Truth, Values, and the Value of Truth in International Relations Theory: Reflections on Critical Realism and Adorno

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Introduction

Over the course of the last decade Critical Realist scholars have located the goal of uncovering the truth about reality at the centre of their emancipatory International Relations (IR) theory. In the words of Colin Wight, for Critical Realists ‘getting things right is a practical, a political, and an ethical imperative’.1 Irrealist conceptions of truth have previously played an important role in postpositivist critiques of the international system.2 Both Critical Theorists and poststructuralists have studied world politics and made recommendations for its reform on the basis of ‘epistemic’ understandings of truth which exclude any suggestion of ‘correspondence’ with an independent reality, focusing instead on the social practices involved in the expression of truth claims. In this context the concept of truth has taken on great practical importance, sustaining theories of political community and pointing to programmes for the reform of world politics. Against this backdrop, the Critical Realist suggestion that we should not see truth solely in epistemic terms but rather as having an ontological dimension which points to an independent reality represents a striking departure. In particular, if right, it suggests that postpositivists have been too ready to allow epistemic conceptions of truth to determine understandings of political realities and possibilities.

This paper argues that, telling as such criticisms may be, Critical Realists are not immune to the need to consider the practical political and normative implications of their own understandings of truth for world politics. In particular, they need to show that in understanding truth as having an ontological function they do not set foot on a path leading back to the sort of instrumental reasoning previously criticised by postpositivists in the discipline. The paper suggests that the philosophy of Theodor Adorno can assist them in this task by offering a conception of truth based upon the idea of the ‘preponderance of the objective’. Like Critical Realists, Adorno rejects the prioritisation of the features of subjective knowledge over those of independent reality. At the same time, the ontological aspect of his conception of truth entails rejection of instrumental reason, and instead contains a normative and practical orientation towards reconciliation with material structures.

The argument of the paper proceeds over four stages. The first sets the scene by outlining the role played by conceptions of truth in postpositivist theories by taking


2 The paper will refer to ‘conceptions’ and ‘understandings’ of truth rather than ‘theories’, since the latter suggests an explicit and extensive consideration of truth which is not always present in the positions being examined.
three examples from the work of Richard Ashley, David Campbell, and Andrew Linklater. Despite their differences, in each case truth places a significant role in shaping critical international theory because it is understood in epistemic terms. The second stage describes the implications of Critical Realist accounts of truth for this epistemic consensus in IR. It does so in part by examining Heikki Patomaki’s account of Critical Realist truth in *After International Relations*, where two alternative Critical Realist understandings of truth are considered. According to the first (from hereon CR1) truth has a dual aspect, consisting of both the epistemic dimension of claims, ideas, and discourses, and an ontological dimension of mind- or language-independent states of affairs. Patomaki fears that approaching critique with this conception might have violent implications for political practice. He proposes that truth instead be seen in predominantly epistemic terms, and any ideas about ‘correspondence’ or ontological truth as metaphors which capture the fact that social scientists should be realists. This second conception of truth (CR2) supposedly points to a non-violent pluralism based on the discussion of truth claims.

Each of these Critical Realist conceptions of truth contains important insights for emancipatory thought in IR. The former highlights the fact that proposals for emancipatory transformation based on the practices associated with epistemic activity are likely to prove inadequate, since they ignore the fact our knowledge concerns independent structures. The latter conception highlights the fact that questions of truth do still have practical and normative implications, and in particular reminds realists of the risk of violence that can accompany truth claims. It is argued, however, that each approach is found wanting precisely where the other succeeds; CR1 neglects the full social implications of truth, CR2 the inadequacies of the epistemic dimension as a source of norms and practical prescriptions for IR. Nor can they be combined; the ontological dimension suggests precisely that we should not formulate emancipatory theory on the basis of the practices associated with the epistemic aspect of truth, whilst the consideration of epistemic practices points to the potentially divisive implications of ontological truth.

The third stage of the argument introduces Adorno as a realist philosopher and outlines his conception of truth. The fourth stage deploys his materialist conception of truth as a means of addressing the impasse between CR1 and CR2, arguing that it deals with the concerns behind each position. Firstly, in a manner reminiscent of CR1, Adorno insists on the ‘preponderance of the object’ in a way which undermines philosophies and ideologies based on the elevation the knowing subject. At the same time, his conception of truth has a practical orientation towards less oppressive and divided social relations – concerns he shares with CR2. In addition, however, Adorno introduces the idea of truth as the expression of the human need as to express their experience of living in a world of objective structures. From this perspective the ontological aspect of truth is integral to the practical and normative concern with overcoming oppression and division.

*Epistemic truth and postpostivist IR theory*

It is, of course well-known, that the questions of truth and knowledge discussed in the work of Critical Theorists such as Jurgen Habermas and poststructuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have been central to the development of
critical postpositivist IR theory. Many students of IR are now initiated into a postpositivist lore according to which positivists assumed the possibility of some Archimedean position from which truths could be identified, free from interference from interests and values. Postpositivists came to the rescue, so the story goes, by revealing the illusory nature of this assumption and pointing to the role of interests and of the social context in general in constituting supposedly neutral knowledge. Although this tale is far from inaccurate, its ready acceptance in the discipline has combined with another tendency to discourage detailed and ongoing critical reflection on the philosophical parameters of critical international thought. Many postpositivists have suggested that it is necessary to turn away from discussions about truth, knowledge, foundations, and the like, and to engage, on the basis of the philosophical foundations established in the critique of positivism, either in empirical work or the formulation of programmes for emancipatory action. Whilst the concerns about armchair philosophising such arguments reflect are not unfounded, they have tended to prevent reflection on the way in which a very particular set of philosophical assumptions has continued to shape critical international political theory. Critical Realists have engaged in just such reflection. Their challenge to postpositivism will be considered in the following section; it will be useful to first provide an account of the role conceptions of truth have played in postpositivist theory. Such an account can be formulated by means of a brief examination of examples from the work of key postpositivist thinkers, namely Richard Ashley, Andrew Linklater, and David Campbell.

The importance of understandings of truth in the formulation of postpositivist critical theory is already apparent in the early stages of critical international thought, in which Ashley’s work played a prominent role. In ‘The Poverty of Neorealism’ Ashley provides an account of the role played by assumptions about truth in ‘practical (international political) realism’. He argues that this form of political realist thinking revolves around awareness of a practical ‘scheme’, consisting of balance of power-thinking, which guides the actions of statesmen and represents ‘the indispensable element of international savoir faire’. The role of the theorist is to hermeneutically

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3 The rest of the paper will simply refer to ‘postpositivist’ theory, but is concerned only with those ‘critical’ approaches which reject the idea of disinterested knowledge and make recommendations for the reform of the international system in pursuit rational self-determination or freedom from oppressive practices.

4 The complexities of positivist accounts of truth are all too often ignored. For positivists, truth is arrived at through the empirical identification of laws, but the theoretical notions employed in the explanation of those laws are not candidates for truth. Rather their validity lies in the success of the theories they are elements of. See Kenneth Waltz Theory of International Politics (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1979), pp.4-6; Richard Ashley ‘Realism and Human Interests’ International Studies Quarterly 25: 2, (1981), p.221.


‘relive’ the experiences of the political practitioners who act in accordance with the scheme.

Ashley’s account of this scheme hinges upon the understanding of truth he attributes to practitioners, one which reflects and is reflected in the hermeneutic mode of epistemological grounding associated with practical political realist theory. The understanding in question ‘poises in unceasing dynamic tension two opposed attitudes or interpretative orientations’ – the ‘particularity of the universal’ and the ‘universality of the particular’. From the former perspective, within the international system claims to universal truth are seen as problematic since they conceal particular interests. From the latter perspective, on the other hand, all particularist claims implicate the social whole, and therefore conceal universalistic projects. The dialectical interaction of these two attitudes to truth leads to a more-or-less consensual recognition of the truth of a dialectical scheme that both disallows any final closure on a singular, contradiction-free truth and generates the expectation that, for reasons unspoken, there will forever be pressure to subsume the whole within a false unity.

This perspective points, for those who recognise it, to a system of evaluative and cognitive social structures which constitute ‘a pluralistic states system’ sustained by power balancing.7

Ashley’s argument displays two characteristics which are of great importance in later postpositivist theories. Firstly, any suggestion of correspondence with reality is omitted in favour of an account of the conditions of uncertainty and plurality in which truth claims are expressed. These epistemic conditions point to the practical political implications of understandings of truth, in this case the balance-of-power scheme. Secondly, and as a result, although there can be no ‘view from nowhere’, truth is not simply reduced to the status of an expression of particular social interests. That is to say, Ashley does to engage in a Mannheimian sociology of knowledge. Rather, the characteristics of truth play a role in shaping his understanding of political practice and community. Indeed, truth is itself seen as a form of practice. Thus, for Ashley recognition of the impossibility of absolute truth and the hermeneutic understanding of validity points to the practical balance-of-power scheme which sustains the pluralistic states-system.

These two characteristics – the epistemic view of truth and its use as a model for political practice and the shape of community – are repeated in later postpositivist theories. In particular, truth understood in terms of epistemic social, and generally linguistic, practice has shaped understandings of community and political practice in world politics. It has provided a source of norms and shaped assessments of the possibilities for global political transformation. In poststructuralist IR theory we find the negative image of this pattern, according to which truth consists only of flawed social practices and can help IR theorists understand violent or oppressive forms of community and practice.

For example, in *National Deconstruction*, David Campbell outlines a negative conception of truth which he identifies with political violence. Campbell aims to outline a theory which rejects the idea that grounded knowledge is necessary if we are

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to resist ‘the worst excesses of our time’, and thereby demonstrate the normative potential of poststructuralist thought. He begins arguing that since facts are socially constructed they provide no basis for choosing between accounts of the war in Bosnia. The absence of an extra-discursive realm against which to assess claims means that the possibilities for any epistemological basis for theory choice evaporate; we must rather choose accounts on the basis of ethical considerations.

However, for Campbell truth is not simply an illusion, but also a violent practice. He argues that academic, journalistic, and diplomatic attempts to uncover the truth about Bosnia generally rely upon maps, censuses, and other data which link population, identity and territory together as closed and cohesive units. Such attempts are instrumental in enabling political violence. In fact, Campbell goes so far as to suggest that they are themselves violent. Following Derrida, he argues that they reflect the Western ‘metaphysics of presence’, an obsession with truth which strives to impose copresence and closure on the fundamentally the diffuse and open. An underlying, and ultimately linguistic, social structure of difference provides the context in which such attempts at closure must take place. At the same time, however, it will always undermine them; the very possibility of language depends on the fact that a successful match between signifier and signified can never take place, but is rather constantly differed. Once underlying social reality is seen in terms of the differential structure of language in which truth claims must be expressed, truth becomes equivalent to violence; in the words of Emmanual Levinas, quoted approvingly by Campbell, ‘political totalitarianism rests on ontological totalitarianism’. Truth, then, is the philosophical form of the same attitude which lies behind the nation-state; both are manifestations of the metaphysics of presence. As a result, Campbell argues, critical international thinkers must abandon the pursuit of truth in favour of an ethics of sensitivity to difference.

The influence of Jurgen Habermas’s discursive conception of truth upon Critical IR Theory is less frequently noted than the importance of Foucauldian or Derridean conceptions to poststructuralist IR theory. Critical IR Theorists have generally been reluctant to endorse Habermas’s theory of the validity basis of communication, to which his theory of truth is integral, preferring to draw upon his communicative social ontology and discourse ethics. However, the nature of Critical IR Theorists’ approach to world politics and the possibilities for emancipation therein owes more to this conception of truth than is generally recognised. This is partly because the Critical Theoretical project has always hinged upon some notion of context-transcendent truth, and some association of the good life and the true. Secondly, Habermas’s discourse theory of truth is instrumental in explaining his emphasis on intersubjectivity over relations with the material world, and provides the basic model for the context-transcending power of discourse which has been so influential in IR.

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9 Ibid, p.41-44.
10 Ibid, p.35.
11 Levinas quoted in Campbell, National Deconstruction, p.172.
12 See for example Andrew Linklater Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations, 2nd Edition (Basingstoke; MacMillan, 1990), pp.210-211.
Habermas understands truth as discursively arrived at agreement, reached under ideal conditions – the ideal speech situation. The ideal of free communication comes into play every time truth claims are made, imbuing them with a context-transcending force and universalising potential. The possibility of rational discourse based on the assessment of such claims emerged through the combination of two ideals; ‘harmony of minds’ and ‘harmony with the nature of things’. The latter meant that claims were not simply assessed against prevailing communal standards. However, significantly, the former form of harmony ultimately dominates. For Habermas, other validity claims are to be understood by way of analogy with this account of truth claims.

The influence of this understanding of truth is apparent in Andrew Linklater’s Critical IR Theory. In *The Transformation of Political Community* Linklater works from the recognition that the truth claims of the critical theory of Kant and Marx conceal European values to a new critical approach which can both be sensitive to cultural differences and avoid moral relativism. Key to this is the Habermasian notion that, despite the fact we can never see beyond ‘the distorting lens of language and culture’, we can through discourse ‘separate merely local truths from those with wider acclaim’. This points to the possibility of moral learning which can overcome the arbitrary forms of exclusion associated with the Westphalian states-system. In particular, Linklater believes it points to the need to widen the boundaries of discourse in pursuit of the ideal of a ‘universal communication community’, an ideal clearly informed by Habermas’s notion of an ideal speech situation.

In the most obvious respects Critical Theoretical and poststructuralist understandings of the normative and practical implications of truth are diametrically opposed, reflecting what Richard Rorty has identified as a Platonist/anti-Platonist divide in philosophy. For philosophers on the Platonist side of the divide, such as Habermas, the pursuit of truth, albeit often in a ‘non-traditional’ form, is vital to human freedom. For anti-Platonists, such as Derrida, on the other hand, the pursuit of truth reflects a hidden desire for ‘spiritual perfection’, and should be replaced with the properly human, non-metaphysical pursuit of a more ethical way of life. This is an important division, and not only for postpositivist political philosophy. However, within critical international thought this fault-line runs across a shared terrain consisting of a common epistemic understanding of truth, where the epistemic is understood in terms of linguistic social practices.

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17 Ibid., p.48.
18 Ibid, p.79.
19 Ibid, pp.7-8.
In their standard, Platonist form epistemic theories seek to salvage context-transcendent truth in the aftermath of the demise of the correspondence theory. If correspondence with reality is impossible – if the ontological dimension of truth is removed – truth risks being undermined through contextualisation, dissolving into whatever happens to be rationally acceptable to a given community.\(^{22}\) Epistemic theorists such as Jürgen Habermas, Karl-Otto Apel, and Hilary Putnam have sought to avoid such a reduction by defining truth in terms of rational acceptability under \textit{ideal} epistemic conditions.\(^{23}\) Such a conception is at work in the notion of an ideal communication community which informs Linklater’s Critical IR Theory.\(^{24}\)

In a second, anti-Platonist epistemic approach the concept truth is again epistemized, but in the process discredited rather salvaged. For example, Derrida agrees with Habermas and Apel that truth involves epistemic idealization. However, as Albrecht Wellmer points out, for Derrida this idealization is an infection in the structure of language which must be tackled by means of deconstruction.\(^{25}\) On this view, the pathological character of the Platonist desire for truth and its violent social implications are revealed by uncovering the more fundamental linguistic structures in which the activity of knowing is necessarily located – its actual rather than idealized epistemic conditions. The contrast between these two sets of epistemic conditions grounds Campbell’s theory of political violence; violence occurs because the idea of truth involves assumptions about the possibility of closure and identity, of lack of interference from language and social others, which in practice either obscure or forcibly incorporate alterity.

As we have seen, in both its Platonist and anti-Platonist form this underlying epistemic understanding of truth lends itself particularly well to the formulation of practical political prescriptions and normative theory in IR. In each of the examples outlined above epistemic truth is a vital critical supplement to the underlying social ontology. In Linklater’s case progress is possible within the context of a communicatively structured world on the basis of a discursive conception of truth. The idealised epistemic conditions identified by Habermas imbue discourse with a progressive universalising dynamic and provide a template for institutional reform which has been productively applied in IR. Likewise, Campbell’s adoption of Derrida’s anti-Platonist epistemic conception of truth as presence provides him, in the context of a linguistic social ontology of difference, with a means of explaining political violence and therefore the ills of the international system. In normative terms the critique of this ‘truth-thinking’ points to the need to pay heed to the grounds which it attempts to ignore; the underlying structure of difference. Beneath the


\(^{23}\) Habermas,

\(^{24}\) Habermas \textit{Communicative Action 2,} p.72. It is significant that Habermas has since rejected an epistemic conception of truth on the grounds that it fails to encapsulate everyday realist intuitions. In terms of meaning, as opposed to criteria, truth should be understood in realist terms. However, Habermas sees this as a purely philosophical revision, with no implications for his critical social theory. See, Jurgen Habermas, ‘Richard Rorty’s Pragmatic Turn’, in Maeve Cooke (ed.) \textit{On the Pragmatics of Communication,} (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1998) p.357.

Platonic/Anti-Platonic divide, then, lies the epistemic conception of truth which assists in the merging of subject and object in social theory and drives the resultant practical political import of truth claims.

**Critical Realism, truth, and IR**

This epistemic consensus about truth has been disrupted by the intervention of Critical Realists in IR. Emphasising the importance of ontology over epistemology, they have retrieved the objective from the subjective (or intersubjective) by arguing that the social world consists of mind- or discourse-independent structures. The reality of social structures leads to the importance of ‘getting things right’; we cannot hope to free ourselves from unwanted or oppressive structures if we do not attempt to understand them as they really are. From this perspective the concept of truth must encapsulate more than epistemic conditions alone. Roy Bhaskar has argued truth has a dual aspect. On the one hand it must refer to epistemic conditions and activities such as reporting judgements and assigning values. On the other hand, however, it has an inescapably ontic aspect which involves ‘designating the states of affairs expressed and in virtue of which judgements are assigned the value ‘true’’. In many respects the epistemic aspect must dominate; since we can have no direct access to reality we can only identify the truth through certain epistemic procedures. Nevertheless, these procedures are orientated towards independent reality, and the status of the conclusions they lead us to is not dependent on epistemic factors alone, but also on the independently existing states of affairs. For this reason Bhaskar argues that truth has a ‘genuinely ontological’ use.

At this point it might be objected that whilst such an understanding of truth is unproblematic for the natural sciences in the case of the social sciences, as postpositivist IR theorists have been at pains to point out, subject and object merge. This being the case, the objection goes, there cannot be an ontological aspect to the truths of social science. For this reason it might be assumed that social scientific truth must take one of the forms identified in the postpositivist approaches described above. In responding to objections such as these Critical Realists begin by accepting that, in contrast with the natural sciences, in the case of social science there is an obvious interaction between subject and object; social structures involve the actions and ideas of social actors. However, they add, it does not follow either that the structures in question are theoretical creations of social scientists (positivism) or that they are simply constituted through the intersubjective ideas of society at a given moment (postpositivism). According to Bhaskar, we can ascribe independence to social structures on the basis of their pre-existence – we operate in a world of structures which are preformed – and reality on the basis of their causal power. On this basis Critical Realists agree to an epistemological relativism according to which knowledge is a social product created from a pre-existing set of beliefs. However, the reality of social structures means that our beliefs about them can be more or less accurate and there is a distinction between their appearance and their essence. Moreover, in addition to this element of ontological realism there are procedures according to

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which we can rationally choose between accounts of reality. In other words, epistemological relativism does not prevent judgemental rationalism. For this reason the removal of false beliefs can be an essential part of emancipation, and truth ‘is a positive value’ which should guide our attempts to understand the social world.\(^{30}\)

Despite this emphasis on the positive value of truth, Critical Realists are much more cautious than postpositivists about linking epistemology and politics. This is primarily due to their insistence on the priority of ontology – we always arrive at epistemological debates with ontological baggage, and many debates about epistemology in IR turn out to be at root about ontology.\(^{31}\) Moreover, the ways in which we know or think we know do not determine the nature of social reality, which, as we have seen, consists of independently existing social structures.\(^{32}\) By failing to recognise these pitfalls postpositivists fall prey to the ‘epistemic fallacy’, according to which they derive assumptions about social reality (ontology) from understandings of the nature of our knowledge of that reality (epistemology). The postpositivist predilection for this move accounts for the importance of epistemic truth in their theories. In contrast, Critical Realism’s dual aspect truth reflects the separation of belief and reality, subject and object, which places a block on the sort of direct practical implications of truth found in postpositivist IR theory. Clearly, if the epistemic dimension can be detached, to an extent, from the ontological, then the epistemic conditions for truth do not tell us as much about political or social realities and practices as postpositivists have generally thought. Moreover, once ontology is prioritised over epistemology, there is no reason to prioritise a particular set of epistemic criteria.\(^{33}\) Clearly, under these circumstances it is inadvisable to base recommendations for political practice on the epistemic conditions of truth.

Nevertheless, truth is in other respects more central to Critical Realist than postpositivist theory. The separation of subject and object grants truth a different sort of importance. In particular, a positive role for the realist conception of truth is integral to Critical Realist ‘explanatory critique’, as outlined by Bhaskar. Since the understandings of social reality which we criticise as false are part of that reality, and given that all other things being equal truth is to be favoured over falsity, the identification of a more satisfactory account implies criticism of those elements of social reality which necessitate false beliefs. Moreover, since by looking to deeper layers of social reality we might be able to identify particular institutions which require false belief for their operation, it follows that we should seek to remove them.

On most readings, the importance of the Critical Realist understanding of truth for IR lies in the account it provides of the activity of social science, especially in highlighting the distinction between appearance and reality, individuals and structures. To this extent Critical Realism is to be seen as a metatheory which does not, in and of itself, establish a framework for emancipatory political practice, let alone a theory of world politics.\(^{34}\) From this perspective, the identification of false beliefs and their sources is one thing, identifying the action we should take as a result

\(^{33}\) Wight, *Agents, Structures*, p.25.
\(^{34}\) Joseph, ‘Philosophy in International Relations’, pp.345-359.
quite another. Bhaskar himself emphaseses that there are of course values other than cognitive ones and social practices other than science, and that it is therefore a mistake to think that science can settle questions of morality and action; truth-based explanation does not point to any particular set of practices. Rather, such explanation points to the need for action which may always be overridden by other considerations. Moreover, the nature of action is to be decided by some other form of theory which will no doubt involve consideration of values other than truth. 35 Truth, practice, and social ontology do not link up in the same way that they can in the context of an epistemic-linguistic understanding of truth and a communicative or linguistic social ontology. Indeed, the ontological aspect of truth serves precisely to highlight the fact of the separation of thought and things, whilst at the same time reminding us that the ‘objects of knowledge’ should be seen to have a dual existence, a foot in each dimension.36 In the context of such a separation the practices associated with knowing do not point to any particular form of practice to be adopted in trying to shape the social structures about which we know. The latter form of practice will be contingent upon the structures that happen to be in place.

It has been argued from within Critical Realism, however, that questions of the practical and normative implications of truth cannot be so easily settled, especially in the context of world politics. In After International Relations Heikki Patomaki argues that in its standard form explanatory critique does in fact point to a particular form of action. Whilst the pursuit of truth need not lead to the neglect of all other considerations, truth-based critique seems to point in particular to instrumental action. That is to say, the social scientist identifies false beliefs and their sources, and tells us that, all other things being equal, we must act to remove the latter. This bears a striking resemblance to the means-ends, technical rationality the dangers of which postpositivist IR theorists have been concerned to outline. Such a form of rationality sustains the action in pursuit of technical control which, in IR, is associated with political realist practices of power balancing, state sovereignty, and administrative control.

Patomaki argues that the dangers of truth-based critique arise from three main problems with Bhaskar’s conception of truth. Firstly, the dualistic conception of truth is unnecessarily complex – why introduce ontological aspect of truth as anything other than metaphor which reminds scientists that they are dealing with an independent reality? Ultimately, truth is a property of claims about reality, not of reality itself. The tendency to think otherwise can have violent implications – why bother to discuss your claims with others if they are a property of an independent reality? 37 Secondly, insufficient emphasis is placed on the normativity of truth – it is, as Bhaskar has himself emphasised, one value amongst many, and as a result we cannot simply pursue it without considering other values. This recognition needs to be more fully incorporated into the procedures of explanatory critique. 38

Finally, the full implications of the lack of neutral criteria for deciding between truth claims in the social sciences are not recognised. 39 An integral part of the scientific

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35 Bhaskar, Naturalism, p.65.
36 Bhaskar, Scientific Realism, pp.99-100.
37 Patomaki, After International Relations, p.148.
38 Ibid., p.154.
39 Ibid. p.154.
pursuit of truth is the justification of claims to the wider scientific community. In the context of social science this community expands to encompass all those with an interest in the issue in question. Explanatory critique in its original form risks fostering political violence for reasons identified by Derrida and Habermas; we must be responsible for the truth claims we raise, recognising the potential for violence that forever accompanies them, and we must raise them within the context of rational discourse between equal partners. As such, the suggestion that the identification of false beliefs and their sources points to the need for their removal is insufficient. This procedure will always be a communal enterprise, and we cannot simply ignore those who disagree with us. Rather, we must persist with discursive attempts to persuade them of our point of view.

Patomaki argues that these problems point to the need for a revised realist conception of truth. On this view truth (CR2) is solely the product of human activity, and in particular of the discourse through which judgemental rationality is exercised. In contrast with postpositivist epistemic conceptions, however, a minimal ontological dimension is retained since truth functions as a ‘regulative metaphor of correspondence’ for social scientists. In other words, it reminds them that they should be realists. By emphasising the epistemic aspect of truth to the near exclusion of the ontological Patomaki attempts to formulate a practically more nuanced version of explanatory critique. He summarises this as follows:

1. $T_1$ is more true than $TDF$.
2. Truth is a positive value.
3. Thus, one should evaluate negatively the relevant parts of $DF$, and engage in discussion about the merits and problems of theories.
4. $T_2$ explains the reproduction of $DF$ in terms of causal complex $Ki$.
5. Thus, one should evaluate negatively the relevant parts of $Ki$ that are responsible for the (re)production of false beliefs.
6. Attempts (3) do not make any difference.
7. $T_1$ and $T_2$ still hold, even if in qualified form.
8. One should evaluate positively public communicative action directed at removing or changing the relevant parts of $Ki$.

According to this version, those being criticised are equal partners in dialogue, so the possibility of instrumental action must be excluded, replaced with an interest in communication. As a result, CR2 has more extensive implications for emancipatory practices and understandings of community in world politics than CR1. In the words of Patomaki:

because of the normative nature of truth and epistemological relativism, there is an essential connection between explanatory or any normative criticism and the non-violence of political action.

Whilst the concern with ‘getting it right’ is still key, we need to take care to ‘specify the rules and conditions of communication, which are necessary for adequate truth-
judgements’. Undertaking this task brings Critical Realism much closer to epistemic understanding of truth which has shaped critical postpositivist IR theory. Of course, Patomaki’s position is still a realist one; the rules and conditions in question are to be deployed alongside a scientific realist investigation of the structures of world politics. Nevertheless, Patomaki re-establishes a connection between the nature of truth, and more specifically its epistemic aspect, and the norms and practices which should be deployed in world politics.

Despite the identification of some important considerations, perhaps the most important aspect of Patomaki’s argument is the tension it highlights in the Critical Realist position. On the one hand, it suggests that Critical Realism is not immune from the question of the practical implications of truth which have concerned postpositivists. The revised understanding represents an attempt to formulate a Critical Realist response to questions about the role of truth in feeding either social division, violence and repression on the one hand or reconciliation and progress on the other. However, whilst he demonstrates that Critical Realism cannot escape from these questions, in addressing them Patomaki seems to risk tipping the balance too far back towards the epistemic aspect of truth. In particular, he seems to risk losing sight of one of the fundamental insights of Critical Realism, one which is captured by the ontological aspect of Bhaskar’s CR1. This aspect serves as a reminder that political prescriptions based on epistemic considerations are based on an unjustifiable elevation of subjectivity or intersubjectivity over independent social structures, and are therefore unlikely to meet with success.

It seems especially problematic to rely so heavily on intersubjective agreement in the context of political critique. Whilst we might accept that in science truth claims must be justified discursively, there is good reason to be wary of the suggestion in a political context. The history of the Twentieth Century is certainly littered with the wreckage wrought by truths asserted rather than discussed, but there have also been times when what Max Horkheimer called ‘the knowledge of the falling fighter’ is of the utmost importance, when it matters that the truth about social reality is not identified too closely with success, discursive or otherwise. It is precisely the ontological aspect of truth which makes this a necessity. It seems, therefore, that whilst Patomaki is right that Critical Realists need to ask questions about the normative and practical implications of truth for world politics, they should be wary of attempts to do so by focusing on its epistemic aspects.

**Adorno, realism, and truth**

It is in the context of the apparent tension between the normative concern with peace and plurality, as expressed in CR2, and the check a realist understanding of truth places on their pursuit on an epistemic basis, as apparent in CR1, that the philosophy of Theodor Adorno is of interest. In many respect Adorno does not seem to have much to offer critical thought; he has endeared himself neither to scientists, with his suspicion of science, nor to later Critical Theorists, with his aestheticism and political passivity. This no doubt accounts for the scant attention he has received in IR.

Nevertheless, Adorno engaged more thoroughly than any other critical thinker with the issues at stake in the tension between CR1 and CR2. Firstly, his critical theory revolves around a theorisation of the relationship between subject and object, according to which he asserts the ‘preponderance of the object’ against ‘the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity’. In this respect his theory resembles the Critical Realist assertion of ontology over epistemology as expressed in CR1. Secondly, his consideration of these issues is infused with the same concern with social harmony which motivates CR2.

Adorno draws together the priority of objectivity and the question of peaceful social relations with a materialist, non-epistemic theory of truth. Truth is seen as a need arising from the suffering of material human beings and as involving, in part, the process of reconciliation with materiality, between subject and object, though which that suffering can be addressed. The aim of the current section is not to deploy this conception of truth in pursuit of an ‘Adornian’ IR theory – a task which would inevitably run aground on the limitations of Adorno’s philosophy – but rather to provide an account of it which can be brought to bear on the question of the practical implications of philosophical realism for IR.

As Alan Norrie has pointed out, there is ‘much to commend Adorno as a realist’. Underlying his philosophy is the reassertion of objectivity against the elevation of the subject to the position of ‘dictator’ over things. Through this elevation, he argues, humanity has been able to establish technical control over both the natural and social worlds. However, in the process has been forgotten how much humans are themselves material creatures which are part of the natural world, and as a result both society and the natural world are known only insofar as they can be manipulated. In modern positivist thought this subjectivism is manifested in the detachment of language from reality which produces a closed ‘system of detached signs’. Any attempt to transcend this system is seen as meaningless, at best being relegated to a ‘cognition-free special area of social activity’. Positivism may believe itself to represent ‘the court of judgement of enlightened reason’, but this instrumental reason in fact maintains its power by means of a taboo placed on all reference to that which cannot be represented by ‘detached signs’ or concepts. Conceptuality, or ‘identity-thinking’ – the idea that reality ‘goes into’ the subject’s concepts ‘without remainder’ – is the main ill of all subject philosophy.

The process by which enlightenment elevates the subject to the status of dictator has always been a social one. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the possibility of separating subject and object first emerges with the division between master and labourer, and is perpetuated in modern times by the market logic which prioritises exchange value over use value. It permeates politics by reducing individuals to the abstract, as a result of which they become ‘the herd’ in which Fascism can find

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49 Ibid, p.18.
50 Ibid, p.25.
52 Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.14.
At an individual level, people become incapable of genuine rationality, sharing positivism’s mythic fear of the Other which lies outside the concept:

The dutiful child of modern civilization is possessed by fear of departing from the facts which, in the very act of perception, the dominant conventions of science, commerce, and politics – cliché-like – have already moulded; his anxiety is none other than the fear of social deviation.54

As in Critical Realism, departure from immediate appearances and engagement with deeper levels of reality is required for emancipation from the status quo.

Like Critical Realists, then, Adorno believes in the importance of the appearance-essence distinction. In his critique of subject philosophy Adorno provides several further arguments with parallels in key elements of Critical Realism. Firstly, he argues, following Kant, that a knowing subject presupposes an object known. However, unlike Kant, the object must take priority since we can always conceive of an object which is not a subject, but not vice versa.55 Moreover, it is always possible to point to the objective conditions which shape the supposedly a priori categories through which the subject engages with the world.56 Thus, like Critical Realists, Adorno rejects the prioritisation of epistemology over ontology which allows the subject to ‘swallow the object, forgetting how much it is itself an object’.57 Secondly, and perhaps surprisingly given his reputation for anti-scientism, Adorno praises modern scientific achievements:

in modern natural science the ratio peers over the wall it has built and grabs a snippet of what differs from its categories. This broadening of the ratio shatters subjectivism.58

In other words, science works by recognising the inadequacy of its (subjective) concepts to the independently existing (objective) real world, that is, by rejecting identity-thinking. In Negative Dialectics, Adorno praises science since Einstein for abandoning the emphasis on subjective observation, and the idea of the apriority of time, space and causality.59 Again, this account of science points to an underlying depth realism and appearance-essence distinction, and also to the idea of a transitive and intransitive dimension of science.

Adorno’s conception of truth plays a key role in his critique of subjectivism. He displays a realist belief in the importance of getting at underlying social structures, criticising Kant for giving up on the ‘specifically philosophical impulse to blast a hidden truth out from behind the idols of conventional consciousness’.60 Adorno’s hostility to subjectivism means that his truth, like Bhaskar’s, has both subjective and objective, epistemic and ontological aspects. At the same time, like Patomaki’s conception, it entails progression towards social harmony in opposition to the divisive rule of instrumental reason. Adorno’s understanding of truth can at times appear

53 Ibid., p.13.
54 Ibid, p.xiv.
56 Ibid, pp.503-504.
57 Ibid., p.499.
58 Ibid., p.503.
59 Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p.188; Deborah Cook, ‘Adorno’s materialism’, pp.733-734.
60 Ibid, p.73; also quoted in Norrie, Beautiful Soul, p.167.
contradictory, and at no point does he clearly summarise a ‘theory of truth’ as such. It is nevertheless possible to reconstruct a theory of sorts from the statements on the question of truth which can be found throughout his works. Two elements of this theory are of particular importance for the current discussion: the idea of the unintentional ‘truth-content’ of cultural phenomena, especially philosophical beliefs and works of art; and the link between truth and the suffering of material human beings.

The first thing to note about Adorno’s approach to truth is its relationship to his intense suspicion of conceptual thought and with it, implicitly, the correspondence theory of truth; both are a reflections of the ‘identity-thinking’ and therefore of the dictatorial arrogance of subject philosophy. In contrast, Adorno sees truth as ‘unintentional’, lying not in thought’s success in ‘capturing’ reality, but rather in the effects of underlying structures in cultural phenomena. However, it is not Adorno’s intention simply to reduce social and cultural phenomena to some objective material substructure; such a move would simply replicate the mistakes of subjectivism in objectivist form. Rather, he suggests that such phenomena must be seen as ‘expressions’ of underlying socio-economic structures. The implications of this conception of truth, and the reduction of the subjective dimension which it involves, are apparent in the contrast between Adorno’s position and that of a hermeneutician such as Dilthey. Whereas the latter wishes to understand the intention of the creator of a cultural artefact, Adorno wants to discover what the artefact is saying despite the creator’s intention, that is, to uncover the ‘truth-content’ which reflects the underlying structure of society regardless of any subjective intention or intersubjective meaning.

Adorno’s rejection of identity-thinking is not unproblematic, and at times seems to lead him into contradiction and pessimism. In particular, his suspicion of conceptual thought at times seems excessive. Now, there is a difference between criticising both the preponderance of identity-thinking in modern society and concomitant assumption that subjective categories exhaust the real, on the one hand, and the rejection of conceptuality in general, on the other. The difference is apparent in a tension that runs through Adorno’s own work. On the one hand, he is at pains to make it clear that conceptual thought cannot simply be rejected, but must be ‘sublated’, applied in new ways, through interaction with other forms of practice. The point is to deploy the power of the subject in new ways, rather than to engage in futile attempts to overcome it entirely. At other times, however, Adorno seems to assume that any hint of conceptuality undermines the emancipatory project. This accounts, no doubt, for his reputation for pessimism. At issue is the question of the nature of Adorno’s critique of modernity. At times his primary concern appears to be with the originary move through which man establishes his power over nature, but thereby alienates himself from his place in the material world. From this approach conceptuality is flawed from its very inception. However, he can be also be read as offering a critique of modern capitalist society in particular, and of its elevation of identity-thinking to a way of life on the basis of the exchange principle.

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62 Ibid., p.40.
63 Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p.15.
From this latter perspective, if Adorno is overly suspicious of conceptuality it is not because of any inherent feature of his philosophy – e.g. that conceptual thought is the manifestation of some primal error – but rather because of the unusually desperate times in which he worked. In other words, he is suspicious of conceptuality because it always seemed to be accompanied by repression and violence. As such it appeared that the barriers to its deployment in pursuit of emancipation were all but insurmountable. By placing Adorno, as a realist and materialist, alongside a less pessimistic realist philosophy such as Critical Realism it is possible to criticise his excessive pessimism, whilst emphasising those moments in which he seems to hold out more hope for the potential of conceptuality. Such moments include: the positive assessments of science just mentioned; the reminder that the total liquidation of the subject in pursuit of engagement with reality would be ‘a regression to real barbarism’; and the identification of the subjectivist error not with conceptuality itself, but rather with the idea that objects ‘go into their concepts without leaving a remainder’. From this perspective it seems that Adorno simply failed to recognise that more opportunities existed for the form of emancipatory thought and activity he favoured than it might often have seemed. Critical Realism is in some respects an example of such a theory. Indeed, the notion of unintentional truth performs a similar function to Bhaskar’s ontological aspect of truth; both serve to limit the role to which the subjective, epistemic dimension of truth can be elevated.

Whilst Critical Realism can help to correct to elements Adorno’s theory, other aspects of his conception of truth offer the possibility of reformulating the Critical Realist position as it stands in IR. Of particular interest is the suggestion that truth arises from the need to express humanity’s experience of objectivity. The roots of this understanding of truth lie in Adorno’s materialism. Simon Jarvis argues that, following Marx, Adorno combines an anti-idealist, scientific materialism with the ethical concerns of the ancient Utopian materialists such as Epicurus. The former tendency seeks to explain social phenomena by looking to underlying societal relations with the material world, whilst the latter is concerned with the possibilities for a life of material wellbeing. This dual-aspect Marxian materialism is manifested in Adorno’s concern with, on the one hand, revealing the mechanisms operating behind the appearances of modern society, and on the other hand with paying heed to the ways in which our relationship to those mechanisms leads to suffering.

For Adorno, in failing to recognise our relationship with the material world we fail to understand ourselves. As we have seen, this relegation of the material, corporeal aspect of human experience has led to the rule of instrumental reason. The utopianism of this approach lies first of all in its anticipation of a society which is reconciled with, or rather recognises its ‘affinity’ with nature, and is therefore reconciled with itself. Since we are part of material nature awareness of our experience of the world as embodied, material beings rather than transcendental subjects must be central to any attempt to bring that relationship back into view. Particularly interesting is the

64 Adorno, ‘Subject and Object’, p.499.
67 Ibid., p.723.
idea that contra subjectivism there is an inherently corporeal dimension to cognition.\(^{68}\) Horkheimer, himself drawing on Schopenhauer, was especially keen to emphasise this aspect of materialism and Adorno was heavily influenced by his colleague in this area.\(^{69}\) As we have seen, Adorno believes the subject to be also objective. As a result, consciousness is to be seen as ‘a function of the living subject’ and physical urges as the origin of the mind. Whilst subjective consciousness allows some level of transcendence over the objective, material world, and for thinking beyond immediacy, the illusion of pure subjectivity leads us to violently repress the material aspect of thought.\(^{70}\) For Adorno, however, this pure thought would not be thought at all; just as it requires an external object, the knowing subject also requires bodily affectivity and needs.\(^{71}\) For Adorno, the idea of pure subjectivity simply serves as a consolation in the face of real suffering and powerlessness.

In the following statement from *Negative Dialectics* Adorno locates the origins of our interest in truth in this combination of material cognition and our alienated materiality:

> Freedom follows the subject’s urge to express itself. The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth. For suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject; its most subjective experience, its expression, is objectively conveyed.\(^{72}\)

This somewhat enigmatic statement can be reformulated in three points, as follows:

1) Suffering arises from the material subject’s experience of the objective (which is both natural and social) as something inimical.

2) Freedom is possible because as subjects we have an urge, need, and ability to express this suffering.

3) This need explains truth, which expresses our subjective experience of objectivity in ‘objective’, i.e. context-transcendent, terms.

This passage draws together all of the most important elements of Adorno’s theory. Firstly, following from his realism as outlined above, truth is possible because subject and object are distinct, and we have the ability to ‘objectively convey’ our subjective experiences of objectivity. It is a necessity, however, because the subject-object distinction has been distorted and hypostatized by identity-thinking in philosophy, and by the domination of nature and all that it entails in practice. The subject experiences this distinction in the form of objective social structures which weigh upon her as something immutable and alien. Expressing the truth about this situation in provides a moment of freedom because, by rising above the purely objective, it reveals the sources of suffering in our alienation from material nature and our own corporeality, i.e. the subject’s objectivity. However, it is clear that Adorno does not believe the need for truth will ever be overcome; the subject-object distinction is irreversible.

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\(^{68}\) Ibid, p.734,  
\(^{69}\) Jarvis, ‘Materialism’, p.84.  
\(^{71}\) Jarvis, ‘Materialism’, pp.97-98.  
Thus, whilst the truths of subject philosophies such as positivism and Kantian idealism reflect the dictatorial attitude and alienation from nature, Adorno’s truth reflects the same subjective ability to know reality, but this time identifies within truth a dynamic pointing towards reconciliation with the natural world and social structures. The significance of this for critical theory and emancipatory practice is expressed in the following passage, which is worth quoting in full:

If speculation on the state of reconciliation were permitted, neither the undistinguished unity of subject and object nor their antithetical hostility would be conceivable; rather, the communication of what was distinguished. Not until then would the concept of communication, as an objective concept, come into its own. The present one is so infamous because the best there is, the potential of an agreement between people and things, is betrayed to an interchange between subjects according to the requirements of subjective reason. In its proper place... the relationship of subject and object would lie in the realization of peace among men as well as between men and their other. Peace is a state of distinctness without domination, with the distinct participating in each other.73

In summary, then, Adorno’s conception of truth has several main features. Firstly, it is realist; truth is not to be defined in epistemic terms alone, but rather involves a relationship of the subject to objective reality. Secondly, this relationship is not to be conceived of in terms of correspondence of concepts with real entities, but rather as a form of expression according to which something of the latter is revealed at a superstructural level. Thirdly, to the extent that truth can be said to ‘exist’ it does so as a manifestation of the subject-object relationship, because of the human need to cope with the ‘weight’ of objective structures. In modern society the weight is particularly heavy, and often the source of suffering. Fourthly, if truth arises from the material subject’s experience of material structures as something alien, it also points to reconciliation with those structures. Indeed truth, properly conceived of, is an expression of both the limited separation of subject and object and the fact that the subject cannot be fully separated from objective material world – ‘an object also a subject’. Finally, as the passage quoted above makes clear, the relationship between subject and object involved in truth undermines attempts to pursue social harmony by focusing on intersubjectivity, pointing instead to the need to concentrate on subject-object relations.

Adorno, Critical Realism, and IR

Adorno’s conception of truth speaks to the concerns expressed in both CR1 and CR2. Regarding the CR1, Adorno agrees that the ontological dimension of truth is essential. Like Bhaskar, he asserts that we should not allow our understanding of reality to be shaped by the subjective aspect alone. By bringing the objective back in both philosophers attempt to reclaim some ground from the position to which the subject has been elevated in Western philosophical tradition. At the same time, like CR2, Adorno’s account of truth reflects the fear that attempts to capture objective reality can have violent or divisive social consequences. Like Patomaki, he finds in the phenomenon of truth elements of a practical attitude to society and politics which can overcome violence and division. Thus, Adorno’s understanding of truth retains the

objective aspect of CR1 whilst displaying, like CR2, a non-instrumental orientation to emancipatory political practices.

Whilst Adorno’s truth offers the possibility of overcoming the tension between the concerns reflected in CR1 and CR2, it also points to the need to revise certain aspects of each. Regarding CR1 the Adornian conception of truth points to a slightly different understanding of the intransitivity of social structures, and therefore to a different set of implications for emancipatory politics. As was described above, his account of this connection reflects his belief that the prevailing forms of subject philosophy have ignored the corporeal, material side of human cognition and experience. Of particular importance is the connection he identifies between truth and the experience of suffering. The fact that social structures are experienced as an external force weighing upon the subject is a reflection of the extent to which subjective identity-thinking has permeated social relations, and in the last instance of humanity’s alienation from nature. The causal power exerted by such structures is not, then, only a sign of their independent reality, but also in some respects a manifestation of a deep social pathology.

From this perspective truth involves two aspects of the subject-object relationship; the inescapable preponderance of the object and the struggle to overcome the alienation of the subject. The former lies behind the realist features of Adorno’s philosophy identified above. It means that truth has a similar critical role for Adorno as for Critical Realism; getting at the reality behind appearances is for him a vital critical task, as is revealing the epistemic fallacy where it is at work. However, the second aspect of the subject-object relationship reveals that, for Adorno, the preponderance of the object only takes on the importance it does because of certain features of the human subject, namely its materiality. As described in the previous section, for Adorno, in providing accounts of objective reality we can express our experience of living with the weight of objective structures but also, since this is ‘our most objective experience’, the fact that we are ourselves elements of the material world. It is this last aspect, necessarily absent from subjectivist accounts of truth, that needs to be emphasised if the rule of subjectivism, identity-thinking, and the exchange principle is to be overcome. Thus, like Critical Realism Adorno wants to put the subject ‘in its place’, but at the same time his conception of truth is tied up with an attempt to do so by means of a materialist account of subjectivity. In his own words:

Adequate expression of a matter does not involve an elimination of subjectivity, but rather that the matter itself can only be brought to language through the most extreme refinement and exertion of subjectivity.74

Such refinement must be based on the recognition that cognition cannot be seen simply as the activity of a transcendental subject standing over reality, but as having an inherently material, corporeal element. There is, as a result, a practical orientation to subjective reconciliation and recognition of our affinity with material reality contained with the concept of truth.

For this reason, the ontological aspect of truth entails not only intellectual efforts to get at the reality behind appearances, but a normative and practical orientation

towards reducing the powerlessness experienced in the face of real social structures. Clearly, CR already contains such an impetus; we cannot rationally control, shape, or come to terms with structures we don’t understand. However, Adorno’s truth means that this scientific attitude needs to be placed in a broader context which points to the need to find new ways of relating to the reality under investigation. Whilst as rational subjects we are able to uncover the reality behind experiences, the material aspect of subjectivity and cognition involved in Adorno’s understanding of truth suggests that we must at the same time strive to reduce our alienation from those structures. Thus, in identifying false beliefs and their sources we do not simply suggest that all things being equal they should be removed – the attitude Patomaki fears contains an element of instrumentalism in CR1 – but also point to the need for re-engagement and empowerment with the area of reality in question. Clearly, we cannot find within truth the complete template for less oppressive political practices – a position both the Platonic and anti-Platonic epistemic approaches described above come close to – but nevertheless find a distinct practical and normative orientation. For example, when Marxist theory identifies the false beliefs behind wage labour, it does not simply identify the need to remove its institutional sources, but also the need for subjects to be re-engaged with, to take possession of the domain in question – i.e. the production process. A similar dynamic can be seen as accompanying scientific accounts of global environmental problems; identification of the sources of environmental degradation entails the need not simply for greater control of the environment, but a deeper engagement and more holistic attitude to our relationship with it. That such reforms to the relationship between subject and object might, as Adorno would argue, lead to the possibility of enhanced communication between subjects is an interesting prospect for IR theory.

Like CR2, then, Adorno’s conception confirms that truth brings with it a practical orientation opposed to the imposition of political structures and practices on individuals against their will. However, it also indicates that the roots of such practice cannot lie in the epistemic procedures deployed in the verification of truth claims. From Adorno’s perspective, we should not expect communication or any other epistemic factor to lead to more peaceful or less oppressive political practice. This restriction can be traced to the ‘preponderance of the object’ and the materialist understanding of the subject and cognition. From this perspective, the solution to the risk of instrumentalism which seems to accompany CR1 cannot lie in supplementing realism with the emphasis on intersubjectivity and communication, or in reducing the objective aspect of truth to the status of metaphor. Firstly, as a result of the latter move, objectivity becomes the abstract assumption of scientists, rather than an integral, albeit repressed, part of the everyday experiences of all members of society. Secondly, it is only on the basis of this abstraction that the discursive justification of truth claims can be seen as providing an orientation for emancipatory social activity and political practice. Such a move reflects the antinomy of reason and nature, and the relegation of materiality in the pursuit of freedom that Adorno criticises in Kant. Adorno’s understanding of truth suggests that where such a relegation occurs, the objective will always impinge on and undermine subjective reason and any attempt to establish it as a source of freedom and social harmony.

75 Accepting the latter point does not, of course, entail that science has not been uniquely successful as an activity which draws upon and enhances this ‘lay realism’.
Fred Dallmayr provides an example which highlights the potential tension involved in using discourse to orientate political practices and norms whilst retaining a realist ontology. He points out that:

It is not only conceivable but current practice that human society collectively (at least in its large majority) consents consensually that exploitation of nature is in the common interest and required for further progress... This communicatively established or sanctioned control, however, reverberates beyond its initial target – first of all into the sphere of inner or “internal nature”... From there – and this was one of the main insights of the older Frankfurt School – the road is not far to social and political domination (Dallmayr, 1991, 4).

By prioritising intersubjectivity over subject-object relations in his account of political practice Patomaki obscures one of the fundamental insights realism can bring; that our relationship with and location in real structures forms the context in which political projects must be pursued. His emphasis on intersubjective agreement as the basis of practice risks squeezing out any political concern with addressing our relationship with objective structures. It is always possible that this relationship will lead to reification and alienation even where we base our political practices on rational communication. This is precisely the problem Adorno identifies with modern subject philosophy; it believes it has identified the roots of freedom in the transcendental subject but draws attention away from the underlying relationship with the material world, the distortion of which leads to oppression and violence. One of the most important contributions of Critical Realism to IR has been to highlight the importance of the investigation of real structures in the face of attempts to base political theory on the characteristics of the knowing subject, such as those described earlier in this paper. By questioning the idea of an objective dimension of truth and emphasising the intersubjective, epistemic dimension Patomaki risks depriving Critical Realism of one of the main supports of its assertion of the importance of the ontological to political thought. In the absence of this support ‘getting it right’ begins, from the perspective of emancipatory practice, to become indistinguishable from ‘winning the argument’ or ‘reaching consensus’.

In contrast, by pointing to the unintentionality of truth, and its roots in the experience of corporeal human subjects Adorno brings the full force of the objective to bear on rational (inter-)subjectivity. It is on this basis that he can point to the problems with the notion that reconciliation between subjects can occur without any attempt to address the question of the relationship between subjects and objective structures. In practical political terms this means that we should not think that freer communication will necessarily further the cause of emancipation in world politics, since the relations between intersubjectivity and the underlying structures of reality will tend to, if not determine, then affect the course such communication takes. This is especially true in the context of a world economy based upon the exchange principle; just as Marx identified in liberal rights the mark of capitalist interests, so today we should be sensitive to the hidden interests and relationships which might lie within appeals to the progressive power of discourse. As such, an Adornian conception of truth indicates that a proper understanding of the practical political implications of truth cannot be drawn out by emphasising the epistemic dimension of the concept at the expense of its objective, ontological aspect.

**Conclusion**
At the broadest level, this paper has identified an ongoing discourse about truth in IR. This began with the critique of positivism and entered a new stage with the appearance of Critical Realism in the discipline. The paper has made three main points about this discourse. Firstly, the investigation into understandings of truth in the work of Critical Realists and Adorno began with an account of a postpositivist epistemic consensus regarding questions of truth in IR. Secondly, it confirmed the importance of the Critical Realist departure from this consensus, a departure which took place on the basis of an ontologically informed understanding of truth. Thirdly, it has attempted to identify some ways in which this discourse can progress beyond the critique of postpositivism.

Regarding the latter point, it has been argued that Adorno provides two points of orientation for those considering the normative and practical implications of realist truth claims, one positive and one negative. On the positive side realist truth claims should be seen as reflecting a normative and practical orientation towards reconciliation with and rational control of objective structures. That is to say, in identifying false beliefs and their sources we do not simply identify obstacles to be removed through instrumental action. Rather, we identify areas of society where the empowerment and engagement of human subjects must be increased. On the negative side Adorno offers a warning; we should not, through fear of instrumentalism, rely too heavily on the epistemic aspects of truth for normative and practical guidance.

No doubt, these conclusions will not appeal to all IR theorists who draw on Critical Realist philosophy as a means of formulating critical theories of IR. The Adornian notion of reconciliation will seem like an unnecessary addition to social scientific explanatory critique to some, muddying the distinction between subject and object and raising too many question marks over scientific activity. To others the critique of discursive justification as a source of political norms will seem to undermine the possibilities for judgemental rationalism and to involve an overly ontologised conception of truth. However, as was stated above, the intention has not been to outline a completed ‘Adornian IR theory’, but rather to use some insights from Adorno’s philosophy to carry forward both the discussion of the implications of Critical Realism for IR and the wider consideration of the relationship between understandings of truth and critical international thought. It is hoped that, even for those who disagree with its conclusions, the paper has drawn attention to important questions about the implications of realism for IR.