

The critique of ideology ('The Critique') is a movement of social inquiry that first garnered popularity in Marx's writings and was later developed over the course of several generations of German philosophers from the Institute for Social Research, or Frankfurt School. As a form of social criticism, The Critique ventures to emancipate individuals from the distorted reality painted by harmful ideologies through the unification of philosophy and the social sciences. In this paper I will situate The Critique within the Frankfurt School's broader research program known as Critical Theory, detail its recent re-emergence in social literature in the context of its major historical issues, and ultimately argue that its contemporary immanent form is an inadequate framework to motivate social transformation. The explanatory pursuits of this paper (in the form of clarifying what The Critique is and how it works) are prioritized equally, if not more to the argumentative pursuits (my ultimate objection to The Critique); as will likely become apparent, the intellectual challenge of understanding The Critique is arguably just as difficult as formulating a basis for its refutation.

### *Critical Theory*

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Critical Theory in the sense that I will be considering refers to a broad and diverse field of approaches first employed by members of the aforementioned Frankfurt school that seeks to critique power structures and motivate social transformation within society. In the postscript to *Traditional and Critical Theory*, Max Horkheimer, director of the institute from 1930 to 1958, explains that the goal of Critical Theory is to serve as a "liberating influence" on the "needs and powers of man" for the sake of their "emancipation from slavery."<sup>1</sup> That is, a critical theory utilizes explanatory measures to expose negative social conditions as contrary to these true "needs and powers" and provides the normative basis for their reconstruction or replacement. Furthermore, to serve as a true "liberating influence," it also assumes the practical responsibility of providing social agents with a pathway to said transformation. Put differently, a Critical theory must identify core issues within a social formation, provide a normative justification for their criticism, and establish realistic objectives for social improvement along with standards for evaluating its progress. To a degree, the descriptive, normative, and practical components of Critical Theory requires the interplay between philosophy and the social sciences; while social research spanning the fields of sociology, psychology, and economics can be used to identify instances of collective repression, philosophy may then push the process forward with normative understandings of truth and morality.

Given this relatively broad goal of explaining and transforming social circumstances characterized by domination and restricted freedom, there have been many theories and social movements that have developed under the umbrella of Critical Theory (including ones unaffiliated with the Frankfurt School). As I alluded to earlier, the primary focus of this paper will be the Critique of Ideology. From a high-level, The Critique endeavors to accomplish the aforementioned goals of Critical Theory and initiate social transformation by freeing agents from

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<sup>1</sup> O'Connell, 246

the captivity of their predominant, socially-induced ideologies.<sup>2</sup> Before delving into the approach of The Critique, we must first establish an understanding of ideology as it relates to the project.

### *Ideology: An Exposition*

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The concept of ideology is an infamously abstract notion with no shortage of definitions; the Marx Corpus alone contains four independent theories of ideology<sup>3</sup> and Raymond Geuss' *The Idea of Critical Theory* identifies ten 20th century models of ideology across three different research programs.<sup>4</sup> As Terry Eagleton points out in *Ideology*, the term "ideology" in contemporary contexts typically denotes something negative, or pejorative; to call something "ideological" is to suggest a skewed perspective.<sup>5</sup> While I will ultimately adopt a pejorative definition of ideology to explicate The Critique, I would like to arrive at this working definition by first inheriting a neutral understanding.

From this "explanatory"<sup>6</sup> perspective, we can cautiously think about ideology as merely "a system of social thought"<sup>7</sup> in relation to a particular set of social circumstances. This view more-or-less reflects what social theorists today define as a form of social consciousness: mental representations (i.e, dispositions, concepts, and beliefs) widely shared by members of a social group that are systematically interconnected, influence behavior, and are central to an agent's conceptual scheme. In this interpretation a form of social consciousness (or ideology in the explanatory sense) can be conceived of as a social "worldview" with *practical implications on social practice* (how one is to act within it), and *is itself a product* of social practice: they are self-reflexive. It is important to underscore the epistemic significance of this reflexivity; ideologies "express validity claims" about the way the world is (descriptive) and should be (normative)<sup>8</sup> in an inextricably commingled fashion. That is, the normative claims shape the social reality that the descriptive claims describe and vice versa. For example, nationalism as an ideology may shape social reality through its influence on political policy, and the resulting cultural/political context may shape agents' sense of national identity in a manner that serves to further define, strengthen, and perpetuate the nationalist ideology. Thus Jaeggi writes, ideologies are "normative as ways of understanding the world."<sup>9</sup>

For critical theorists, then, an ideology (hereby pejorative sense) are those systematically interconnected mental representations that present a distorted image of social reality to their beholder. For the sake of clarity, I will make a distinction between *how* an ideology distorts the worldview of an agent, and *what* its resulting consequences are. Regarding the former, an

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<sup>2</sup> While Critical Theory (as a broad program of social critique) and The Critique (as a program of social critique with ideology as its target) are sometimes used interchangeably, I reserve these as distinct, categorically different topics.

<sup>3</sup> Rosen, chapter 6.

<sup>4</sup> Geuss, chapter 1.

<sup>5</sup> Eagleton, 1.

<sup>6</sup> This is typically called the "descriptive" viewpoint. However, in order not to confuse this with the "descriptive" beliefs detailed later, I will call it the "explanatory" understanding of ideology.

<sup>7</sup> Eagleton, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Shelby, 157.

<sup>9</sup> Jaeggi, 72.

ideology is deemed distortive in virtue of some defects within the epistemological justification for its descriptive or normative claims. Since a comprehensive description of what ideological distortions are and how they work is a critical element of *The Critique* as a process, I will reserve further discussion of this for subsequent sections. For now, an understanding of a distortion as a “misrepresentation of self-understanding” will do; if ideology is the set of perspectival goggles one uses to perceive (social) reality, ideological distortion operates by misrepresenting the agent’s relation to, and position in this filtered perspective. According to critical theorists, ideological distortion has severe, negative implications on how ideology practically functions. More specifically, it is precisely through their use of epistemic illusion and misrepresentation that certain putative ideologies justify, establish, and sustain social arrangements characterized by repressive domination; ideological captives hold mistaken beliefs of self-understanding that erroneously justify their social state of affairs. Shelby provides a more straightforward characterization: agents are simply “self-deceived about the real motives for why [they] hold” their beliefs.<sup>10</sup> Thus we can imagine the ruling elite in a class-divided society weaponizing ideology to pass off their particular interests as representative of the masses, religious claims of morality being passed off as natural, unsupported notions of racial inferiority fueling a self-fulfilling cycle of limited opportunity to limited success to limited opportunity, and so forth.

With the hope to further demystify the concept of ideology, the final clarification I will make is that, perhaps counterintuitively, there is no discrete difference between ideology in the explanatory and pejorative senses in the context of social reality. That is, forms of social consciousness (explanatory) and ideologies (pejorative) do not exist independently of one another, with the latter being some specific, distortive subset of the former; their distinctiveness is merely conceptual. To my knowledge, the best explanation of this subtle, yet major distinction (or lack of) is presented by John McMurtry: ideology is “constituted of public formulations, whereas [forms of social consciousness] are presupposed principles of such formulations.”<sup>11</sup> That is, epistemological distortions are a contingent aspect of the self-reflexivity of forms of social consciousness, and contingent on these distortions are the bad social arrangements (i.e., those characterized by inequality, oppression) that earn ideology its pejorative association. It is perhaps with this in mind that Jaeggi writes that “being mistaken is part of the nature of ideology.”<sup>12</sup>

With this formulation in mind, we can finally understand *The Critique* as an attempt to unmask and ultimately rise above the negative social conditions produced by ideology. As we will see, the Critique does not merely seek to subvert ideology by some unmotivated desire to correct epistemic falsehoods, but proceeds from the characteristically oppressive nature of ideology to its illusory core to enact social change.

### *The Challenge of a Critique of Ideology*

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<sup>10</sup> Shelby, 170.

<sup>11</sup> McMurtry, 146.

<sup>12</sup> Jaeggi, 64.

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How can The Critique achieve its goal of motivating social progress from the oppressive arrangements created by ideology? Most, if not all theorists within the tradition of Critical Theory agree that this cannot be accomplished through merely “moralizing criticism.” That is, The Critique cannot simply criticize an ideology by the sole fact that it upholds repressive (i.e., immoral) social arrangements. Briefly put, it lacks any universal moral standard (whatever that may be and if that is possible) to apply to a given ideological context and therefore any justification for its normativity.

One approach, generally referred to as “traditional theory,” endeavors to maneuver around this normative issue by solely appealing to notions of objectivity to expose mistakes underlying ideology. That is, an ideology is not merely “wrong,” but “false” by some epistemic fallacy. Without delving too deeply into the world of traditional theory, its perhaps strongest approach known as “positivism” pursues this course through identifying and evaluating the cognitive beliefs of ideology: beliefs that can be rationally assessed as true or false, and if true, constitute knowledge. Different variations of empiricism are typically inherited for this application of objectivity. The positivist may assign a belief cognitive content if it has observational content and/or if it is scientifically testable.<sup>13</sup> Some examples of false beliefs under this cognitive framework might include the scientifically false statement that “cannibalism promotes long term health” or the observationally false statement that “the sky is blue.” Ideological fallacies may not be this blatant, however, and can infect social consciousness in a number of distortive ways; an ideology will then be epistemically false if it passes off of value judgements as empirically-based descriptive claims (mistake of epistemic status), presents some conditioned social phenomena as something absolute or naturally given (objectification mistake), or has beliefs backed by observation that are attributable to the belief itself (self-fulfilling mistake<sup>14</sup>). An important characteristic of this type of critique is that it takes place *externally* to its object of ideology; the critic has the privilege of being able to analyze ideology from a third-person perspective and apply an external standard of evaluation. Accordingly, going forward I will refer to this approach as “external critique.”

I have presented these early versions of ideology critique as they are ripe with issues that serve as the focal point for contemporary critiques. These issues can be condensed into the following two normative shortcomings:

*(1) External critique cannot comment on the normative claims of ideology.*

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<sup>13</sup> Geuss, 27.

<sup>14</sup> This might require more explanation. An example could be the belief that men on average are better at chess. While male professional chess players may on average have higher ELO ratings than their female counterparts, this is not a result of some innate/genetic property of man. In fact, this observed phenomenon is much more likely attributable to the belief itself; this belief may disincentivize women from playing competitively, generate apathy toward teaching women the game, and so forth.

A sharp reader will note that the focal point of the external critique just described falls exclusively in the descriptive realm of ideology. Descriptive claims appeal to some notion of objectivity to verify truth content, and therefore cognitive defects can be tangibly identified by comparing a claim to its grounding notion of objectivity; normative claims lack the cognitive content necessary for this. That is, inquiring into the validity of a statement “material conditions are characterized by limitation and scarcity” is epistemologically very different from inquiring into the similar statement that “material conditions should be allocated as equally as possible.” We cannot appeal to any observable, empirically verifiable standard to evaluate the latter. Furthermore, in its evaluation of ideology as a false form of consciousness, external critique appears to totally ignore the role attitudes, preferences, and other relevant phenomena without cognitive content have in shaping an agent’s world outlook.

*(2) External critique cannot justify any rectification of epistemic distortion.*

Even if the external critic successfully exposes an epistemic flaw in an ideology, on what basis can this be used to justify a more valid replacement? Why should a homophobe be compelled to replace a normative belief (e.g, intimacy is reserved for those of opposite sex) once previously conceived of as descriptive? Even if some of their homophobic beliefs are empirically false (e.g, same-sex relationships generate disease), on what grounds can the critic say this apparent irrationality is bad? This here, is a second, but distinct issue of normativity. The implicit normativity of the external method (i.e, we should seek to develop a more rational system of beliefs by eliminating those with cognitive defects) has no claim of superiority over any normative underpinnings used to sustain ideological beliefs, even if they are cognitively flawed. Put differently, this approach finds itself preoccupied with “incommensurable standpoints that do not share basic criteria.”<sup>15</sup> That is, how can one critically judge an ideological social practice as wrong or false, when the ideology itself validates them through its own epistemic distortions?

Throughout the postmodernist era, the normative challenges associated with an external viewpoint of ideology (or social arrangements and practices more broadly) become the focal point of the program of pragmatism: the view that social reality cannot be fully understood without considering the subjective perspectives and self-perceptions of the people under its veil.<sup>16</sup> While pragmatism is not theoretically incompatible with The Critique, it requires that it establish itself within ideology: its normative basis for criticizing ideology and proposing an alternative set of beliefs must somehow be derived from the ideological beliefs themselves. This is what contemporary theorists typically define as an “immanent approach” and its self-referential methodology (to be elaborated upon further in the subsequent section) poses a large set of conceptual hurdles for The Critique.<sup>17</sup> For one thing, if ideology constitutes such a firm grip on an agent’s notions of truth and morality, it is conceptually unclear how a critic could use the very faculties they are critiquing as distortive as the weapon for this judgment. Put differently, if ideology permeates all facets of our perspective, how is one to develop a more

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<sup>15</sup> Becker, section 3

<sup>16</sup> Celikates, 1

<sup>17</sup> Ng, 394-395.

objective or neutral stance from which to definitively evaluate the influence of their own ideological distortion?<sup>18</sup> Even if the critic is capable of the perspective necessary to reflexively evaluate their ideological delusion, why couldn't this viewpoint be deemed ideological and subject to critique itself?<sup>19</sup> Given the immense theoretical difficulties present on each potential pathway for The Critique, it is perhaps unsurprising that many social theorists opted to abandon the project coming out of the postmodernist era.

### *Contemporary Critical Approaches*

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Since the turn of the century, we have seen the rise of a new wave of Critical Theorists that are roughly unified in their determination to solve the foreboding conceptual challenges of The Critique articulated above. These refurbished theories of critique endeavor to solve these normative issues by reestablishing the self-understanding of The Critique with respect to its object, ideology. While there is no shortage of contemporary literature regarding social inquiry and critique (e.g. cultural sociology, critical psychology, discourse analysis, etc.), I have selected the projects of Robin Celikates and Rajeh Jaeggi for their commitment to ideology critique within the context of the goals of traditional Critical Theory described earlier.

#### *Celikates—*

Robin Celikates' *Critique as Social Practice* is one of the earliest, and arguably most impactful contributions to the revival. Throughout the course of his book, Celikates navigates the realms of sociology, philosophy, and Critical Theory in order to carve a pathway for Critical Theory in the context of pragmatism. A primary objective of Celikates' project is to develop a self-reflexive account of social agents that can serve as the basis for an immanent critique of ideology. That is, Celikates hopes to avoid falling victim to the aforementioned Mannheim's paradox or charges of totalization (see FN 18 & 19) by demonstrating the theoretical ability and willingness of social agents to "critically distance themselves from themselves" in spite of ideological constraints.<sup>20</sup> In line with this objective, Celikates begins by investigating ways in which social agents might demonstrate the capacity for reflective judgment in the operation of social practice. In his analysis of various sociological accounts of critique, Celikates finds a promising foundation in the parallel works of Luc Boltanski's *Sociology of Critique* ("SOC").

Put briefly, SOC attempts to show that "the arguments and vocabularies of critical social theories find their way into society's,"<sup>21</sup> and thus external critiques are not only infeasible, but unnecessary. More specifically, SOC seeks to uncover the ways in which justification and critique manifest themselves in everyday social practices. SOC analyzes this phenomena through its function in dispute, disagreement, or negotiation as a regular occurrence: "agents in their everyday practices are subject to certain demands to justify themselves"<sup>22</sup> and accordingly

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<sup>18</sup> This dilemma is known as "totalization."

<sup>19</sup> This dilemma was coined by Clifford Geertz as "Mannheim's Paradox."

<sup>20</sup> Celikates, 16.

<sup>21</sup> Celikates, 120.

<sup>22</sup> Celikates, 95.

“draw on socially and culturally mediated models of argumentation in order to detach themselves from the concrete situation and to engage in an exchange of reasons in which critique and justification are inseparably linked.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, given the heterogeneous nature of confrontational situations, agents must be able to shift their action and regimes of justification to fit the context; this requires “one to detach from the immediate environment” in the aforementioned self-reflexive manner. According to Celikates, while SOC points to a potential pathway for The Critique, one with a promising normative standing, it by itself is limiting. More specifically, it images critical social theory as a second-order endeavor; social theorists only seek to describe and account for the critical capabilities of agents without being able to wield this knowledge themselves to promote social change. The position social theorists occupy with respect to social criticism is similar to that of “linguistics to actual language users...not linguists, but those who speak have knowledge about language.”<sup>24</sup> Without delving too deep into the weeds, it is important to note that the structural limitations of SOC are attributable to all internal theories<sup>25</sup> of social inquiry and are thus not easily rectified with mere slight reinterpretations. In the view of Celikates, there is one major theoretical flaw within SOC that conveniently opens the door for a stronger reframing of social criticism in line with the traditional objectives of The Critique: namely that it (SOC) does not provide an account for how social conditions affect an agent’s ability to exercise and/or develop their reflexive capabilities.<sup>26</sup> That is, in virtue of its inability to provide any account of social reality outside of the subjective perspective (see FN 23) of social agents, SOC is forced to falsely assume that the “communicative competences and the ability to make oneself heard” are not socially conditioned, and thus “strictly equally distributed.”<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, Celikates reimagines The Critique as the emancipatory process of discovering and criticizing the social conditions that impede agents’ self-reflexive abilities for critique. In Celikates’ view, these restrictive social conditions (“second-order pathologies”) are inextricably linked to the first-order pathologies Critical Theory seeks to expose and replace. Put differently, the social conditions created by ideology systematically distort an agent’s ability to develop and grow the self-reflexive abilities that allow them to recognize and critique first-order pathologies (e.g, oppression, domination, inequality ) as problematic. Finally, to equip The Critique with the normative underpinnings necessary to push forward this process of self-understanding, in an immanent fashion, Celikates explains that The Critique must “render the implicit normative content [constitutive of a social context] explicit” by “latching onto the practices and self-understandings of ordinary agents and their first-order reflexive constructions.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, the normativity of the process relies on the ability of the (now positioned) social theorist to

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<sup>23</sup> Celikates, 98.

<sup>24</sup> Celikates, 122.

<sup>25</sup> Internal theories of social inquiry are in all respects a complete repudiation of the external methods previously described. They make no distinction between, in fact, argue against the possibility of, a social theory that exists outside of the self-understanding of social agents. Consequently, any account of social criticism is so fundamentally tied to the perspective of a social agent that it cannot be objectively formalized. A particularly interesting parallel to help understand this facet of the internal perspective is by comparing it to Nagel’s ‘What is it like to be a bat?’ The subjective experience of a bat can only be knowable through a first-hand account. We cannot read a book on the phenomenology of sonar and then know what it’s like to have that ability.

<sup>26</sup> Celikates, 123.

<sup>27</sup> Celikates, 123.

<sup>28</sup> Celikates, 137.

demonstrate the existence of second-order pathologies as contrary to an agent's notion of self-understanding and "prompt a process of reflection that is a precondition for practical transformations."<sup>29</sup>

*Jaeggi—*

The theoretical framework proposed by Celikates is conveniently complementary to The Critique outlined in Rahel Jaeggi's *Rethinking Ideology*. If Celikates is primarily focussed on providing an account of how the self-reflexivity necessitated by immanent critique is possible despite the firm grip ideology holds over agents, Jaeggi concentrates on how a practical account of immanent critique can then be developed to accomplish goals of Critical Theory.

In a word, The Critique in Jaeggi's theory identifies the ideals "constitutive" of, or "immanent" to a particular ideology, investigates their deficient, practical realizations in society, and ultimately inherits precisely these standards for the basis of its critique of the status quo.<sup>30</sup> The distortive element of ideology alluded to previously that The Critique seeks to expose takes the form of "internal contradictions" contained within ideology. More specifically, distortions are *necessary* contradictions between the respective normative and descriptive elements of an ideology's ideals; a normative prescription of how social reality *necessarily* manifests itself such that the resulting social reality does not descriptively correspond to the normative ideal.<sup>31</sup> As an example, Jaeggi argues that "freedom and equality" as constitutive ideals of capitalist ideology fit the bill for ideological distortion; the realization of legal and political freedoms necessarily results in forced labor relationships and thus the descriptive aspect of these ideals can never correspond to their normative character. Note that this apparent framing of ideological distortion seemingly resolves the first normativity issue inherent to external critique explained previously. In virtue of the intermingling of descriptive and normative elements of ideology, The Critique can comment on normative claims based on the descriptive truth content of their manifestations in social reality. Motivating the adoption of a different set of ideals based on the presence of this type of distortion, however, will require additional moves from Jaeggi.

Returning to our example norms of "freedom and equality," and in consideration of their inadequate realization, the critic can inherit (in an immanent fashion) these norms to justify a transformation of social practice that better corresponds to these normative ideals.<sup>32</sup> However, recall that this normative-descriptive mismatch is a necessary contradiction, and as such, the only way to remedy the contradiction is by a total transformation of the normative underpinnings (and thereby social reality) of the status quo. In short, this transformative procedure ensues in a process of societal learning with no definable end. For each iteration of an ideology, The

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<sup>29</sup> Celikates, 142.

<sup>30</sup> Jaeggi, 75.

<sup>31</sup> Jaeggi, 74-75.

<sup>32</sup> It may be worth noting that if Jaeggi were to stop here, her conception of The Critique would be aligned with what is known as a "reconstructive" version; one that seeks to justify a reconstruction of social reality in better alignment with prefabricated ideals.

Critique can and should be always applied to transform the status quo toward a “higher level” with fewer deficiencies.<sup>33</sup>

### *Practical Shortcomings of the Contemporary Approaches*

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Thus far I have been very cautious not to bias my explanation of The Critique with any expression of personal opinion. I have merely tried to describe the most robust, contemporary approaches for ideology critique in light of a conception of ideology that to the best of my abilities is accurate and representative of these projects. It is difficult to be too meticulous in this matter; the unfortunate reality of the ongoing debate is that the immense theoretical complexity of the topic inhibits intellectual progress by clouding the validity of objections to, or agreements with proposed projects. Subtle differences of understanding with respect to ideology, critical techniques and perspectives, and social objectives are not uncommon and enable theorists to talk past each other. With that in mind, it is my belief that there are only two sensible routes one can take to reject The Critique: theoretical and practical. While the former refers to the validity, or hypothetical possibility of a particular approach in light of the aforementioned theoretical difficulties, the latter concerns the actual capability of an approach to drive social change. Given that the respective immanent approaches utilized by Jaeggi and Celikates contain enough theoretical differences that make a cohesive discussion of the two difficult, my objections will be situated in the practical realm.

Recall from our earlier discussion that a Critical Theory endeavors to emancipate individuals from negative social conditions through an *interdisciplinary approach*. However, Jaeggi and Celikates are both awfully guilty of prioritizing theoretical considerations over real-world issues in a manner that consequently undermines the espoused superiority of Critical Theory over traditional theory; throughout their respective works, the two make reference to remarkably few examples of relevant social or political dilemmas and their discussion remains largely abstract. They each dedicate ample consideration to the nature of ideological distortion, toil relentlessly to provide the normative justification for a switch toward less distortive worldviews, but fail miserably to provide an account for how this social transformation might actually work. Even in a most charitable reading, the two seem to be heavily reliant on the notion that positive social change will magically follow from the unmasking of ideology: that once social agents realize their social reality has been misrepresented, and that there exist better alternatives, they will automatically, and in unison transform the status quo. This, unsurprisingly, comes ripe with negative implications regarding the ability of The Critique to actually realize its practical aim of “emancipation.” One may be skeptical of the persuasive ability of Jaeggi’s novel application of Hegelian sublation to her new “performative-practical” account of The Critique to persuade the everyday neighborhood racist to change their ways. One might ask how a new awareness of the second-order pathologies limiting the innate, self-reflexive capabilities of a coal miner will help him break the chains. If The Critique is to provide ideologically-captive agent’s with a new cognitive framework for understanding their illusory, oppressive worldviews, one may ask why it

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<sup>33</sup> This is a practical spin on Hegelian sublation; old states are negated, preserved, and transposed to higher levels.

takes a PhD in philosophy to fully grasp it. Obviously I am being overly derisive, but the ten-levels-too-abstract nature of *The Critique* really does put into question its practical feasibility.

It seems at the root of this seemingly extreme rationalism is either a misunderstanding of how social progress works, or a willful ignorance of it. More specifically, and likely a result of a lack of engagement with social science, both accounts unforgivably ignore the necessary role of collective action in social transformation. Haslanger, another contemporary theorist who ironically lacks a practical fervor of her own, gets it right here: “emancipation in particular, and justice more generally, is not achieved simply by ‘seeing the truth,’ or getting others to see the truth... “it requires insight into the pathologies and potential for collective action.”<sup>34</sup> Put differently, the persistence of social pathologies is not always, if ever, merely a result of ideological delusion. Rather, agents often align themselves with problematic social practices because straying from the norm carries social costs. These bad arrangements persist in virtue of the massive levels of coordination required to minimize these costs. In fact, all social agents within a particular society could be fully enlightened as to the ideological nature of their practices, yet still be held captive if they are unable to collectively unify against it. For example, all families within modern-day Bangladesh could agree that dowries dehumanize women and should not be an expectation of marriage, and yet to be the first family to willingly reject the practice would certainly subject their daughters to worse-off conditions. In a word, the possibility of better alternatives does not guarantee their pursuance, and *The Critique* is accordingly overly reliant on the mere presence of epistemic possibilities as a catalyst for social change.

Finally, one related point of practical implication is the fact that both Celikates and Jaeggi's works align with a trend within modern Critical Theory: the rejection of ideal theorizing. Both Celikates' “practice of reflection and transformation” and Jaeggi's “process of learning and evolution” are self-described as occurring indefinitely, with no discernable end; using the normative toolkit immanent to a social worldview to compare it to a derivative, less distortive version is far less theoretically burdensome than using these immanent normatives to envisage a wholly distinct, ideal state. As Adams puts it, ideal conceptions “consist in an abstract claim about how social practices should be structured that is independent from the content of any actual practices.”<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, both Jaeggi and Celikates avoid the abstract difficulties of providing a final telos by removing this possibility from their respective theories altogether. Once again, however, this maneuver is guilty of prioritizing theoretical feasibility over practical feasibility in my opinion. It is highly unlikely that a social transformation could result from a movement that is unable to articulate an ideal social structure. Political revolutions of recent memory, the French revolution, American revolution, and Marxist revolution to name a few, were not merely driven by a desire to change from the status quo, but also by a desire to move towards a new set of ideals characteristic of these social movements. That is, one can reasonably argue the fervor necessary for social transformation is derived from a forward-looking vision that contemporary accounts of *The Critique* fail to describe.

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<sup>34</sup> Haslanger, 24.

<sup>35</sup> Adams, 690.

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