

CONTEMPORARY MARXIST THEORY

Week 4. Habermas' Reconstruction of Historical Materialism

1. How does Habermas distinguish contemporary capitalism from the stage of "liberal capitalism" analyzed by Marx? According to Habermas, what implications does this transformation of capitalism have for Marxist theory? What specifically does Habermas mean when he says that the introduction of elements of the superstructure into the base itself has transformed the classical relationship between politics and the economy? Critically evaluate Habermas's arguments regarding the need to revise or update Marxist theory.

2. What forces, according to Habermas, have undermined the traditional forms of the legitimation of power in class society? What does Habermas mean by his claim that science and technology have become new sources of legitimation in contemporary capitalism? What are the implications of Habermas's analysis for social science as a source of legitimation? How applicable to contemporary American society is Habermas's thesis that technocratic ideologies have displaced conservative cultural traditions as the main source of legitimation?

3. Clarify Habermas' views on the crisis tendencies in late capitalist society (Held, 284-295). What does Habermas mean by each of the following: economic crisis, rationality crisis, legitimation crisis, and motivation crisis? What does he see as the likelihood of each? What implications does his theory of crisis have for political practice (as compared with classical Marxist theory)?

4. Summarize Habermas' theory of cognitive interests as presented in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Held, 296-325). What criticisms does Habermas make of positivism and hermeneutics? How does he attempt to establish a cognitive interest in human emancipation? Are you persuaded by his arguments on this point?