City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Susen, S. (2011). Kritische Gesellschaftstheorie or kritische Gesellschaftspraxis? Robin Celikates, Kritik als soziale Praxis. Gesellschaftliche Selbstverständigung und kritische Theorie (Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 2009). Archives Européennes de Sociologie / European Journal of Sociology, 52(3), pp. 447-463. doi: 10.1017/S0003975611000488

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/18831/

Link to published version: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975611000488

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to City Research Online policy.

City Research Online: http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/ publications@citystgeorges.ac.uk

Kritische Gesellschaftstheorie or *kritische Gesellschaftspraxis*?

Robin Celikates, *Kritik als soziale Praxis. Gesellschaftliche Selbstverständigung und kritische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 2009)

Simon Susen

Robin Celikates's recent book, entitled *Kritik als soziale Praxis. Gesellschaftliche Selbstverständigung und kritische Theorie* (*Criticism as Social Practice: Social Self-Understanding and Critical Theory*), published by Campus Verlag in 2009, is undoubtedly one of the most significant contributions made to the field of critical theory over the past few years. If there is one major problem with this volume, it is the fact that it has still not been translated into, let alone published in, English. Given the conceptual precision, methodological rigour, intellectual originality, and thought-provoking argument of this study, one can only hope the volume will soon be available in English, so that its timely relevance and scholarly quality can be appreciated by a wider international readership in general and by Anglophone researchers working in the humanities and social sciences in particular. It is not often that one reads a book from cover to cover and has the pleasant experience of noticing that every single paragraph, and indeed every single sentence, is carefully crafted, meticulously organized, and thoroughly researched. One must congratulate the author for putting together a long-needed treasure of a book which makes a convincing case for the view that the very possibility of critical theory depends on its capacity to ground itself in the normative potentials and everyday disputes of society, rather than in the abstract concepts and sterile epistemic frameworks of armchair philosophy. In order to illustrate the complexity of Celikates's ambitious endeavour, this review article shall provide a succinct overview of the main arguments and contributions, as well as of several noteworthy shortcomings and limitations, of *Kritik als soziale Praxis*.

Argument and structure

The book is divided into three main parts. As Axel Honneth, who supervised the PhD thesis upon which this volume is based, eloquently

remarks in the Foreword, the line of reasoning underlying the study follows a ''dialectical scheme of argumentation'' (p. 10): thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. *Part I*, the ''thesis'', focuses on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who is eager to insist that, if we accept that there is an ineluctable epistemological gap between the objectifying gaze of reflexive researchers and the short-sighted perspective of ordinary actors, we have every reason to assume that the critical capacity to uncover the underlying mechanisms that govern the development of human reality remains a privilege of those engaged in scientific activity. In addition to examining the contributions of ethnomethodology to the sociological analysis of human reflexivity, *Part II*, the ''antithesis'', centres on the work of Luc Boltanski, who, along with Loïc Wacquant, is now widely regarded as one of Bourdieu's most distinguished disciples. According to Boltanski's ''methodological egalitarianism'' (p. 12), critical capacity constitutes a vital human competence. In fact, ordinary forms of interaction and discursive modes of reflection do not exclude but complement one another in everyday life. In *Part III*, the ''synthesis'', Celikates reflects on the possibility of transcending the counterproductive antinomy between Bourdieu's ''critical sociology'' and Boltanski's ''sociology of critique'' by overcoming the main flaws of these two approaches, whilst drawing on the compelling insights that can be gained from each of them. Essentially, Celikates seeks to demonstrate that a genuinely emancipatory critical theory not only needs to make use of the conceptual and methodological tools designed by social scientists ''from above'', but also has to study, and attribute substantial importance to, the reflexive and discursive processes generated by ordinary actors ''from below''. In short, we need to take both social scientists *and* ordinary actors seriously, if we aim to shed light on the pivotal role that criticism plays both in the systematic objectification and in the day-to-day functioning of society.

In a skilfully argued and intellectually challenging Introduction, Celikates sets the scene by making a strong case for the view that criticism can be conceived of as a constitutive *social practice*, that is, as an activity that is crucial not only to undertaking scientific research but also to shaping the normative parameters underlying the material and symbolic arrangements put in place to organize people's actions and reflections in a given society. When trying to make sense of the relationship between scientific and ordinary knowledge, we are, as the author points out, confronted with three epistemological options. (1) There is ''the orthodox conception of *critical social science*'' (p. 25), according to which we need to face up to the profound ''epistemic

asymmetry'' (p. 25, italics added) between reflexive scientists and ordinary actors. Following this model, the primary task of social science consists in the ''*explanation* of social phenomena'' (p. 26), that is, in uncovering the underlying mechanisms that largely determine the constitution and evolution of the social world. (2) The epistemological model epitomized in ''*ethnomethodology* and *the sociology of critique*'' (p. 26), as well as in the ''pragmatic turn'' (p. 26), suggests that, contrary to the orthodox conception of social science, we need to recognize ''the fundamental *symmetry* between 'laypeople' and 'experts''' (p. 26). From this perspective, the primary task of social science lies in the ''*description* and *interpretation* of social phenomena'' (p. 26) on the basis of the careful examination of the material and symbolic practices carried out by ordinary actors, who need to be taken seriously as reflexive subjects capable of shaping, and attributing meaning to, their existence. (3) According to Celikates's own approach, which he characterizes as ''*criticism as social practice*'' (p. 26), it is essential to acknowledge that, whilst ordinary actors are endowed with ''capacities of articulation and reflection'' (p. 26), it must remain the task of critical researchers to engage in the ''*analysis* and *critique* of the social conditions that obstruct the development of reflexive capacities and of their realization in corresponding practices'' (p. 26). In short, Celikates's project is based on the assumption that valuable insights can be gained from cross-fertilizing the critical practices of ordinary actors and the reflexive tools of social scientists.

Before embarking upon the laborious task of analysing the pre-suppositional foundations of each of the above models, Celikates provides the reader with a useful overview of four central ''dogmas'' (p. 27), upon which, he claims, ''the classical model of ideology critique'' (p. 27) is based. (i) According to the dogma of ''*scientism* and *objectivism*'' (p. 27), the ''objective'' (p. 27) nature of the ''scientific method'' (p. 27) and of the knowledge gained from it is indicative of the ''non-normative'' (p. 27) character of critical social research. (ii) According to the dogma of ''*totality*'' (p. 27), social reality, which is composed of both practices and institutions, constitutes a ''homogenous totality'' (p. 27). (iii) According to the dogma of ''*functionalism*'' (p. 27), society can be conceived of as an ensemble of ''factually enclosed and seamlessly integrated systems'' (p. 27), whose causal functioning cannot properly be grasped by those whose everyday practices allow for the very possibility of the emergence of a relationally constructed reality. (iv) According to the dogma of ''*asymmetry* and *rupture*'' (p. 27), ''the critical impetus of scientifically founded theory'' (p. 27) obliges reflexive researchers to undertake an epistemological break with ''the perspective of

'ordinary' actors and common sense'' (p. 27), implying that there is an epistemic gap between the ''internal perspective'' (p. 27) of the social participant and the ''external perspective'' (p. 27) of the scientific observer.

Challenging the validity of these four assumptions, Celikates raises the following objections: (i) Contrary to the dogma of scientism and objectivism, we need to account for the profoundly ''*normative* structure'' (p. 28, italics added) not only of human practices in everyday life but also of empirical and theoretical studies in social research. (ii) Contrary to the dogma of totality, we need to confront the sociological challenge of exploring the intrinsic ''*plurality* and *heterogeneity*'' (p. 28, italics added) of polycentric societies, in which most actors are exposed to high degrees of interactional complexity. Contrary to the dogma of macro-systemic functionalism, we need to embrace ''an attenuated, *local* functionalism'' (p. 28 italics added), which, rather than seeking to present the ''big picture'' of the macrostructural processes that allow for the reproduction of social order, focuses on examining ''the stabilization of *particular* institutions, practices, and interpretive schemes'' (p. 28). (iv) Contrary to the dogma of asymmetry and rupture, we need to concede that *critical capacity* is not a socio-professional privilege of reflexive researchers but a socio-ontological competence of ordinary actors. In brief, Celikates invites us to reflect upon the ways in which everyday experiences of actors situated in polycentric societies are shaped by the preponderance of normativity, complexity, locality, and discursivity. With these considerations in mind, the remainder of the book is dedicated to demonstrating that important insights can be gained from initiating a fruitful dialogue between Bourdieu's genetic structuralism (''thesis'') and Boltanski's sociological pragmatism (''antithesis''), leading Celikates to propose an alternative model based on the reflexive exercise of ''reconstructive critique'' (''synthesis'').

Bourdieu's model of rupture: ''I can see something you cannot see'', or: ''I spy with my little eye''

To cut a long story short, Bourdieu's critical sociology is unambiguously Durkheimian in assuming that ''[human] actors are involved in practice in a way that makes reflexive and critical perspective-taking impossible and forces them to establish a structurally pre-reflexive and naïve relation to the conditions underlying their actions'' (p. 39). Considering Auguste Comte's belief in the enlightening scientificity of

sociological knowledge, Durkheim's insistence upon the sociologist's duty to be categorically distrustful of the illusory preconceptions of common sense, and Marx's dictum that there would be no point in producing scientific knowledge if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided, we may follow Celikates in facing up to the fact that ''the dogma of rupture is as old as sociology itself'' (p. 40).

If there is one thing that Bourdieu adds to the normative centrality of the notion of rupture in critical social research, it is the idea that reflexive sociologists should aim to undertake a ''double'', rather than a ''single'', epistemological break (p. 56) by overcoming the pitfalls of *both* the doxic preconceptions derived from common sense *and* the scholastic fallacies in which intellectualist thinkers remain trapped when treating the ''things of logic'' as the ''logic of things''. In other words, reflexive scientists need to free themselves from *both* the preconceptions of those who are ''too involved'' in social life to grasp the underlying mechanisms by which their lives are determined *and* the theoreticist frameworks of those who are ''too removed'' from social life to realize that their intellectualist thought experiments are largely detached from the constraints of everyday life and lack empirical substantiation.

As pointed out by Celikates, ''Bourdieu's conception of critical social science is based on two steps'' (p. 72): first, the *action-theoretic* assumption that there is an inherent ''nexus between structure, habitus, and practice'' (p. 72), that is, a homological correspondence between the relationally defined positions that actors occupy in social fields and the naturalized dispositions that they develop by virtue of their habitus (p. 73); and, second, the ''*methodological* plea for a radical rupture with the perspective of actors' self-understanding'' (p. 72), that is, with their inability to grasp the complexities of social reality, because, as ordinary people, they remain caught up in ideologically powerful misconceptions and relatively arbitrary misrepresentations. Hence, borrowing an expression from the French philosopher Paul Ricœur, Bourdieu's critical sociology is founded on the idea of a ''hermeneutics of suspicion'' (p. 73). Why, then, does Celikates think that we need to be critical of Bourdieu's plea for a ''hermeneutics of suspicion''? The author elaborates on four serious objections that can be raised against Bourdieu's model of the epistemological break.

(1) Celikates raises the *normative* objection that, contrary to Bourdieu's *objectivist* position, we cannot ignore the fact that in sociology ''the *object* of scientific study is at the same time

a *subject*'' (p. 76, italics added): given that the human world is a cultural realm of interpretive entities, who attach meaning to their natural and social environment, we need to account for the normativity that permeates all value-laden aspects of human reality. If we draw an ontological distinction between the natural and the social world, since they constitute two fundamentally different forms of being composed of qualitatively distinct entities, we also have to draw a methodological distinction between the natural and the social sciences, for the epistemic tools and research strategies of the former are insufficient to grasp the specificity of human life, which cannot be disregarded by the latter.

(2) Celikates raises the *politico-strategic* objection that, behind Bourdieu's orthodox conception of social science, which is arguably based on a ''phenomenology of an avant-garde consciousness'' (p. 78), lurks the danger of embracing a position of ''epistemic and ethical authoritarianism'' (p. 78). Such a paternalist view *overestimates* the cognitive capacities and moral integrity of critical researchers and *underestimates* the critical and reflexive competences of ordinary actors, thereby reducing social emancipation to an exogenously monitored project imposed upon largely heteronomous subjects. As a consequence, a tension arises between ''a *positivist* perspective, according to which the social world is governed by rigid laws'' (p. 79, italics added), whose determinacy can be uncovered only by scientific modes of reflexivity, and ''a *critical* perspective, which presupposes both the malleability of social relations and actors' performative capacity'' (p. 79, italics added), without which it would be pointless to believe in the possibility of bringing about emancipatory forms of sociality.

(3) Celikates raises the *methodological* objection that Bourdieu fails to take the implications of ''*interpretive* and *pragmatic* (and, thus, post-empiricist)'' (p. 81, italics added) approaches in the social sciences seriously: if, as mentioned above, the *object* of social-scientific study constitutes a *subject* capable of producing both individually uttered and collectively mediated forms of meaning, then the particularity of the social world needs to be reflected in ''the idiosyncrasy of the social sciences on the ontological, methodological, and epistemological level'' (p. 81), that is, in terms of what the social world *is*, how it can be *studied*, and how and to what extent it can be *understood* both

by its participants and by its observers. This task is expressed in the proposal of a ''double hermeneutics'' (p. 81), which aims to do justice to the fact that the symbolic constitution of the social world can be adequately grasped only insofar as we explore people's everyday forms of understanding, through which they attribute meaning to their existence.

(4) Celikates raises the *empirical* objection that ''the central theses of the orthodox model of critical social science'' (p. 89), as defended by Bourdieu, remain trapped in the monolithic logic of the ''dominant ideology thesis'' (p. 90)[1]. According to this logic, hegemonic sets of ideas are macro-structurally constituted forms of ''social cement'' (p. 89), whose main function consists in guaranteeing both the reproduction of social order and the legitimation of social domination. Such a functionalist view, however, tends to underestimate the extent to which most people living in complex societies are not only allowed but are in fact expected to take on a multiplicity of roles, and therefore develop a plurality of perspectives when dealing with the various praxeological imperatives thrown at them in different interactional contexts. Confronted with ''unstable behavioural expectations and increasing risks of dissension'' (p. 92), arising from their potential exposure to and bodily immersion in gradually more differentiated realms of social interaction, ''plural actors'' (p. 90) are profoundly challenged by the socio-ontological dialectics between ''engagement and distanciation'' (p. 92), role-playing and perspective-taking, intuitive participation and discursive reflection. Given the potential complexity underlying structurally differentiated realities, actors need to mobilize the normative resources inherent in their critical capacity and rise to the task of surviving in the normative jungle of polycentric – or, as one may argue, centreless – societies.

Boltanski's model of symmetry: « Suivre les acteurs »

How can we take the aforementioned objections seriously? Celikates proposes to search for a response in the writings of one of Bourdieu's most influential disciples: Luc Boltanski. In the recent sociological literature, particularly in France and Germany, Boltanski's oeuvre has

[1] On Celikates's critique of the orthodox Marxist definition of ideology as ''necessarily false consciousness'', see pp. 220-221.

been widely recognized as a major contribution to contemporary social science. This contribution is based on the creation of a new paradigm: the research programme commonly known as the ''sociology of critique'' or, as Boltanski has described it in his most recent writings, the ''pragmatic sociology of critique''. What is striking, however, is that in the literature there is a profound gap, and little in the way of constructive dialogue, between Bourdieu's ''critical sociology'' and Boltanski's ''sociology of critique''. It is one of the major achievements of Celikates's book to have contributed to initiating a fruitful dialogue between these two accounts. This is not to suggest that Celikates ignores the substantial presuppositional differences between the two approaches; rather, this is to acknowledge that the author, whilst recognizing the profound epistemic and normative gap between Bourdieusian and Boltanskian thought, is willing to take on the challenging task of cross-fertilizing some of their most significant insights. Yet, before doing so, we need to follow Celikates in posing the obvious question of what can be learned from Boltanski's pragmatic sociology of critique.

As meticulously illustrated by Celikates, the ''methodological paradigm shift'' (p. 139) from Bourdieu's ''critical sociology'' to Boltanski's ''sociology of critique'' is, first and foremost, motivated by the following insight: we have to take ordinary people seriously in order to account for the fact that critical capacity is an indispensable normative resource by which human actors shape the development of society. In other words, rather than establishing an epistemological hierarchy between reflexive and enlightened scientists, on the one hand, and naïve and misguided actors, on the other, we need to acknowledge the fact that the analytical resources of objectifying researchers derive from the reflexive capacities of ordinary people. Hence, if critical theory is to be given any kind of normative foundation, it needs to be located in people's discursive ability to engage in disputes and justify their actions. One may even go as far as Bruno Latour by suggesting that ''it is essential to restore actors' capacity to *formulate their own theories* about the constitution of the social'' (p. 139, italics added; quoting Latour). Inspired by this perspective, Celikates justifiably draws an analogy between Boltanski's pragmatic sociology and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, for both approaches follow the methodological maxim that we need to ''*suivre les acteurs*'' (p. 139)[2] (literally, ''follow the actors''): only if we take ''their actions, interpretations, and judgements'' (p.139) seriously, can we shed light on the multifaceted ways in which the development of

[2] On Celikates's detailed analysis of ethnomethodology, see esp. pp. 104-116.

society is contingent upon people's practical ability to mobilize the discursive potentials built into their reflexive capacity.

It is another noteworthy achievement of this book that Celikates, referring to the work of Michael Lynch, provides a fine-grained definition of the term *reflexivity*. This term is often loosely used or effectively misused by social scientists, and too frequently is its meaning taken for granted. Celikates, by contrast, offers an instructive definitional typology that permits us to identify seven influential meanings of this term (pp. 116-122): (1) *basal or mechanical reflexivity*, which can be found in technological devices; (2) *self-reflexivity*, which represents a constitutive feature of self-conscious beings; (3) substantial forms of *societal reflexivity*, which is based on the self-regulation of social systems; (4) *reflexivity as a methodical category*, which is expressed in cognitive processes of self-critical contemplation; (5) *methodological or meta-theoretical reflexivity*, which manifests itself in social-scientific ways of problematizing taken-for-granted ideas and practices; (6) *interpretive reflexivity*, which is epitomized in the concept of ''double hermeneutics'', aimed at the ''interpretation of interpretation''; and (7) *ethnomethodological reflexivity*, which is derived from critical capacity, conceived of as a socio-ontological competence of ordinary actors. It should come as no surprise that, as elucidated by Celikates, it is the seventh category of this typology which is particularly important to Boltanski's insistence upon the sociological centrality of ordinary processes of action and justification.

In fact, it is one of the central premises of Boltanski's pragmatic approach to consider ''the experiences made and self-interpretations accomplished by 'ordinary' actors as the point of departure'' (p. 138) of sociological analysis. In this sense, it presupposes that ''the mutual recognition of their reflexive and critical capacities is a constitutive element of actors' everyday practices and self-understanding'' (p. 138). From this perspective, ordinary people can be regarded as ''justificatory entities'' (*Rechtfertigungswesen*), that is, as potentially critical subjects capable not only of justifying their everyday practices but also of reflexively distancing themselves from themselves and their actions. One of the main contributions of Boltanski's sociology is to have provided abundant empirical data combined with useful conceptual tools to illustrate that different ''regimes of action'' require different ''regimes of justification'' (pp. 140-149) with varying degrees of critical reflection.

Bringing conceptual sharpness, explanatory precision, and considerable eloquence to bear, Celikates draws attention to the fact that Boltanski's pragmatist approach to different regimes of justification,

understood as disputed ‘‘realm[s] of reasons’’ (p. 146), is based on four principles: symmetry, pluralism, capacity, and grammars of agreement (pp. 148-149). According to the principle of *symmetry*, we need to reject ‘‘the strict separation and hierarchization of scientific and un- or non-scientific forms of action and cognition’’ (p. 148), thereby refusing to accept the positivist parameters underlying Bourdieu’s model of epistemological rupture. According to the principle of *pluralism*, we need to account for the fact that multiple regimes of action are sustained by diversified regimes of justification, thereby reminding us of the fact that most actors in complex societies find themselves, often simultaneously, immersed in a ‘‘plurality of ‘worlds’’’ (p. 148). According to the principle of reflexive *capacities*, we need to acknowledge that ordinary people are equipped with an intuitive ‘‘know-how’’ (p. 148), which enables them to commute back and forth ‘‘between the different ‘worlds’’’ (p. 148), thereby recognizing their practical ability ‘‘to combine universals (principles, rules, etc.) with particulars (concrete situations, persons, etc.)’’ (p. 148) and ‘‘to distance themselves from particular contexts of action’’ (p. 148). According to the principle of the *grammars of agreement*, we need to examine the ‘‘rules that actors have to follow in order to coordinate their actions and judgements’’ (p. 148), thereby demonstrating that ‘‘particular patterns of justification and narration’’ (p. 148) emanate from context-specific grammars of action and coordination.

Perhaps the most significant insight to be gained from the sociological study of these principles is that – regardless of whether we consider ‘‘reformist’’ or ‘‘radical’’, ‘‘immanent’’ or ‘‘transcendent’’, ‘‘corrective’’ or ‘‘transformative’’ forms of critique (pp. 149-151) – ‘‘[t]he quotidian practices of criticism and justification show a structural affinity with the procedures of critical social theory’’ (p. 152). Put bluntly, the *épreuve* (p. 149) is in the pudding: every ‘‘principle of justification’’ (p. 149) needs to pass the test of being defensible as a *grandeur* (p. 149) which connects the performances of different *acteurs*. Yet, how does Celikates justify the *grandeur* of his own project?

Celikates’s model of critical theory: the power of reconstructive critique

In the third and final part of the book, Celikates develops an outline for an alternative model of critical theory, which is based on the reflexive exercise of ‘‘reconstructive critique’’ (see esp. pp. 159-160 and 187-247). With the aim of illustrating both the complexity and the

viability of such an alternative proposal, the author deals with a number of controversial issues such as the following: the relationship between ''internal'' and ''external'' critique; the sociological significance of so-called ''second order pathologies''; the explanatory and normative functions of critical theory; the distinction between ''social critique'', ''meta-critique'', and ''reconstructive critique''; the challenges posed by psychoanalysis, social theories of knowledge, and system justification theories; and, most importantly, the emancipatory potentials of ''reconstructive critique''. The question remains, however, what Celikates has in mind when making a case for an alternative model of critical theory based on the reflexive exercise of ''reconstructive critique''.

To be clear from the outset, the starting point of Celikates's alternative project is a negative one, namely the categorical rejection of ''the false alternative of internal and external critique'' (p. 187)[3]. The point, he contends, is to overcome the counterproductive antinomy between ''an *internal* (or soft and contextualist) form of critique'' (p. 161), which emerges in ''the circle of community'' (p. 161) and is formulated by ordinary actors preoccupied with *understanding* their existence by immersing themselves in discursive practices, and ''an *external* (or strong and context-transcending) form of critique'' (pp. 160-161), which ''draws on social-scientific methods'' (p. 161) aimed at *explaining* ''functional laws of social and historical processes'' (p. 161), which can be uncovered by making use of sophisticated conceptual and methodological tools whose epistemic complexity reaches far beyond the misleading simplicity of doxic preconceptions and everyday forms of ''spontaneous sociology'' (p. 96).

Rather than subscribing to the antonymic distinction between internal and external critique, Celikates proposes to introduce the concept of ''reconstructive critique'', which is based on a *distinction between ''first-order'' and ''second-order'' constructions* (p. 187). As he eloquently puts it, ''from this perspective, reconstruction is the attempt to make an implicit normative content explicit. It constitutes a second-order construction in that it relies on 'ordinary' actors' practices and self-understandings as well as on their reflexive first-order constructions […]'' (p. 187). In other words, ''reconstructive critique'' is the systematic attempt to locate the normative foundations of second-order constructions developed by social scientists in the reflexive expressions of first-order constructions articulated by

[3] For a detailed analysis of the relationship between ''internal'' and ''external'' critique, see esp. pp. 160-166.

ordinary actors. According to this view, the epistemic quality of different forms of scientificity is derived from actors' critical capacity, which permits them to shape the development of both their individuality and their society.

Celikates suggests that critique, understood in the above way, has four key features (p. 188) : (a) it is *constructive* in the sense that it incorporates the first-order knowledge of everyday life into the explicative and interpretive horizon of second-order knowledge of social science, rather than strictly separating the latter from the former; (b) it is *normative* in the sense that, by drawing on actors' reflexive practices and taking them seriously, it refuses to take on the proselytizing mission of inventing universal parameters for the realization of the good life and its orchestration ''from above'', thereby regarding humans as creators of their own destiny; (c) it is *dialogical* in the sense that its own epistemic accomplishments do not bypass but engage with actors' reflexive attempts to reach self-understanding; (d) it is *critical* in the sense that, in some cases, radical social change is inconceivable without ''the transformation of actors' understanding of themselves, that is, the deconstruction of structurally conditioned barriers to reflection'' (p. 188). In short, what lies at the heart of Celikates's project of ''reconstructive critique'' is the conviction that we must neither *overestimate* the enlightening power of social-scientific research nor *underestimate* the self-enlightening capacities of ordinary actors.

Just as Bourdieu has a point when insisting on the epistemic value of the conceptual and methodological tools designed by social researchers with the aim of unmasking what is not immediately obvious to ordinary actors, Boltanski is right to insist that every subject capable of reflection and action is able to engage in disputes and processes of justification. Assuming that both scientific and ordinary actors are equipped with reflexive resources, which indicate that critical capacity constitutes an indispensable discursive force for both the study and the functioning of society, Celikates proposes to cross-fertilize the respective insights of first-order and second-order epistemic constructions, instead of artificially separating internal and external forms of critique from one another.

Weaknesses and limitations

Despite the overall strength and timely relevance of Celikates's project, in particular his attempt to demonstrate that important lessons

can be learned not only from combining Bourdieusian and Boltanskian thought but also from making a case for an alternative model based on the notion of ''reconstructive critique'', we need to reflect on some of the key weaknesses and limitations of *Kritik als soziale Praxis*. These shortcomings shall be briefly considered in this final section.

The first, and most general, criticism one may make of Celikates's study is that its underlying theme, the analysis of the relationship between scientific and ordinary forms of knowledge production, has been on the agenda for a long time. The centrality of this distinction has been thoroughly discussed in some of the most influential debates that have been taking place in the humanities and social sciences over the past one hundred and fifty years. We may consider the presuppositional differences between naturalist and anti-naturalist approaches in the context of the ''methodological dispute'' (*Methodenstreit*), the opposition between the paradigm of explanation and the paradigm of interpretation in the humanities and social sciences, the divide between Durkheimian and Weberian schools of thought in sociology, or the rivalry between positivist and interpretivist traditions in social research; one key dimension that the controversies regarding the significance of these paradigmatic antinomies have in common is that they are unavoidably concerned with the epistemological implications arising from the distinction between scientific and ordinary forms of knowledge production. What Celikates regrettably fails to spell out, however, is to what extent the lessons that can be learned from comparing, contrasting, and combining Bourdieu's ''critical sociology'' and Boltanski's ''sociology of critique'' go *beyond* the insights gained from previous debates. Given this omission in Celikates's study, the reader remains under the impression that we are dealing with old problems in new clothes, and that the differences between previous and contemporary controversies are merely semantic, rather than substantive. In other words, it would have been useful if Celikates had explained to what extent *new* lessons can be learned from cross-fertilizing Bourdieu's scientistic account of epistemological rupture and Boltanski's pragmatic model of epistemological symmetry.

Second, when Celikates takes issue with the ''classical project of ideology critique'' (p. 27) in terms of four underlying ''dogmas'' (p. 27), he does not tell us *who* in the contemporary social sciences would seriously defend these sets of presuppositions in the way they are presented in his study. One may, of course, have good reason to attribute the dogmas of scientism/objectivism and rupture/asymmetry to Bourdieu, but Celikates does not provide any evidence to support

the view that the most influential French sociologist of the late twentieth century conceives of reality, in accordance with the second dogma in question, as a ''homogenous totality'' (p. 27). This lack of analytical evidence is not surprising, given that the whole point of Bourdieu's field theory is to account for the polycentric, rather than ''homogenous'' or ''monolithic'', nature of differentiated societies. Even if, in response to this criticism, Celikates may be willing to concede that the idea of portraying society as a ''homogenous totality'' does not apply to Bourdieu, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a contemporary sociologist who would seriously seek to defend the validity of all four aforementioned dogmas.

Third, although Celikates appears to admit that it would be reductive to accuse Bourdieu of *unreservedly* subscribing to the ''dogma of rupture and asymmetry'' (see, for example, p. 79), he does not express the same caution when associating Boltanski's work with the paradigm of ''symmetry'' (p. 26), that is, with the view that the relationship between ''social-scientific experts and laypersons'' (p. 28) is symmetrically structured. On a number of occasions, Boltanski distances himself from such an idealistic misinterpretation of his work, recognizing that, even if we take ordinary actors seriously, we must not forget that, in terms of both their epistemic capacities and their situatedness in the social space, it would be untenable to characterize the relationship between social scientists and laypersons as ''symmetrical''. Just as we need to account for the fact that Bourdieu, particularly in his later writings, is willing to incorporate an interpretive dimension to his analysis[4], Boltanski, notably in response to the most common misreadings of his position, is prepared to accept that it would be naïve to assume that the critical researcher, who is capable of objectification, and the critical actor, who is capable of justification, stand on an equal footing[5].

Fourth, one issue that will strike readers who are familiar with the writings of both Bourdieu and Boltanski is that, in this book, Celikates has a tendency to read the work of the former too much through the

[4] Celikates acknowledges this when stating (on p. 79) that the methodological approach defended in *The Weight of the World* may be seen as indicative of an ''interpretive turn'' in Bourdieu's œuvre. On this point, see Pierre Bourdieu, ''Comprendre'', *in* Pierre Bourdieu (ed.) *La misère du monde* (Paris, Seuil, 1993), pp. 1389-1447.

[5] On this issue, see, for example: Luc Boltanski, Juliette Rennes, and Simon Susen, ''La fragilité de la réalité. Entretien avec Luc Boltanski. Propos recueillis par Juliette Rennes et Simon Susen'', *Mouvements* 64, 2010, pp. 149-164, esp. pp. 155-156. See also Luc Boltanski, ''Critique sociale et sens moral. Pour une sociologie du jugement'', in Tetsuji Yamamoto (ed.) *Philosophical Designs for a Socio-Cultural Transformation: Beyond Violence and the Modern Era* (Tokyo; Boulder, CO: EHESS; Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 248-273.

eyes of the latter. This, of course, applies particularly to Celikates's legitimate criticisms of the controversial aspects of Bourdieu's work, notably the positivist, paternalist, functionalist, and determinist dimensions of his œuvre. What is much more problematic about Celikates's study, however, is the fact that his assessment of Bourdieu's and Boltanski's respective contributions suffers from a remarkable analytical *imbalance*. Part I contains a large section that is concerned with the weaknesses and pitfalls of Bourdieu's model of rupture (pp. 76-97), not to mention the various critical comments on the erroneous assumptions underlying Bourdieusian thought[6] that can be found throughout the entire volume. Part II, by contrast, does *not* offer anything in the way of a detailed criticism of Boltanski's work[7]. One may speculate about the reasons for this omission, the most obvious being the fact that Celikates's own project of ''reconstructive critique'', as outlined in Part III, is arguably much closer to Boltanski's ''sociology of critique'' than to Bourdieu's ''critical sociology'', even if the author aims to draw on the respective insights provided by each of these approaches. In a similar vein, it is worth mentioning that it would have been useful to apply the central theme of this study, *criticism* as social practice, not only to other scholars but also to the author's alternative model by incorporating some *self-critical* reflections on the limitations of Celikates's own project. The point is not to suggest that the author is expected to invalidate his own approach, but to demonstrate that, just as he is capable of raising forceful objections to Bourdieu's work, he is prepared to elaborate, in an equally conscientious manner, on the pitfalls of Boltanski's framework as well as on the limitations of his own model, which, in this case, is based on the notion of ''reconstructive critique''. Unfortunately, both aspects are missing, which makes the narrative of this study at times appear unjustifiably biased, imbalanced, and essentially steered towards making the author's own argument work[8].

Fifth, when examining the various points made throughout the text, one will notice that there are several minor, yet noteworthy, inconsistencies. (a) On the one hand, Boltanski's account is described as less ''situationist'' (p. 136) than ethnomethodological approaches in that it

[6] See, for instance, pp. 28-33, 73-75, 136-140, 151-152, 156-156, 159-166, 187, and 249-252.

[7] A few cursory comments on the weaknesses of Boltanski's approach can be found, for instance, on pp. 153-157.

[8] This shortcoming is also expressed in unsubstantiated claims such as the following: ''Surely, one of the most controversial theses put forward by Bourdieu is the assumption that one's own habitus cannot be converted into an object of reflection'' (p. 68). Where does Bourdieu say so? Again, it is hardly surprising that no reference is provided given that, in fact, the opposite is true.

insists upon the existence of ''*context-transcending* normative structures of everyday practices'' (p. 136, italics added); on the other hand, it is characterized as having a profoundly ''situationist focus'' (p. 167), concerned with the concrete ''*contexts and conditions*'' (p. 167, italics added) in which ''discursive regimes of justification'' (p. 167) emerge in the first place. (b) Celikates may be right to assume that ''actors, even under the most adverse social circumstances, are equipped with basic reflexive capacities and that, therefore, the curtailing or damaging of these capacities can only be partial and never lead to their complete loss'' (p. 170); the problem, however, is that this remains an *unsubstantiated* presupposition, that is, the author does not offer any analytical, let alone empirical, evidence to prove the validity of this assumption. (c) It may be true that the distinction between internal and external critique is based on a ''*false* alternative'' (p. 187, italics added), but Celikates does not provide any obvious reasons as to why we should not consider this to be a *real*, albeit counterproductive, alternative. (d) Although the late Habermas distances himself, for a number of reasons, from his early account of the alleged nexus between knowledge and human interests, the whole point of his assertion that ''a radical critique of knowledge is possible only as *social* theory''[9] is aimed at recognizing that, in practice, processes of cognition and recognition are sociohistorically embedded, rather than ''abstract and 'transhistorical''' (p. 191), as Celikates seems to suggest when examining Habermas's concern with ''quasi-transcendental conditions'' (p. 191) in his universal and formal pragmatics[10]. One could add further examples to the list.

Sixth, from a merely formalistic point of view, it may be worth mentioning that some of the (pertinent) quotations in the text appear excessively long and should at least be indented[11], in order to separate the author's own writing from the assertions made by other scholars. Furthermore, it would have been helpful if the book contained both an Index of Names and an Index of Subjects; given the richness of the

[9] Jürgen Habermas, ''Preface'', in his *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1987 [1968]), pp. vii-viii, here p. vii (italics added).

[10] Some Habermasian scholars may disagree with Celikates's ''transcendentalist'' interpretation of Habermas's universal and formal pragmatics (see esp. p. 192) and may object that it is based on a misrepresentation of Habermas's arguments.

[11] Again, there are numerous examples to illustrate this point, but if this book is to be translated into English (or into any other language), the long quotations on the following pages should be indented: pp. 77, 84, 113-114, 115, 137, 162, 167, 186, 189, 205-206, 208, 215, 221, 223, and 228.

literature and arguments covered in this study, there is little doubt that the readers would have found such indices extremely useful.

Finally, one may wonder to what extent Celikates's project of ''reconstructive critique'' remains trapped in a *rationalist* account of the social, which is concerned primarily with actors' cognitive and linguistic capacities, rather than with their bodily constitution and non-rational ways of engaging with the world. Can there be a sociology of emancipation without a sociology of the body? The latter certainly escapes the agenda of merely rationalist approaches to individual and social emancipation. Whilst Celikates's project of ''reconstructive critique'' is set out to take ordinary actors and their various self-empowering capacities seriously, it remains caught up in the tradition of mainstream theories of domination in conceiving of the subject's rational and critical capacities as the motor of emancipatory social processes. Celikates's book is a major contribution to the literature and makes a convincing case for regarding critical theory as a worthwhile project whose normative foundations are to be located in ordinary processes of action and reflection. If, however, we are willing to accept that emancipatory social practices are *not* limited to discursive processes of critique and justification, it must be the task of critical theory to break out of the rationalist straitjacket that prevents it from understanding that self-enlightenment is a necessary but insufficient condition for human emancipation.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Richard Armstrong and William Outhwaite for their useful comments on an earlier version of this review article.