

cognitive faculty and a moral virtue.” For this reason, Rorty keeps them distinct. “The epistemological notion of rationality concerns our relation to something nonhuman, whereas the moral notion concerns our relations to our fellow human beings” (Rorty 1996, 74). In a way similar to recent arguments in Putnam, Habermas now more strongly distinguishes between claims to truth and the context of justification in which they are made, even as he also wants to reject moral realism.

The problem for the practical conception of critical social inquiry is then to escape the horns of a dilemma: it should be neither purely epistemic and thus overly cognitivist, nor purely moralistic. Neither provides sufficient critical purchase. In the case of the observer, there is too much distance, so much so that it is hard to see how the theory can motivate criticism; in the case of the pure participant perspective, there is too little distance to motivate or justify any criticism at all. It is also the same general theoretical and methodological dilemma that characterizes the debates between naturalist and anti-naturalist approaches. While the former sees terms such as rationality as explanans to explain away such phenomena as norms, the latter argues that normative terms are not so reducible and thus figure in both explanans and explanandum. The best practical account here reconciles Rorty's ambiguity by putting the epistemological component in the social world, in our various cognitive perspectives towards it that include the normative perspectives of others. The ambiguity is then the practical problem of adopting different points of view, something that reflective participants in self-critical practices must already be able to do by virtue of their competence.

Social Inquiry as Practical Knowledge

This shift to “perspective taking” is already implicit in the reflexivity of practical forms of Critical Theory. Rather than look for the universal and necessary features of social scientific knowledge, Critical Theory has instead focused on the social relationships between inquirers and other actors in the social sciences. Such relationships can be specified epistemically in terms of the perspective taken by the inquirer on the actors who figure in their explanations or interpretations. Seen in this way, the two dominant and opposed approaches to social science adopt quite different perspectives. On the one hand, naturalism gives priority to the third-person or explanatory perspective; on the other hand, the anti-reductionism of interpretive social science argues for the priority of first- and second-person understanding and so for an essential methodological dualism. Critical Theory since Horkheimer has long attempted to offer an alternative to both views.

Habermas and other Critical Theorists rightly call “technocratic” any social inquiry that only develops optimal problem-solving strategies in light of purely third-person knowledge of the impersonal consequences of all available courses of action. Pragmatists from Mead to Dewey offer similar criticisms (Habermas 1971, 1973; Dewey 1927b). This conception of practical knowledge would model the role of the social scientist in politics on the engineer, who masterfully chooses the optimal solution to a problem of design. For the social scientist *qua* an ideally rational and informed actor, “the range of permissible solutions is clearly delimited, the relevant probabilities and utilities precisely specified, and even the criteria of rationality to be employed (e.g., maximization of expected utilities) is clearly stated” (Hempel 1965, 481). This technocratic model of the social scientist as detached observer (rather than reflective participant) always needs to be contextualized in the social relationships it constitutes as a form of socially distributed practical knowledge.

By contrast with the engineering model, interpretive social science takes up the first-person perspective in making explicit the meaningfulness of an action or expression. Interpretations as practical knowledge are not based on some general theory (no matter how helpful or explanatory these may be when interpretation is difficult), but reconstruct agent's own reasons, or at least how these reasons might seem to be good ones from a first-person perspective. This leaves an interpreter in a peculiar epistemic predicament: what started as the enterprise of seeing things from others' points of view can at best provide the best

interpretation *for us* of how things are *for them*. As a matter of interpretive responsibility, there is no getting around the fact that ethnography or history is our attempt “to see another form of life in the categories of our own” (Geertz 1971, 16–17; Bohman 1991, 132). The only way out of this problem is to see that there is more than one form of practical knowledge.

Naturalistic and hermeneutic approaches see the relationship of the subject and object of inquiry as forcing the social scientist to take either the third-person or first-person perspective. However, critical social science necessarily requires complex perspective taking and the coordination of various points of view, minimally that of social scientists with the subjects under study. The “second-person perspective” differs from both third-person observer and the first-person participant perspectives in its specific form of practical knowledge. It employs the know-how of a participant in dialogue or communication (Bohman 2000). This perspective provides the alternative to opposing perspectives especially when our first-person knowledge or third-person theories get it wrong. When faced with interpreting others' behavior we quickly run into the limits of first-person knowledge *simpliciter*. Third-person accounts face the same “gerrymandering problem” as made clear in the private language argument (Brandom 1994, 28ff). Neither the interpreter's nor the observer's perspectives are sufficient to specify these opaque intentional contexts for others. For social scientists as well as participants in practices more generally, the adjudication of such conflicts requires mutual perspective taking, which is its own mode of practical reasoning.

Theories of many different sorts locate interpretation as a practice, that is, in acts and processes of ongoing communication. Communication is seen from this perspective as the exercise of a distinctive form of practical rationality. A critical theory of communicative action offers its own distinctive definition of rationality, one that is epistemic, practical, and intersubjective. For Habermas, for example, rationality consists not so much in the possession of particular knowledge, but rather in “how speaking and acting subjects acquire and use knowledge” (Habermas 1984, 11). Any such account is “pragmatic” because it shares a number of distinctive features with other views that see interpreters as competent and knowledgeable agents. Most importantly, a pragmatic approach develops an account of practical knowledge in the “performative attitude,” that is, from the point of view of a competent speaker. A theory of rationality can be a reconstruction of the practical knowledge necessary for establishing social relationships. This reconstruction is essential to understanding the commitments of the reflective participant, including the critic.

There are two general arguments for a theory that assumes the irreducibility of such a perspective. The first is that interpreting is not merely describing something. Rather, it establishes commitments and entitlements between the interpreter and the one interpreted. Second, in doing so the interpreter takes up particular *normative* attitudes. These “normative attitudes” must be those of the interpreted. In interpreting one is not just reporting, but rather expressing and establishing one's attitude toward a claim, such as when the interpreter takes the interpreted to say something to be true, or to perform an act that is appropriate according to social norms. Some such attitudes are essentially two-person attitudes: the interpreter does not just express an attitude in the first-person perspective alone, but rather incurs a commitment or obligation to others by interpreting what others are doing (Brandom 1994, 79). To offer an interpretation that is accepted is to make explicit the operative social norms and thus to establish the normative terms of a social relationship.

The critical attitude shares with the interpretive stance a structure derived from the second-person perspective. Here an agent's beliefs, attitudes, and practices cannot only be interpreted as meaningful or not, but must also be assessed as correct, incorrect, or inconclusive. Nonetheless, the second-person perspective is not yet sufficient for criticism. In order for an act of criticism itself to be assessed as correct or incorrect, it must often resort to tests from the first- and third-person perspectives as well. The reflective participant must take up all stances; she assumes no single normative attitude as proper for all critical inquiry. Only such an “interspectival” stance is fully dialogical, giving the inquirer and agent

equal standing. If indeed all cooperative social activities “involve a moment of inquiry” (Putnam 1994, 174), then they also need a moment of self-reflection on the assumptions of such inquiry itself. It is this type of reflection that calls for a distinctively practical form of critical perspective taking. If critical social inquiry is inquiry into the basis of cooperative practices as such, it takes practical inquiry one reflective step further. The inquirer does not carry out this step alone, but rather with the public whom the inquirer addresses. As in Kuhn's distinction between normal and revolutionary science, second-order critical reflection considers whether or not the framework for cooperation itself needs to be changed, thus whether new terms of cooperation are necessary to solve problems.

Various perspectives for inquiry are appropriate in different critical situations. If it is to identify all the problems with cooperative practices of inquiry, it must be able to occupy and account for a variety of perspectives. Only then will it enable public reflection among free and equal participants. Such problems have emerged for example in the practices of inquiry surrounding the treatment of AIDS. The continued spread of the epidemic and lack of effective treatments brought about a crisis in expert authority, an “existential problematic situation” in Dewey's sense (Dewey 1938, 492). By defining expert activity through its social consequences and by making explicit the terms of social cooperation between researchers and patients, lay participants reshape the practices of gaining medical knowledge and authority (Epstein 1996, Part II). The affected public changed the normative terms of cooperation and inquiry in this area in order that institutions could engage in acceptable first-order problem solving. If expertise is to be brought under democratic control, reflective inquiry into scientific practices and their operative norms is necessary (Bohman 1999a). This public challenge to the norms on which expert authority is based may be generalized to all forms of research in cooperative activity. It suggests the transformation of some of the epistemological problems of the social sciences into the practical question of how to make their forms of inquiry and research open to public testing and public accountability. This demand also means that some sort of “practical verification” of critical social inquiry is necessary.

3.3 Pluralism and Critical Inquiry

A practical approach to Critical Theory responds to pluralism in the social sciences in two ways, once again embracing and reconciling both sides of the traditional opposition between epistemic (explanatory) and non-epistemic (interpretive) approaches to normative claims. On the one hand, it affirms the need for general theories, while weakening the strong epistemic claims made for them in underwriting criticism. On the other hand, it situates the critical inquirer in the pragmatic situation of communication, seeing the critic as making a strong claim for the truth or rightness of his critical analysis. This is a presupposition of the critic's discourse, without which it would make no sense to engage in criticism of others.

A good test case for the practical and pluralist conception of Critical Theory based on perspective taking would be to give a more precise account of the role of general theories and social scientific methods in social criticism, including moral theories or theories of norms. Rather than serving a justifying role in criticisms for their transperspectival comprehensiveness, theories are better seen as interpretations that are validated by the extent to which they open up new possibilities of action that are themselves to be verified in democratic inquiry. Not only that, but every such theory is itself formulated from within a particular perspective. General theories are then best seen as practical proposals whose critical purchase is not moral and epistemic independence but practical and public testing according to criteria of interpretive adequacy. This means that it is not the theoretical or interpretive framework that is decisive, but the practical ability in employing such frameworks to cross various perspectives in acts of social criticism. In the above example, it is accomplished in taking the patients' perspectives seriously in altering practices of medical inquiry into AIDS.

Why is this practical dimension decisive for democratizing scientific authority? There seems to be an indefinite number of perspectives from which to formulate possible general histories of the present.