Gordon Finlayson and I debate two related questions. The first concerns Adorno’s and Habermas’s views about the existence, scope, and nature of ideology formation in the West; the second concerns the foundations of their critical theories of society. Where Habermas endorses Bell’s end-of-ideology thesis and turns his critical attention to the colonisation of the lifeworld, Adorno criticises a new ideology in the West, which he labels ‘positivism’. Furthermore, where Adorno uses the emphatic ideas of freedom, autonomy, and individuality that emerged under liberalism as the basis for his critique of capitalism, I argue that Habermas undermines the foundations of his own critical enterprise in Between Facts and Norms. However, Finlayson contests my claim that Habermas thinks that ideology has ended, while arguing that Adorno adopts the classical, pejorative, view of ideology. He also criticises Adorno for lacking unimpeachable foundations for his critique, and defends what he takes to be the normative grounds of Habermas’s social criticism: the normative content of the idealising presuppositions that underlie communicative practice. To borrow Nancy Fraser’s phrase, the disagreement between Finlayson and myself ultimately concerns what is really critical
about critical theory. By questioning the foundations and goals of first- and second-generation critical theory, Finlayson and I also broach the problem of the nature and extent of the damage inflicted on human life under late capitalism. At issue in our debate is not only what critical theory should be and do, but also the equally thorny problem of the depth and breadth of its criticism of reification.

For many, including Habermas, the radical Left is already defeated, finished, ‘done’ (to borrow Christopher Hitchens’ largely autobiographical plaint). Still, at a time when the welfare state compromise is collapsing under the impact of globalisation, and the class conflicts that Adorno and Habermas thought were always latent are now resurfacing, I shall venture the claim that it is premature to portray the Left as the moribund champion of lost causes. Finlayson also implies that I am among those who accuse Habermas of ‘selling out’. In fact, I do accept Tom Rockmore’s cogent arguments that Habermas dramatically changed his political stripes over the years.\(^1\) Now endorsing a view of the economy that hearkens back to Adam Smith’s infamously mystifying ‘invisible hand’, Habermas wants to shield capitalism from all but the most indirect forms of control by a citizenry which he nonetheless deems mature and rational. Although he admits that Western democracies do not satisfy their own normative principle of self-determination, Habermas is prepared to consider them legitimate to the extent that they pay lip-service to this principle in their constitutions. He also insists that citizens voluntarily limit their influence over political decision-making to such a degree that self-determination is completely eviscerated. In other words, Habermas has become an ideological spokesman for the *status quo*.

This is one of the points I make in my article. In my conclusion, I advance the claim that there are two possible readings of Habermas. In the first, he has become a positivist. On the second, more charitable, reading, Habermas is a liberal ideologue. But Finlayson simply ignores this second interpretation. For this reason, and others as well, I welcome the opportunity to respond to Finlayson here. In my response, I shall focus briefly on each of Finlayson’s criticisms which he conveniently groups around different themes: the viability of Habermas’s charge of performative contradiction, Adorno’s concept of ideology, Habermas’s end of ideology thesis, the normative basis of Habermas’s social criticism, and, finally, the grievous charge of positivism. Adorno is

\(^1\) Rockmore 1989.