Modernity under assault: Some Thoughts on the Importance of Habermas and Voegelin to the Present Age

> The common factor is the growing awareness that man is the origin of meaning in the universe, and at the point of convergence arises an image of the universe that owes its meaning to the fact that it has been evoked by the mind of man. This new awareness, which we shall designate by the term *modern*, constitutes a radical break with the medieval image of the closed universe in its dimensions of nature and history. The medieval idea of the closed cosmos gives way to the idea of an open, infinitely extending universe evoked as a projection of the human mind and of its infinity into space.1 [1]

> [H]igher levels of system differentiation bring the advantage of higher levels of freedom. But alienation effects increasingly emerge when spheres of life that are functionally dependent on value orientations, binding norms, and processes of understanding are monetarized and bureaucratized. Weber has [correctly] diagnosed this sort of loss as loss of meaning and loss of freedom.2 [2]

> [W]hat is true is that each and every criticism of imperfection, incompleteness, intolerance, and impatience already without a doubt presupposes the conception of, and the longing for, a possible perfection.3 [3]

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1 [1] Eric Voegelin *History of Political Ideas, Vol V: Religion and the Rise of Modernity*, ed. James L. Wise (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1999), p. 136.

2 [2] J rgen Habermas, "Conceptions of Modernity: A Look Back at Two Traditions." In *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*. Trans and edited by Max Pensky. Cambridge , MA : The MIT Press, 2001. p. 153

3 [3] Ernst Bloch in "Something's Missing: A Discussion Between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adornoon the Contradictions of Utopian Longing," in Ernst Bloch*, The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays.* Trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg. Cambridge , MA : The MIT Press, 1988. p. 16.

As we stumble through these early years of the Twenty-First Century, many find little reason to be hopeful about human possibility. Neither the utopian hopes of the early 20th century, some of which became enmeshed in authoritarian schemes and regimes, nor the more modest hopes of the end of the Cold War seem sustainable today. Even the United Nations, an institution that embodies a hopeful belief in the possibilities and power of reasoned conversation and debate, seems all too often aimless and riddled with internal corruptions. Our ever-surprising scientific and technological prowess promises now not a more human, but according to some a "trans-human" future, if we do not complete our journey of making the planet uninhabitable beforehand.

What each of these instances of failed hope share is that they represent aspects of modernity, of a belief in the powers of human reason to make the world over into a more humane place. Modernity, what some call the Western Enlightenment Project, is characterized by a belief in the power of human reason, the importance of a secular state, economic capitalism, and a trust in the usefulness of science and technology.

In the following few minutes I will offer some thoughts on the prospects of modernity, or rather, I will offer some thoughts on our fate. Drawing on the work of EV and J�rgen Habermas, I will discuss both grounds for critique of our present age, and also reasons for hope. Because this is a session under the auspices of the EVS, and because I suspect many in the audience have more than a passing knowledge of his work, my comments will be weighted more toward the work of J�rgen Habermas.

I will first situate my project by discussing four challenges to modernity, each of which presents reasons to believe either that the Modern project is no-longer feasible ? either on empirical and descriptive grounds that support the claim that modernity is not tenable, or for normative and theoretical grounds that support the notion that even if modernity were empirically plausible, it neither is nor should be desirable. I will then turn my attention to the characterizations and critiques of modernity offered by EV and JH. I note that each argues that scientism is one of the central deformations of culture, thought, and life under conditions of modernity. By focusing on issues of immanence and transcendence, I will trace some of the commonalities and disagreements between EV and Habermas in the analysis and critique of scientism, and I conclude with a discussion of the grounds for hope.

1. **Some Challenges to Modernity**

   Before turning to my discussion of Voegelin and Habermas on modernity, I will briefly trace some of the present lines of thought that suggest modernity is (and perhaps ought to be) in trouble. I note these only to outline some of the challenges that others have identified. Neither Voegelin nor Habermas accepts any of these as compelling.

a. **External Challenges**

There are two main threads of thinking that suggest that modernity is in trouble and facing what might be fatal challenges from without, challenges from those who live in developing countries, under authoritarian regimes, away from the benefits brought by advanced science and technology. The first of these is the argument that we live in a time of clashing cultures, that modernity as worked out in much of Europe, North America, and some parts of the Pacific is in the midst of an unavoidable battle with cultural forces that either reject or are threatened by modernity. For the most part these cultures draw values and order from fundamentalist versions of religion. Of special concern and threat are supposed to be Islamic cultures.4 [4] The second account of the external threat to modernity makes a broader argument that there is not some grand clash between the modern and the not-modern, but that cultural, religious, and ethnic conflict are thriving wherever modernity fails to reach, in places such as Rwanda, the Sudan, Iraq, Lebanon, or the former Yugoslavia.5 [5] These lines of thought tend to assume, rather unreflectively, that western liberal democracies, economic capitalism, modernity, are good and should be defended. The challenges then are understood as something to be defeated.

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4 [4] See, for example, Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order.* New York : Simon and Schuster, 1998.

5 [5] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler. "Conflicts,"2004 in: Lomborg, B. (ed) *Global Crises, Global Solutions*. Cambridge University Press.

"The Political Economy of Secession," 2006, in Hannum, H. and E.F. Babbitt: *Negotiating Self-Determination*, 37-59, Lanham MD: Lexington Books

Murder by Numbers: On the Socio-Economic Determinants of Homicide and Civil War 2004,

CSAE Working paper 2004-10, Centre for the Study of African Economies, Department of Economics, University of Oxford , March, 2004, accessed on 10 August 2006 at: http://www.csae.ox.ac.uk/workingpapers/pdfs/2004-10text.pdf

"Chapter 4 Civil War," in *Draft chapter for the Handbook of Defense Economics*, Department of Economics, University of Oxford , April 2006, accessed on 10 August 2006 at: http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ball0144/col&hoe_handbook.pdf

b. **Internal challenges**

i. Post-Modernity and radical relativism: One of the challenges to modernity is postmodernism. Exactly how and in what respects postmodernity is a challenge to modernism is difficult in no small part because postmodernism is many things. I will here deal briefly with two ways of understanding what postmodernism is.

1. **Postmodern Culture:** One way of understanding postmodernism is that it is a cultural condition that comes after and replaces modernism. It is characterized by a collapse of central authorities and metanarratives, thus opening an endless proliferation of ways in which people might freely and creatively live. While some argue that postmodernity follows positively from globalization and multiculturalism, others argue that it represents merely an advanced stage of culture under modernism, and one that systematically discourages conscious attention to it limits and problems and the underlying instances of human suffering.

2. **Postmodern Theory:** Another possible understanding of Postmodernity is as one of a wide variety of theoretical positions that criticize the narrow instrumental rationality of modernity, argue that modernity is a totalizing imperialist project that only spreads western domination. Modernity is thus undesirable and immoral.

ii. **Radical Fundamentalism and the Rejection of Modernity:** Just as some find a threat to modernity from fundamentalist forces without, other note a pre-modernist movement within modernity. The central shared idea is that modernity marginalizes and destroys basic and human values and ways of living. Only a rejection of, or a careful contextualization and control over modernity, is ethically acceptable.

iii. Internal distortions of culture: The last set of internal challenges to modernity that I will identify are those problems generated from within its very successes. These include:

1. Ethnic, Religious, and Racial strife arising from an ever greater openness to difference.

2. Anomie, consumerism, and so on arising from the incredible material success of modern research, innovation, production and work.

3. Thoughtlessness and political cynicism arising from the growing sense that in complex social orders political engagement is generally useless.

2. Modernity

a. EV on Modernity:

On Voegelin's account, every political order is grounded in the particular mode of symbolizing the relationships humans have to their experience of reality, especially the reality of a transcendent or divine ground of being. Because we are limited finite beings, any symbolic order will fail to capture some aspects of our relationship to the real, and thus at some point the order will break down.6 [6] In response to the crisis a new order will form, at times under the conscious attempt to understand the origins of the crisis and at other times the new order might emerge haphazardly or be imposed from outside. In any instance the new order must respond to the specific nature of the crisis. Further, as a limited human attempt to grapple with our relation to transcendence, the new order will likely fail to carry forward some insights of the previous symbolic order.

According to Voegelin, Christian revelation captured as clearly and fully as possible the order of reality: divine transcendence, nature, human social order, and individual persons. From this view, modernity can be understood as essentially decaying Christianity in which humans deny their finitude, claim transcendence for themselves, and attempt to exert their power over every aspect of reality. However, Voegelin's account of modernity is not unequivocal, but rather responds to the ambiguous possibilities modernity brings. Modernity might be understood not only as a decline, but also as a possibility and an opening to live and think the relation to transcendence without the weight of centralized authority and avoiding religious arrogance.7 [7] The distorted development of modernity has meant that this possibility is only partially realized. Hence modernity demands new forms of symbolization, and thus presents the possibility of new understandings of the human relationship with transcendence, new understandings that are compatible with a greater degree of freedom and equality and mutual recognition.

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6 [6] Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction.* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1952.

7 [7] See Glenn Hughes, *Transcendence and History: The Search for Ultimacy from Ancient Societies to Postmodernity*, Columbia , MO : The Univesrity of Missouri Press, 2003.

b. **Habermas - Modernity on the world stage**

> For the normative self-understanding of modernity, Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or a catalyst. Universalist egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love.8 [8]

Habermas conceptualizes modernity (or the Enlightenment) as a process of social and cultural differentiation moved by and revolving around developmental logics located within the differentiating value and action spheres. Modernity is a series of separate developmental logics including the logic of democracy, the logic of capitalism and the logic of industrialization.9 [9] Tendencies that character�ize modernity are the capitalization of social life, the conception of persons as autonomous, industrialization, the autonomization of art, the democratization of debates about civil society and the state. Conflict within society occurs because of the clash between i) the development of the public sphere (associated with democracy and autonomy) and ii) the tendency of the state to absorb society (associated industrialization and the rise of capitalism).10 [10]

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8 [8] J�rgen Habermas, "A Conversation about God and the World," in *Religion and Rationality: Essays on God, Reason, and Modernity*, edited and with an introduction by Eduardo Mendieta. Cambridge , MA : The MIT Press, 2002. pp. 148-49.

9 [9] Here I am following the account of modernity formulated by the ' Budapest School '. See Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller and Gyorgy Markus, *Dictatorship over Needs*, [Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1983].

10 [10] See John F. Rundell, *Origins of Modernity: The Origins of Modern Social Theory from Kant to Hegel to Marx*, [Cambridge : Polity Press, 1987].

Unlike many of his predecessors (Lukacs and Marcuse come to mind), Habermas argues that the rationalization of the lifeworld, its separation into different spheres of knowledge and action, is a positive result of modernity. The rationalized lifeworld allows the structural differentiation of i) culture from society -- this frees normative institutions (such as the courts) from metaphysical or religious worldviews (at least in theory); ii) personality from culture -- this frees individuals to revise traditions, to participate freely in interpersonal relationships, and to engage in self-conscious self-realization; and iii) form from content -- this includes freeing formal procedures of justice from concrete action contexts, and cognitive structures from particular life histories. The rationalized lifeworld also requires greater reflexivity in decision-making. One result of these trends is that specialized disciplines emerge, democratic institutions replace authoritarian institutions, and education "de-parochializes."11 [11]

Habermas agrees with Weber's account of rationalization. As Weber demonstrated alienation and despair do follow demythologization, bureaucratization, and mechanization. Habermas is not willing to stop here, he argues that the loss of freedom and meaning is more than adequately compensated for by the positive and enabling consequences of rationalization. The positive consequences of rationalization include:

1) new prospects for freedom and autonomy, the enhancement of individual autonomy with respect to tradition, and

2) the emergence of new possibilities for meaning in new forms of art, and in increased possibilities for democracy brought about, in part, by new technologies.

Modernity thus brings with it a new openness and universalism, and because of the removal of imposed authoritative answers to existential questions, places ever-greater burdens and responsibilities on us. As I will explain, according to Habermas the failure of social and cultural forms that can guide us through this leaves open room for scientism and systemic colonization of the lifeworld.

c. **Internal problems ⇒ the role of scientism**

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11 [11] Habermas, *TCA* , 2:145-148. Also, *TCA* , 1:157-158.

Both Habermas and Voegelin argue that a certain mistaken role and weight is all too often given to science and technology, or to what appears as such. This is scientism, and one of the central points of critique**.**

i. Voegelin on Scientism:.

Voegelin describes Scientism as "**[illegible]** an intellectual movement of which the beginnings could be discerned as early as the second half of the sixteenth century. **[illegible]** They began in a fascination with the new science to the point of underrating and neglecting the concern for experiences of the spirit; they developed into the assumption that the new science could create a world view that would substitute for the religious order of the soul. **[illegible]** The prohibition of metaphysical questions was pronounced by Comte in 1830."12 [12] Scientism is a turning away from the divine along with an elevation of human technical rationality and capacity. It is hubris, an attempt to bring all of reality under our control and knowledge and deny the fact of our finitude.

Voegelin argues that the ground for the critique and response to scientism is to be found in a proper understanding of the human relation to the divine. Beginning in the Renaissance life on earth began to change dramatically through new inventions and discoveries and the rise of modem science.13 [13] Voegelin, acknowledges that there is a core of rational and practical usefulness modern science and technology. Yet, he also believes that S&T are becoming "a cancerous growth. This is in large part due tp the very success of scientific and technological understandings and methods. As science and technology provide an every more useful map of the world, and ever more powerful and successful means of manipulation, the social realization of other values is noticeably weakened. This process comes to enact the principle (seldom is ever stated, and then at this point in history almost always only as a matter of critique) that the utilitarian domination of over nature through science and technology should and will become the central goal of human activity and the primary determinant for the structure of society.14 [14] Voegelin here articulates a version of technological determinism **[illegible]** the notion that science and technology can and do determine the direction and content of human society. While it is possible to read Voegelin as arguing that this is inherent and unavoidable in the structure of modernity, I think it better to read this claim as a cautionary tale, as a warning about a strong and dangerous tendency within modernity. Voegelin further claims that beliefs that science and technology will lead to human happiness "are part of a cultural process that is dominated by a flight of magic imagination, that is, by the idea of operating on the substance of man though the instrument of a pragmatically planning will. We have ventured the suggestion that in retrospect the age of science will appear as

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12 [12] Eric Voegelin "The Origins of Scientism", *Collected Works, Vol. 10*

13 [13] Eric Voegelin *History of Political Ideas, Vol. VI., p. 56.*

14 [14] Eric Voegelin *History of Political Ideas,* V1, p. 207.

the greatest power orgy in the history of mankind."15 [15] What Voegelin calls a "power orgy" is characterized by human relating to science and technology, methods and knowledges of our own creation, as if they are magical. Thus, modernity has become "a gigantic outburst of magic imagination after the breakdown of the intellectual and spiritual form of medieval high civilization."16 [16]

ii. Habermas on Scientism

Both Voegelin and Habermas critique Positivism (understood as a particularly pernicious form of scientism) and scientism, although Habermas is rather more hopeful about the possibilities unleashed by contemporary science and technology, and (again, for the most part) argues that the necessary resources to rein in and direct science and technology toward humane goals and practices can be found immanent within human cultures.

He argues that technoscience brings great benefits to humans in modern cultures, and that in so far as it is concerned with technoscientific questions it should remain true to its own internal values. A problem arises when we allow technoscience and technoscientific values to take over other realms of human life that should not be organized around values of productivity and efficiency. Habermas criticizes the tendency of modern societies to subject all areas of human life to instrumental reasoning -- scientism. For example, the sorts of thinking best suited to determining how to build a bridge are not the same as those best suited to nurturing friendship, neither are the skills and modes of thinking that characterize consumption those best suited to responsible citizenship. He claims that it is dangerous to allow the values of either realm to seep into the other. On the one hand we get dehumanization of human relationships, and many of the destructive possibilities identified by other critical theorists. On the other hand we will get bad science, and our pursuit of technical knowledge will be subordinated to ideology. Thus, technoscience, properly constrained, is necessary to human liberation and to decreasing suffering and oppression. As I'll explain in the next section, where I explore the grounds for critique, Habermas argues that there is an appropriate role for instrumental rationality, but only within certain contexts and constrained by certain procedures and by a correct understanding of its limits and possibilities.

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15 [15] Eric Voegelin *History of Political Ideas,* V1, p. 208.

16 [16] Eric Voegelin *History of Political Ideas*, V1, pp. 209-211.

3. **Grounds for critique17 [17]**
    a. **Voegelin and Necessity of Transcendence**

As you all know well, for Voegelin the grounds for critique are found in understanding our relationship to transcendence. The problem with scientism, and therefore much of modernity, is that it fails to attend to this relationship. Voegelin wrote that "There are no things that are merely immanent."18 [18] Of course, misplaced faith in human power is a reduction of reality to mere immanence. Since, as he argues, consciousness is "the specifically human mode of participation in reality"19 [19] our thought under these conditions will be distorted, and absent some awareness of the reality of transcendence critique will be impossible. All of the "pneumopathological disorders of modernity" such as anomie, alienation, consumerism, and so on, are rooted in either lack of attention to, or explicit denial of these facts.20 [20]

    b. **Habermas on Socio-Pathologies and "quasi-transcendence"**

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17 [17] J  rgen Habermas, "Historical Consciousness and Post-traditional Identity," *The New Conservatism:*

Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989),

18 [18] Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis,* tr. and ed. by Gerhart Niemeyer, University of Notre Dame Press. 1978, p. 78

19 [19] Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis,* tr. and ed. by Gerhart Niemeyer, University of Notre Dame Press. 1978, p. 4.

20 [20] Glenn Hughes, In Private Correspondence, August 2006, was most helpful in helping me be more clear on these matters.

i. Three Quasi-Transcendental Interests constitutive of Human Nature21 [21]

Habermas argues in *Knowledge and Human Interests* that human beings have certain interests in terms of which we organize our experience. Though these interests arise from the material history of the human species, they function **a priori** to structure the very possibility of knowledge. Habermas explains:

> They have a transcendental function but arise from actual structures of human life: from structures of a species that reproduces its life through learning processes of socially organized labor and processes of mutual understanding in interaction through mediated language.22 [22]

Habermas characterizes these interests as "quasi-transcendental" because as **a priori** interests they function as transcendental structures, yet they are formed in the contingent history of the species. The argument that claims to freedom underlie knowledge is a variation of a position also maintained by Kant, Fichte and Hegel. Reason desires that it be free and freedom rests upon self-knowledge. As Hegel argues, no unfree situation can be reasonable. Habermas argues that we have a transcendent interest in human emancipation; the specific content of this interest will be historically variable. That is, what 'freedom' means will be understood within the terms of the existing culture. In this manner, Habermas' theory is a revision of the Critical Theory model of immanent critique.

We are, Habermas notes, both tool using and language using animals. We must produce tools and techniques in order that we can survive our confrontations with nature; we must develop the ability to produce and control objects. As social beings, we must also communicate with each other. Habermas argues that from these two interests, the interest in knowledge that allows the control of objects and the interest in knowledge that allows for communication, follows a third interest. This third interest is in answer to the demand to understand the interest bound nature of all knowledge and demands the self-reflective appropriation of human life. This third interest demands that we submit our lives to rational evaluation. By following this demand we increase

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21 [21] J  rgen Habermas *Knowledge and Human Interests*

22 [22] Habermas, *KHI*, p. 194.

our capacity for self-awareness and self-determination (autonomy). In other words, the third interest is an emancipatory interest that transcends even the quasi-transcendent status of the practical and communicative interests. It is this interest, articulated in demands for liberty and equality, imperfectly embodied in democratic cultures, and most clearly articulated in religious responses to suffering and evil, that provides a possible ground for critique and a reservoir for hope.

At this point in the analysis, Habermas has presented the following model of the way in which human beings constitute reality: Human beings have three cognitive interests: technical (tool production and manipulation), practical (communication), and emancipatory. Human cognitive interests give rise to the conditions of three sciences: the empirical-analytic, the historical-hermeneutic and the critical.23 [23]

science is committed to truth-telling. The goal of an accurate description and explanation of the world requires an interest in open and free communication. If we are interested in controlling (or simply understanding) the world, then we need an accurate model. In order to ensure we have the best possible model, we must test it, examine how it fits with existing models, explore the questions it opens up. Doing so requires that the testing and discussion of theories must aim at truth, at the best possible explanation. To ensure this, science has an interest in openness.

The demand for critical theory arises from the human interest in emancipation that is based in the human capacity to be self-constituting, self-reflective, rational creatures. Such capacities are, Habermas argues, blocked not only by the cultural conditions of advanced capitalism in general, but also by the knowledge conditions characteristic of the natural and cultural sciences. In order to allow the process of human self-formation to occur under conditions free from unacknowledged constraints, a form of knowledge adequate to identifying and abolishing such constraints is necessary. Habermas identifies this type of knowledge as that gained through a process of self-reflection.

> Self-reflection brings to consciousness those determinates of a self-formative process of cultivation and self-formation which ideologically determine a contemporary practice and conception of the world...[Self-reflection] leads to insight due to the fact that what has previously been unconscious is made conscious in a manner rich in consequences: analytic insights intervene in life.24 [24]

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23 [23] Habermas, *KHI*, pp. 301-317.

24 [24] Jrgen Habermas, *TAP*, pp. 22-23.

What is needed is a practice based in self-reflective apprehension of our actual material conditions and the possibilities they offer for human emancipation. Such a practice, which will unblock our critical capacities, is what Habermas calls an emancipatory practice.

ii. Thwarting of Emancipatory Interest, and distorted communication ⊗ the Ideal Speech Situation25 [25]

One of the moving forces behind the socio-cultural crises of late capitalism is the emancipatory ideal that is implicit in the acts of speech. Habermas argues that the very act of speech presupposes the possibility of an ideal speech situation where the force of the better argument alone will prevail.26 [26] Furthermore, the ideal speech situation functions as a regulative ideal against which we can compare our existing society.27 [27]

Habermas claims that when we speak we wish to achieve an understanding; we wish to communicate with each other. For this reason, communicative interaction presupposes four claims about its own practice. When I speak I assume: 1) that what I say is comprehensible, 2) that what I say is true, 3) that what I say is appropriate to this context, 4) that what I say is sincerely meant.28 [28] These assumptions underlay every speech situation; however, they may not be concretely

25 [25] Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis, Towards a Rational Society*

26 [26] See J⊗rgen Habermas, "Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence," *Inquiry* 13, (1970): 368-372. See also, J⊗rgen Habermas, "On Systematically Distorted Communication," *Inquiry* 13, (1970): 205-218. For a more detailed account of the relation between Habermas' work on speech act theory and universal pragmatics, and the work of Noam Chomsky, J.L. Austin, and John Searle, see Roderick, *Habermas and the Foundations of Critical Theory*, pp. 73-100.

27 [27] Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, pp. 110-113.

28 [28] Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp. 1-6.

realized in every speech situation. That is, we may intend understanding when we talk; nonetheless, we might not achieve understanding.

Habermas argues that reaching an understanding presupposes that we can genuinely understand each other, and that it is possible to distinguish between a genuine understanding and a deceptive understanding. According to Habermas, a genuine understanding is based solely on the force of the better argument. If we agree, our agreement should not be based upon any hidden factors or prior constraints on speech. If we reach a genuine understanding, it is based on the force of the better argument alone. This can only be the case if all possible participants (i.e.: all affected parties) have an equal opportunity to freely participate in the debate.29 [29] In this way we arrive at the 'ideal speech situation', a situation of discursive practice much like Kant's ' Kingdom of Ends '.30 [30] On this account the very act of talking, of chatting with a neighbor, calling a family member for a recipe, arguing about sports, or politics, or movies at a bar, discussing what to have for dinner, explaining the results of recent medical tests to a friend, all of these and more constitute and reveal grounds for hope. Conversations about what we might do, about how we might live, about the nature of the good life (and these happen all the time, even if not always in the self-critical manner than philosophers might advocate) are what Habermas calls "moral discourse." He further argues that,

> "moral discourse allows all those concerned and affected an equal say and expects each participant to adopt the perspectives of the others when deliberating what is in the equal interest of all. In this way, the parties to the discourse learn to mutually incorporate the interpretations others have of their self and of their world into their own, expanded self- and world-understanding."31 [31]

iii. Colonization of the Lifeworld32 [32]

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29 [29] Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp. 45-68. See also John B. Thompson, "Universal Pragmatics" in *Habermas: Critical Debates*.

30 [30] See Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

31 [31] J�rgen Habermas, "Public space and political public sphere – the biographical roots of two motifs in my thought" Kyoto Commemorative Lecture, November 11, 2004 . p6.

32 [32] *Theory of Communicative Action, vols 1 and 2*

On Habermas' account the lifeworld is the unthematized background of meanings against which particular events occur. Habermas integrates three different existing approaches into his account of the lifeworld; i) the phenomenological (Husserl and Schutz) with its emphasis on the production and reproduction of cultural knowledge, ii) the social systems approach (Durkheim, Parsons and Luhmann) with its focus on the role of institutions and social integration, and iii) symbolic interactionism (Mead) with its emphasis on the role of socialization and the lifeworld as a ground for the formation of personality, for individual growth and action. By combining these three theoretical perspectives Habermas arrives at a description of the lifeworld as a preexisting stock of meanings handed down in culture and language. Under conditions of modernity the lifeworld becomes rationalized. That is, the lifeworld possesses linguistic structures that allow the differentiation of objective, social and subjective domains of reference.33 [33]

Every action includes a complex set of objective facts, social norms, and personal experiences. Depending upon the situation some of these conditions will emerge from and some will fade into the lifeworld. These actions/events are unified into a life history through narratives, through communicative action.34 [34]

Habermas identifies three dimensions of communicative rationality, not surprisingly they correspond to the three domains/viewpoints within the lifeworld. They are: first, the knowing subject and its relation to the world of events; second, the acting practical subject in its relation to a social world; third, the suffering passionate subject in its relation to its own and others subjectivity.35 [35] It is through these communicatively structured relations that cultural reproduction, the coordination of social interaction, and socialization take place.36 [36]

From the viewpoint internal to the lifeworld "society is represented as a network of communicatively mediated cooperation . . . . The lifeworld that members construct from common

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33 [33] Habermas, *TCA* , 2:119-140.

34 [34] Habermas, *TCA* , 2:143-145.

35 [35] Habermas, *A&S,* pp. 108-109.

36 [36] Habermas, *TCA* , 2:143-145.

cultural traditions is coextensive with society."37 [37] But such a viewpoint is a mistake. It is a mistake not in that it is false, but because it is only partial.38 [38] If society is equated with lifeworld, then the source of social pathologies and crises remain enigmatic, and in response to social pathologies we receive such edifying discourses as bourgeois psycho-babble and eco-babble. Furthermore, such an equation requires the acceptance of "three fictions": i) that culture and ordinary language is transparent, ii) that communicative action is characterized by reciprocity and the participants "have to assume that they could, in principle, arrive at an understanding about anything and everything,"39 [39] and iii) that individuals are fully conscious of their motives.

According to Habermas these fictions are an account of,

> "the way things look to the members of the sociocultural lifeworld themselves. In fact, however, their goal directed actions are coordinated not only through processes of reaching understanding, but also through functional interconnections that are not intended by them, and are usually not even perceived within the horizon of everyday practice."40 [40]

Habermas is claiming that there are forces external to the lifeworld that are the sources of distortion in the communicative action of the lifeworld, sources of social pathologies. These social pathologies include such symptoms of modern life as ano**?**mie, alienation, neurosis, and the loss of meaning, security and identity provided by being firmly situated in a culture. The rationalization process that characterizes modernity becomes pathological because of the one-sided selective

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37 [37] Habermas, *TCA* , 2:148-149.

38 [38] See my discussions of Hegel, Lukacs and the dialectic in *Refiguring Critical Theory*:2002.

39 [39] Habermas, *TCA* , 2:150.

40 [40] Habermas, *TCA* , 2:150.

institutionalization of rationality that stems from advanced capitalism. This process Habermas calls the "colonization of the lifeworld."

c. **On the Origin and Justification of our Ideas about the Transcendent**

Both Habermas and Voegelin agree that our ideas about transcendence originate in religious experience and our attempts to make sense of it. Religious experience is here understood as broadly as William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and includes also the experience of trembling before inexplicable evil, and for Habermas felt solidarity with the suffering of others, past, present and future. Voegelin goes further to argue that faith, hope, love, and so forth not only originate in a correct understanding of our relationship to transcendence, but that these values can only be grounded and justified by reference to such symbolic orders.

Here we find an important area of disagreement between Voegelin and Habermas. For Habermas, these values might originate in religion, and it might remain one of the best ways of responding to certain human concerns (hope/faith/love), but they no longer require religion for justification. One significant advance of Modernity has been this separation between origin and justification.

Habermas argues that the relation of philosophy to religion is best understood as a translation exercise. "It seeks to re-express what it learns from religion in a discourse that is independent of revealed truth."41 [41] He argues that "indispensable potentials for meaning are preserved in religious language,"42 [42] potentials that philosophy has only begun, haltingly, to translate in the language of public rationality. It is precisely because we live in a culturally and religiously plural world, and because after both the Axial age and Modernity we cannot responsibly live in unreflexive relations to ourselves and others that philosophy must undertake this translation program. He further explains:

> The ambition of Philosophy's "translation program" is, if you like, to rescue the profane significance of interpersonal and existential experiences that have thus far only been adequately address in religious language. In contemporary terms, I would think of

41 [41] Habermas, "A Conversation About God and the World." P. 164.

42 [42] Habermas, "A Conversation About God and the World." P. 162.

responses to extreme situations of helplessness, loss of self, or the threat of annihilation, which "leave us speechless."43 [43]

4. **On The Grounds for Hope and Some Questions**
    a. **Grounds for Hope**

In the aftermath of the great human suffering of the 20th Century, we move now through times that lead many to wonder if we have learned anything about hubris, about listening, about love. One of the great claims of modernity was to universalism, and as articulated by Kant, the possibility of perpetual peace. What today are the possible grounds for hope? I suggest the grounds for hope are located in the grounds for critique. Thus, for Voegelin, it is the universal nature of the experience of transcendence that opens room for hope. For Habermas it is modernity itself. He explains:

> [I]n the end, egalitarianism and universalism provide us with the only convincing criteria for criticizing the miserable state of our economically fragmented, stratified, and un-pacified global society."the modern condition," is without any clearly recognizable alternative."44 [44]

In a recent essay one of Habermas' interlocutors, Martin Beck Matu[illegible]t[illegible]k, a signatory of Charta 77 during the bad old days of the Eastern Block wrote:

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43 [43] Habermas, "A Conversation About God and the World." P. 164.

44 [44] Habermas, "A Conversation About God and the World." pp. 152-153.

His own remarkable journey through the twentieth century bears witness to the fact that things did get better in postwar Europe Habermas's theory of communicative action expresses this fact by locating the resources for learning on this side of the world--in human linguistic competencies--that is, in our ability and willingness to rise up from the

> ashes of our dastardly deeds and rebuild the fragments of fragile social bonds. As long as we do not go entirely mad or cease to communicate with one another as humans about something in the world, what other options do we have (thus he would question his skeptics as often as they question him, and so he would also confront his own unbelief), than take recourse in hope lodged in our very speech, communicative action, and want of mutual recognition?" 45 [45]

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45 [45] Martin Beck Matuøtøk, "Singular Existence and Critical Theory," *Radical Philosophy Rev*iew volume 8, number 2 (2005) 222-223