition of social institutional spaces that have occurred due to civil rights legislation amount less to "equality" than to what Luke Charles Harris has called "diminished overrepresentation" of whites.[31] Where colorblindness posits equal individuals, critical race research counters by demonstrating the ongoing racial gap in education, employment, income, wealth, health, housing, representation, and treatment before the law. Critical race theory points out that, were policies intended to promote equality (e.g., affirmative action) to be ended, their original justifications would not cease to exist. Racism and its consequences are not matters of the past.

> Despite continuing residential, school and job segregation, a growing racial gap, severe racial health disparities, and diametrically divergent racialized relationships to criminal justice institutions, we are told [by proponents of colorblindness] that it is dangerous and divisive to enforce fully the laws the ban discrimination in housing, schools, jobs, and business opportunities, to invest in asset-building programs and educational enhancement initiatives, or to utilize affirmative action in hiring, contracting, and college admissions.… Colorblindness thus survives and thrives… because of what it prevents: that is, exposure, analysis, and remediation of the skewing of social opportunities and life chances by race.[32]

That is, ideologies of colorblindness and post-racialism ignore, distort, and constrain communication about the many ways that life chances for individuals of different races are structured differently because of race.

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's work consistently exemplifies the critical theoretical imperative of publicly unmasking structurally violent distortions produced by colorblind ideologies and enlightening people to the actual, unjust realities experienced by people of color. As a professor of law, prolific scholar, and leading public intellectual, she is particularly well-known in feminist political thought for her theory of intersectionality. Intersectionality illuminates the simultaneous and intersecting forms of structural gender and race oppression faced by women of color. To illuminate these analytical

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[31]Luke Charles Harris, "Affirmative Action and the White Backlash: Notes from a Child of Apartheid," in *Picturing US: African American Identity in Photography*, Deborah Wills, ed. New York: The New Press, 1996; quoted in Crenshaw, "Twenty Years," op. cit. , p. 1334fn 250.

[32]Lipsitz, "The Sounds," op. cit., p. 24.

emphases of critical race theory, let us describe two of Crenshaw's analyses of the ideological content of public statements made by the two most recent presidents of the United States, Barrack Obama and Donald Trump. Each faced criticism of their views of race and racial justice during their first presidential campaigns—that is, while they were engaged in strategic action to acquire and maintain the position of United States president and the systems power the presidency commands. Crenshaw analyzes their positions and found them to reveal ongoing patterns of structural violence.

Obama's early successes in the campaign of 2008 were viewed by many as evidence of progress in "colorblind" race relations, but in March of 2008, he was forced to defend himself against charges of radicalism following news coverage of politically "radical," non-patriotic and prejudicial comments made by his former pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright. Obama responded to these charges in his now famous speech, "A More Perfect Union." The title is a phrase from the United States Constitution. Obama delivered the speech at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the site of the drafting of the U.S. Constitution, on March 18. The speech provided insight into Obama's views of race in America.

Given the historic importance of Obama's candidacy and future presidency, Crenshaw critically analyzes the speech as part of her history of critical race theory. She argues that Obama framed racial conflict in the United States as a conflict between equals, not unequals, and thus lent support to ideologies of colorblindness. That is, his expressed view of race relations failed to acknowledge enduring racial hierarchies and asymmetries of power in the United States. We quote at length from Crenshaw's analysis to show the detailed critical theoretical attention to the production of systematic communications blocks in Obama's major address about race relations and racial power in the United States:

> In stepping through the racial minefield created by the surfacing of Jeremiah Wright's damning critiques of American society, Obama courageously confronted the contemporary legacy of racism. Seeking to contextualize Wright's volatile rhetoric in his generation's debilitating encounter with the country's racial past, Obama insisted that 'the anger is real; it is powerful, and to simply wish it away, to condemn it without understanding its roots only serves to widen the chasm of misunderstanding between the races.' Yet the upshot of this 'misunderstanding' was an appeal that seemed to be taken directly from the classic [colorblind] 'race relations' approach. Key moments in the candidate's address framed racial conflict as a 'misunderstanding' between social

> equals rather than as matters of exclusion and power. In perhaps the most memorable passage of the speech, Obama drew out a parallel between his white grandmother and his Black pastor, and by extension, between whites and African Americans that effectively framed both sides as warring factions whose pain was both legitimate and misunderstood by the other.
>
> Obama's efforts to frame the grievances that reflect centuries of discrimination as on par with white anger over affirmative action convincingly mixed material inequalities with anxieties, continuing injuries with under-realized remedies, and minority rights with majority power. While balance and symmetry were the admirable and in some sense beguiling features of Obama's oratory, underneath this statesman-like intervention was an asymmetrical analysis that distributed responsibilities and obligations differently. To bridge the divides that proved so divisive for African Americans, Obama's prescriptions included a full complement of actions that were both public (admonishing African Americans to 'bind your grievances to… the larger aspirations of all Americans') and private (urging African Americans to 'read to your children' and to be good fathers). For their part, white Americans were asked to understand the anger was real even if its roots were buried in the past. Beyond that, however, whites were prescribed no parallel responsibility in the home.[33]

Crenshaw points out that universal messages of equality and inclusion ("binding" the struggle to "the larger aspirations of all Americans") had, in fact, been part of the civil rights agenda, but so, too, was an analysis of the asymmetrical realities of racial, gender, and class power in the United States. By suggesting that racial conflict in the United States was essentially a fight between social equals, Obama the candidate perpetuated a systematic communications block in the public's understanding of their situation as unequals in a society of systemic inequality. As such, he lent support to colorblind ideological efforts to limit race-based remedies for race-bound problems. The distorting ideological belief produced by post-racialism is that race is no longer a matter requiring serious attention: the rights of all have been successfully guaranteed, and all Americans may be treated as equals.

> Indeed, the speech in general—its acknowledgement of racial injury along with the admonishment that we rise above it to address "universal" interest—may come to define the post-racial

[33]Crenshaw, "Twenty Years," op. cit. pp. 1321–25.

> gloss on colorblindness. Packed into the speech were embodiments of the very ideologies of racial symmetry and the moral equivalence between segregation and affirmative action that have grounded the rollback of civil rights remediation…. Ironically… the election of President Barrack Obama is probably the best thing that could have happened for proponents of colorblindness. As post-racialism becomes the vehicle for a colorblind agenda, the material consequences of racial exploitation and social violence—including the persistence of educational inequity, the disproportionate racial patterns of criminalization and incarceration, and the deepening patterns of economic stratification—slide further into obscurity.[34]

In this context, Crenshaw underscored the need for critical race theory to counter the "deadly silence" produced by providing "stories and counternarratives that hold the possibilities of broadening rather than constraining the terrain of social discourse"[35]—new ways to think and talk about racial power in the United States:

> [P]ost-racialism's stance toward the remainder of racial power leaves little room for critique and contestation… a deadly silence about the disproportionate and growing losses suffered by wide swaths of people of color. The challenge faced by civil rights constituents and other stakeholders is to find new ways to talk about the reproduction of racial inequality in a political era in which race is left off the table by the very representatives they have supported.[36]

The candidacy of Donald J. Trump brought race back onto the table, but from the opposite direction. As a candidate for president, Trump symbolically mobilized white nationalism and resentment against structural reform as part of his promise "make America great again." His long record of hostility to Obama (delegitimizing his election by falsely accusing him of falsifying his citizenship), his racist criminalization of immigrants (especially Mexicans and Muslims, despite the long history of citizenship in the United States in both communities), his symbolic and coalitional courtship of white nationalist groups, and his alignment with nationalist-populist movements in Europe constituted an explicit revival of white racial power in the United

[34]Ibid., p. 1324-7.
[35]Ibid., p. 1327.
[36]Ibid., p. 1336–7.

States. These and other aspects of Trump's agenda have garnered much attention in critical theoretical scholarship. Here, we focus our attention on Crenshaw's critical race theoretical intervention at a particularly vulnerable moment in his campaign, comparable to the moment of Obama was forced to defend himself against charges of radicalism.

Trump released a statement in early October of 2016 reaffirming the guilt of the "Central Park Five"—five men of color who were convicted in New York City in 1990 for brutally attacking and raping a white woman jogger in Central Park. After their arrest, Trump had taken out full page advertisements in New York City newspapers calling on the state to reinstitute the death penalty so that the men could be executed. The advertisements explicitly endorsed "hate" for murderers and criminals, a theme that would be central to his presidential campaign over two decades later. In 2002, a man who was not part of the Central Park Five confessed to the crime, and DNA results confirmed his guilt. After the Central Park Five served between six and thirteen years in prison, New York vacated their guilty verdicts and released them from prison. In 2014, they received compensation in a settlement with New York City for the harm done to them.

In his statement in October of 2016, Trump reasserted his earlier views: "They admitted they were guilty. The police doing the original investigation say they were guilty. The fact that that case was settled with so much evidence against them is outrageous. And the woman, so badly injured, will never be the same." Trump's statement drew some media attention, but it was overshadowed a day later by the release of the so-called "*Access Hollywood*" tape. The tape showed Trump proudly and lewdly describe his sexually aggressive, predatory habits toward women. It was released a few days before Trump was to debate the Democratic Party candidate, Hillary Clinton. The morning of the debate, Trump issued another statement, apologizing for having offended anyone: "This [the exchange on the *Access Hollywood* tape] was locker room banter, a private conversation that took place many years ago. Bill Clinton has said far worse to me on the golf course—not even close. I apologize if anyone was offended."

Appearing as a guest on a pre-debate roundtable on the public affairs show, *Democracy Now*, Kimberlé Crenshaw demonstrated critical race theory's demand for race-conscious and intersectional analytical thinking by tying the racist qualities of Trump's comments about the Central Park Five to his sexist behavior in the *Access Hollywood* tape. Crenshaw showed how Trump's views and ongoing success in his campaign were conditioned upon privileges of whiteness—his being a white man in a society that treats whites and people of color unequally, and women of color even more unequally. Crenshaw offered a relatively simple thought experiment: Imagine if Donald

Trump had been a man of color. Because of racist prejudicial stereotypes, his remarks on the *Access Hollywood* tape would not only have been disqualifying; he would have also been burdened with the racial stereotype of being a rapist, which is precisely how Trump continued to think, in the face of evidence to the contrary, of the "Central Park Five." Crenshaw's comments were prompted by an observation, made by the program's host, about how the *Access Hollywood* tape was making it possible to talk about rape culture in the United States. (This was a year before the #Me Too movement.) Crenshaw offered the following analysis:

> It is abundantly clear that this is a moment in which rape culture is being explored and for once at the center of the conversation. But the reality is that this is not just a product of rape culture, It's a racist rape culture, and it's a racist rape culture obviously for a couple of reasons. Number one, it is abundantly clear that no African American candidate would have been viable if he had the track record Donald Trump had—if he had said he owned women in a beauty pageant, if he had talked about his anatomy, if he had talked about the attractiveness of his daughter or having sex with his wives, he would not have been palatable. So, these are not just rantings of a sexist or a chauvinist or elitist playboy. This has whiteness at the core of an exercise of the ability to do these things. Then, you add to that history from last week, which basically hasn't gotten the attention it deserves. So, effectively, five young men of color might well have been executed for something that they did not do if Donald Trump had had his way. Rather than seeing this as a moment to reflect along the lines he said in his apology [about the tape]; he's grown, he's learned, he's seen new things. Rather than walking that back, he doubles down on the idea that these young men should have actually perhaps confronted the death penalty even as the criminal justice system, as it rarely does, acknowledges that it was an illegitimate conviction. So, it's this tried and true idea that we've seen many many times before, from the Scottsboro boys—nine young men [falsely accused of raping two white women in 1931], who themselves faced possible death by an illegitimate prosecution, all the way to today—the idea being, don't look at what I do. My sexual predatory behavior is for me to do, but for men of color across history, they are the ones who carry the burden of the idea of being the rapist.[37]

[37]*Democracy Now,* October 11,2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TbH29BRR5A, accessed February 1, 2019.

Racism produces the reality where a white man like Trump can not only get away with his views and behavior. He can also survive and thrive as an effective strategic actor in the competition for power in existing political systems. By ignoring race, colorblindness and its post-racialist expression distort the racial prejudices and inequalities (e.g., in relation to the criminal justice system) that make this all possible, that structurally generate this reality. Crenshaw continued by further illuminating the consequences of failing to attend analytically to those made most vulnerable by racialized structural violence at the intersection of race and gender:

> Of course, the last thing we cannot forget is that women and girls of color who are sexually abused never come into Donald Trump's framework of those who he wants to defend. The very week that the Central Park jogger was raped, twenty-eight other women were raped, most of them women of color, one was thrown down an elevator shaft. The resources and attention that he could have directed toward making women safe ends up being an expression of bloodlust. That's a part of our history that many of us thought we had gotten away from until Donald Trump ran for president.[38]

Crenshaw's analysis counters the role that colorblindness plays not only in terms of everyday politics, but also as a basic presupposition of the mainstream media that tends to treat political actors as individuals, rather than situating their positions in explicitly racialized structures of power. Crenshaw thus demonstrates the critical race theoretical effort to point out communications blocks at several levels. The ideologically produced lack of attention to race perpetuates double standards in social and political life, and it prevents serious public consideration of, and concern for, those most adversely affected by continuing racial inequities. Critical race theory seeks to enlighten people to the reality of this structural violence.

A significant comment above is Crenshaw's assertion that Trump could have seen the exoneration of the Central Park Five "as a moment to reflect along the lines he said in his apology, [saying] he's grown, he's learned, he's seen new things." This assertion expresses critical theory's optimism about the capacity of human beings to reflect autonomously and responsibly about the realities of the situation they face, and to overcome ideological conditioning. Recall that critical theory seeks to take its propositions about the functioning of ideologies to the victims of structural violence, precisely so that the latter reflect, grow, learn, and see the world anew. Crenshaw's comment,

[38]Ibid.

therefore, implies that Trump may be viewed as a victim of racist structural violence, who could, in principle, use his capacity for reflection to overcome his ideological conditioning. Alternatively, given his record on these matters, Trump may also be viewed as a strategic actor who has participated in the production and reproduction of racist ideology, especially in the particular circumstances of the case of the Central Park attack and rape. Just as President George Bush sought to make his will "the will" of "the nation" after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Trump used his position of power at the time of the attack and rape to attempt to fashion the public's will according to his. His views had no small effect on people's perception of the accused. From a critical theoretical perspective, therefore, Trump may be viewed as both a victim or producer of ideology. Either position would be compatible with his being a strategic actor seeking to manufacture the convictions of the public, so as to ensure his power and the power of the systems whose resources he commands.

Critical race theory constitutes an arena for generating ideas about the concept of race and for producing consciousness that will eliminate racial injustices. Its "task," writes Crenshaw, is "to remap the racial contours and the way racial power is observed and denied—not simply to better understand and to navigate it, but to nullify and ultimately transform it."[39] In her critique of Obama, the task is realized in illuminating the communications blocks and relatively enduring persistence of colorblind ideology in the official discourse of the first African American President; in her critique of Trump, the task is displayed in demonstrating the different, hierarchized standards of judgement, concern, and lack of concern generated differentially by structures according to race and gender. Critical race theory promotes research to identify these distorting ideologies and standards that leave enduring injuries of racial power in place, and to transcend them by articulating polices, laws, and standards responsive to the needs of people of color, and therefore fruitful to promoting genuine equality. Like other critical theories, critical race theory is ultimately engaged in a battle over the constitution of structures that organize power in nominally democratic societies. With one set of structures, societies are of one kind; with another, they would be another. Critical race theory's constant attention to the "deadly" sounds of "silenced" racial injustices, as well as the challenges of holding them in view while pursuing more universally just structures, reminds us that much is at stake.

[39]Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Unmasking Colorblindness in the Law: Lessons from the Formation of Critical Race Theory," in Crenshaw, et. al., *Seeing Race Again*, op. cit. p. 79.

Goals of Critical Theory

The goal of critical theory's critique of ideology then is to examine propositions like "deprive a people and they will revolt," "the only options are sanctions or war," "they kill because of hate," "drain the swamp," "everyone is equal," etc., and to identify their ideological content. It then seeks to take critical propositions about the consequences of ideology to the citizens, and, with great effort attempt to set off a process of reflection in their minds. It aims to show how their will and communication with others are being shaped by illusions fed to them by powerful strategic actors who seek to use the systems of power they control to maintain the power of those systems and their control over them. Such a critical engagement aims ultimately to produce a transformation in which people live more democratically and make collective decisions based on the principles of autonomy and responsibility.

The goal of critical theory is therefore not simply to control (empiricism) or to understand (hermeneutics). It is to emancipate people from unjust and often unacknowledged relations of oppression that systematically infuse political life and frustrate their potential as autonomous and responsible, egalitarian human beings. Our examples from United States foreign policy and critical race theory can be replicated in many other places, with many other subject areas, and at many levels of analysis. The key to this mode of interpreting politics is to identify the strategic actors, the systems or structures of power they have access to, the ways they psychically constrain, persuade, and manipulate others to produce their power, the content of the ideologies they produce, the ways those ideologies produce inconspicuously working communications blocks, where and when those blocks are at work, the consequences of institutionalizing the illegitimate consensus that is produced when people act in concert; and what may be transformed for a more legitimate consensus to take shape. We break this down in the study questions at the end of the chapter, and encourage you to think about and discuss some examples with your classmates.

Critical theory's ultimate hope is that once released from the workings of ideologically frozen relations—either in social scientific or political terms—people will turn the structures that govern their lives from structures that that frustrate consensus into structures that enable it. From laws that enable sanctions to laws the enable unconstrained engagement with circumstances people collectively face. Or from ideas like "necessary war" to ideas like "politically negotiated end to conflict." These structures have causal power. The link between critical theory and realism is thus very sharp, even if not all scientific realists are critical theorists. As we have underscored in the early

pages of this chapter: Human agency to transform structures that produce their action has other social structural preconditions. Efforts to make peace rather than war are conditioned by structures of war, efforts to extend rights are conditioned by prior violations of rights, and efforts to combat climate change are conditioned by global warming. Transformation for critical theory is thus not simply a matter of changing meanings, nor is it easy, as we have emphasized. Structures are often unacknowledged conditions of the activities that they mediate and are only occasionally subject to historical transformation.

Nonetheless, where the *relatively enduring* structures of ideology are at work, they must be challenged such that the *enduring* structures of autonomy and responsibility may produce processes of consensus formation that are genuinely democratic. Critical theory presupposes that people can reflect upon, see through and transcend illegitimate structures of power and oppression that shape their lives in undemocratic ways. The critique of ideology may not render ideology inoperative, for it occurs on a vast scale in modern politics, but it may render specific instances of ideology inapplicable in specific contexts. This essential framework undergirds more specific, self-consciously critical schools of contemporary critical theory (e.g., critical class, gender, race, environmental, and international theories) that apply the critique of ideology in various specified domains of ideological and structural oppression. The framework has also been subject to further scrutiny—as empiricism and hermeneutics were by critical theory—by proponents of *discourse analysis*, another approach to interpreting politics to which we now turn.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Consider and describe causal mechanisms that may be said to generate the following empirically observable events: 1) A group prays before a meal. 2) A student surfs the web for a homework assignment. 3) A politician gives a speech in front of a crowd of wealthy campaign donors. 4) Workers build a wall on the border between two countries. 5) People from one of those countries attempt to cross the wall to find better paying jobs. Here, name at least two structures for each, keeping in mind that social structures may be multiple and overlapping. As you do, trace or describe in words how these events emerge as effects of the causal structures. (For example, if the event is a tweet sent by a U.S. president, the structures that caused this event might be the structure of social media communications and the structure of executive authority. The structure of social media communications overlaps with

the structure of executive authority in ways that produce the event of a Presidential tweet.)

2. This question explores the critical theoretical concern to distinguish between social scientific statements that express law-like connections between variables as such, and those that express ideologically frozen relations of dependence. What would a critical theorist decide about the following social scientific assertion about the relationship between money and politics: "When the preferences of economic elites and the political stands of organized interest groups are controlled for, the preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy."[40] Does this assertion reflect a belief in invariable social relations? Does it reflect an ideologically frozen relation? Is it an assertion that a critical theorist would make in an effort to emancipate people from ideological domination? What is at stake for democratic processes and practices in whether or not one adopts an emancipatory, critical-theoretical orientation in one's evaluation of this assertion?
3. To think through and apply the critique of ideology in the case of structural violence, complete the following questions:
   a. Identify an ideology and its content.
   b. Name at least two strategic actors who have produced that ideology, their position of power within systems or structures of power, and an example of how they have competed to acquire, maintain, and preserve those positions of power.
   c. What are the specific ways that the strategic actors have psychically constrained, persuaded and manipulated others to have the will of others conform to theirs?
   d. How are those products of the power of the strategic actors?
   e. How, precisely, does the ideology produce inconspicuously working communications blocks when people gather together politically?
   f. How might those gathering together be said to deceive themselves about themselves and their situation?
   g. What are some of the consequences of institutionalizing the illegitimate consensus that they produce, and how may it be used against them?

[40]Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups and Average Citizens," *Perspectives on Politics* (12/3 September 2014), p. 572.

h. What may be transformed for a more legitimate consensus to take shape?

4. In his contemporary critical race theory classical work, *The Racial Contract*, the philsopher Charles W. Mills suggests that the critique of ideology "lets the world rush into" academic spaces where ideological domination persists.[41] By this, he means that the critique of ideology is "intimate" with "the world in which we actually live."[42] It opens space for awareness and reflection about what is actually taking place in people's lives—including structurally violent forms of oppression—in contrast to the illusions produced by ideology. To conclude our considerations of critical theory, think about and discuss what "letting the world rush into" spaces that are dominated by ideology might look like in your experience? Consider this in relation to the ideology you described in the prior question (or another example, if you like). What actualities in your experience would an emancipatory critique of ideology bring to awareness and reflection? What effect would such awareness and reflection have on your experience—on your self-understanding, your understanding of and relationships with others, and your living and acting in *your* world?

[41]Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 130.
[42]Ibid., p. 130, 131.