

Addis Ababa University
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Department of Philosophy

Jürgen Habermas:
Modernity as Processes
of Rationalization

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Introduction

It is almost intuitive to ask: 'what is this?', when we are faced with something incomprehensible. This initial quest for *meaninging* the given triggers human rationality. Strictly it is not the quest by itself but the way that this quest is 'satisfied and justified' that gets an ever increasing focus in the rationality discourse. Here, *the quest* [human *reflection*] as an object *reflexively* is also part of the discourse.

The influence of an earlier emphasis on metaphysics, especially the problem of 'the one and the many', had its shadow in the epistemological quest; as if it is a quest for defining the one underlying rationality for all of humanity about any possible claims of knowledge. Thus if one has to tell a single important engagement in history of epistemology all through to 'modernity', it is the effort to *standardize* and *universalize* possible claims of 'human' rationality [Habermas 1981: 1].

Neither Aristotle's 'Man' [in the '*Man is a rational animal*'] nor Descartes' '*I*' [in the '*I think, therefore, I am*'] were *intentionally* meant to refer a certain historical or cultural subject. It was declared for an abstract [non-contextual] one, which had been at the root of the *subject-centered reason* and *philosophy of consciousness*.

It was this subject-centered reason and philosophy of consciousness, according to Habermas, that modernity radicalized and also pushed to an *indefensible* impasse. Neither Kant's critical engagement, to show legitimate limits of *Reason*, nor Hegel's *radical* shift through his concept of Objective Reason (Absolute Spirit), could successfully sustain the claim to purity of Reason. It is this concept of universal [neutral] reason and human rationality that had faced all forms of suspicion, distrust and severe criticisms in the 'postmodern' discourses.

This new wave of postmodern (sometimes referred as *anti-modernists* by Habermas) was dominantly engaged in a wholesale rejection of the *Enlightenment* ideal: the liberating potential of reason and reason alone.

Habermas argues that Nietzsche is a *turning point* in this postmodern movement where a major deviation from modern reverence towards reason begun to surface.

Habermas therefore wants to make a “*determinate* negation of *reason* by reason understood as *communicative action*” [McCarthy, (in) *Introduction to Habermas 1987: VII*]. This selective and cautious criticism of philosophical modernity put Habermas both with the friends and foes of Enlightenment.

My central theme in this essay is to show how Habermas tried to conceive modernity as a double processes of rationalization; a rationalization of both what he calls *the system* and *the lifeworld*. So that the one could be complemented by the other to maintain a certain balance for the sanity of social existence and its betterment through critical theory.

It is, therefore, concerned with central themes of discourses on modernity. The first chapter of the three chapters in this essay tries to address the issue of modernity from two angles. The first is Hegelian, that conceives modernity as a *process towards subjectivity*; and the second is primarily Weberian, that conceives modernity as a *process of rationalization*. Discussion on modernity will not be complete without a brief account of the enlightenment ideal and critical theory. Thus I have included these themes so that we can have a comprehensive background for understanding his theory of rationality in his argument that modernity is about processes of rationalization.

The second chapter directly deals with his theory of communicative action, following a preliminary discussion of his Linguistic Turn. It tries to show how the linguistic (communicative) paradigm is adopted by Habermas over the cognitive paradigm of *the philosophy of consciousness*. Habermas’s concept of rationality is also discussed specifically as *typically modern, post-metaphysical* and *non-defeatist*.

The third chapter, discusses the unity and differences between Habermas and some postmodern thinkers; specifically Jean-Francois Lyotard, Richard

Rorty, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. This discussion is preceded by Habermas's thesis of the colonization of the lifeworld by the system; by which he tried to psychoanalyze the postmodern emphasis on the different and the contingent as a reflection of this pathology. He, therefore, concludes that the postmodernists only add upon the problems rather than contributing to the solution.

Here again, after a careful presentation of Habermas's theory on modernity as double processes of rationalization, I have tried to reflect upon some problems that I think are inherent to Habermas's theory of rationalization. The major problems raised are: *Evolutionism, Homogenization, Relativism and the Babel of consensus, the essentiality of the procedural, the instrumentality of the communicative, susceptibility for a cognitive return, problem of identifying the final worth for the process of rationalization (its general telos) in modern societies*. These all are argued against Habermas's strong positions, not as a call for rejecting Habermas's idea about modernity but as problematic spots that should be further addressed to enlighten the communicative paradigm for justifiable common venue of communication.

Generally this essay does not compare different theories of modernity, but focus on important concepts related to Habermas's idea of modernity as processes of rationalization. Some postmodern philosophers are included only when I think them helpful in exposing both the values and problems of Habermas's position.

Most of *modern philosophical positions* were inconsiderate and sometimes even denigrating towards non-western cultures. But Habermas, as a critical modernist, is willing to open, at least by intension, the philosophical discourse on modernity to all interested. The communicative model of Habermas, which I think has a problem, even with its problems, is a much more progressive step to craft a common future, with constant critical engagement on clearing the ground for a fair exchange of ideas.

There are many original works written by Habermas and secondary materials written about Habermas's theories of communicative rationality

which I have got through English translations. But when I was working this essay, I could not get them in the way I want them to be. I have got them mixed with themes from sociology, psychology, history, political theory...due to Habermas's breadth and depth of thinking. I, however, tried to limit this essay with the philosophical themes alone.

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Chapter One:

Modernity, Subjectivity, and Rationalization

The concept *modern* has been mainly used to signify the advent of a new age (epoch) since its first academic use in the western world around *late antiquity*. But by the *middle of the nineteenth century*, it started to be used in a *substantive form* [Habermas 1987(b):8]. In contemporary discourses, however, its generic concepts *modernity*, *modernism* and *modernization* suffer lack of precision of use across different intellectuals and different disciplines.

These terms are used as methods of marking periods, as expression of specific culture, and as a representative of certain ways of thinking. But initially this concept was popular in movements of art and literature. Habermas recognizes the centrality of art and literature on issues of modernization, but his major concern is on philosophical discourses of modernity. It is “an ongoing debate among philosophers [about] the status of western culture since the Enlightenment” [Zoeller 1988:151].

The dominant intellectual current that Habermas has lived with, and specifically conditioned his work *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985), was *unfriendly* to the achievements and promises of modernity. Most of the arguments were directed against philosophical foundations of modern Western culture(s); such claims related to *neutrality of Reason* and *liberating power of human Rationality*. These critiques also believe that they, in some way, *transcended* modernity and deserve to be called *postmoderns* [*Ibid.*].

Major criticisms against modern conception of reason are based on important facts like; “[t]he overwhelming impurity of reason, its unavoidable entanglement in history and tradition, society and power, practice and interest, body and desire” [McCarthy in *Introduction to Habermas* 1987(b): VII]. Moreover:

To the necessity that characterize reason in the Cartesian-Kantian view, the radical critics typically oppose the contingency and conventionality of the rules, criteria, and product of what counts as rational speech and action at a given time and place; *to its Universality*, they oppose an irreducible plurality of incommensurable lifeworlds and forms of life, the irremediably “local” character of the truth, argument, and validity; *to the apriori* the empirical; *to certainty* fallibility; *to unity* heterogeneity; ...*to the unconditional*, a universal rejection of ultimate foundation in any form.[*Ibid.* VIII-IX *emphasis is mine*]

Habermas carefully shares these *postmodern* criticisms against modern ideals of a *subject-centered reason*. Modern achievements, especially the advancement of empirical sciences, have already put the purity of reason under question mark. Habermas understands how the border between philosophy and other sciences was getting thinner and sometimes crossed. The role of the unconscious and the irrational on the conscious and the rational was not considered a *mystery* as it used to be. The specialized sciences, including psychoanalyses, were introduced. Hence the modern philosophical paradigm, *philosophy of consciousness*, could not sustain itself up to the standards of its own offspring- the empirical sciences.

Though Habermas shares the critical aspect of postmodernists, he strictly argues against a wholesale rejection of modern ideals on *reason* and *rationality*. For him this kind of negative move towards our enlightenment that makes us see the weaknesses of modernity itself is an irrational retreat. It is a refusal, in Habermas’s word, not to *take the road* opened. It is lack of a *determinate negation*: a negation that also incorporates critical appropriation of promises and achievements of philosophical modernity [MaCarthy in the introduction to Habermas 1987(b): VII & XVII]. The question however is: what this philosophical modernity is? And which part of this modernity should be rescued, and how?

Before dealing with this question it is important to raise one significant difference in perspective that Habermas makes with the postmodernists. He, initially, is not comfortable with the prefix ‘*post*’ to modern philosophy. He rather wants us to consider the question “[h]ow modern is the philosophy of

the twentieth century?” and with a little irony added “[if] philosophy, too, succumbed to the aging of modernity, as for instance present-day architecture has...” [Habermas 1992: 1]. His answer was made clear long ago, when he boldly declared that *the project of modernity has not yet been fulfilled*, thus it is an Unfinished Project [Habermas 1981: 12].

Habermas, therefore, does not recognize the *post of modernity* [the claim to transcend modernity] in any of the philosophical discourses. He believes that “we are still contemporaries of the Young Hegelians”, who are moderns but very much conscious of the problematic of modernity through Hegel (since Hegel) [Habermas 1987:43]. For Habermas philosophical issues that are raised in the name of postmodernism are basically modern and are traceable to its *modern ancestors*. He, therefore, attributes the source of this confusion to a limited/ lack of understanding of philosophical modernity. The question again rolls back to what is philosophical modernity?

Habermas has approached this question from two perspectives. The first is Hegelian who characterized modernity as a movement towards *subjectivity*. The second is Weberian that has depicted modernization as a process of *societal rationalization*. Habermas’s strong commitment for the *Enlightenment* ideal and rekindling of the *Critical Theory* is based on his criticism of modern subjectivity and rationality. Hence let us first expose how Habermas thinks about each of these concepts: *subjectivity, modern rationality, enlightenment Ideal* and *redeeming critical theory*.

Modernity as a Process towards Subjectivity

Reflexivity (self-reflection) is justifiable when our world of knowledge fails us in many ways. The modern era embarked by this type of epistemological shock, specifically due to the Copernican revolution. That is partly the reason why modern philosophy becomes focused more on ‘epistemology’ than ontology.

This epistemological focus, according to Habermas [in line with Hegel] expresses itself in a form of subjectivity. Hegel defined this subjectivity as

'*the structure of self-reflection*' that happened to be a universal mark across modernity. For Hegel "the principle of modern world is freedom of subjectivity" [*Hegel quoted in Habermas 1987(b): 16*].

Though this idea of modernity as subjectivity took different forms, Hegel believes that it had its best expression in Kant. For Kant modernity is a form of *absolute self-consciousness*. Its major principles are: *Individualism*--recognition of a self-sufficient rational individual; *Criticism*--principle of thinking for one-self both in recognizing and forwarding validity claims; *Autonomy*--freedom from external authorities that squares back as responsibility for our actions; *Idealism*--principle of being guided by reason and reason alone (the responsibility of being reasonable) [*Habermas 1987(b): 17*]. Hegel, therefore, "understand[s] Kant's philosophy as the standard (or authoritative) self-interpretation of modernity" [*Habermas 1987(b): 16*].

It is true that subjectivity had its way throughout modernity, especially since Descartes' *Meditations*. The very title --*Meditations...*--echoes a subjective, self-reflective, engagement of Cartesian philosophy. Above all other implications, these meditations resulted with an important discovery of modern age in philosophy: '*I think, therefore I am*'.

Now the *self* is discovered with the most possible certainty that satisfied Descartes. Almost all modern philosophers endorse this Cartesian subject without modification until Kant brought another bifurcation to *the self* as a *transcendental* subject and *empirical* subject. There in Descartes, the subject of modern philosophy was crafted and refined out of the *Meditations*. What philosophers, after Descartes, did was to follow him in the self-reflective gaze of this *marvelous* discovery. The self in its internal gaze underlined modern subjectivism and defined the perspective of modern subject-centered philosophy of consciousness.

Even if no any other modern philosopher took the burden of proving *the self*; they have tried to address the problem of its cognitive implication in different forms. After Descartes the major contention, therefore, shifted from the status of the subject into what the subject is conscious about; as if the

search for *rationality* of an *autonomous* individual subject is finished in the *I think therefore I am*. The question now shifted to: How is it possible to know other than the immediate self? This, therefore, becomes an open challenge to this 'ego', immediately after its *unconditional* self-consciousness. The *liberated* self has to justify its own truth about the external world without the help of *the story of a rational creation* and providential revelation of an *All Good God*.

Descartes himself was at loss to go, *rationally* and *certainly*, out of the *self* and its *ideas*. The Archimedean point that he had sought to unravel the mystery of certainty and indubitable truth, when declared to be found, proved to be a labyrinth of *self-prison* that caught much of modern philosophical energy. Descartes tried to resolve this problem through the idea of an all good *God* the material world and a rational self. But this idea of God could not be more than an appeal for a Catholic God, to liberate a non-Catholic 'I' (a rational *ego* that he discovered without the idea of God). This is a live contradiction in his epistemology and metaphysics, messing the *logos* with the *mythos*.

No one pushed very hard the border like Bishop George Berkeley to free this self imprisonment of modern philosophy through radical metaphysics. He declared that *Things*, whether subjectively perceived by an infinite eternal perceiver or objectively perceived by a finite mind, *are* nothing but *Ideas*. So the labyrinth is declared to have no materiality. But there had been no easy way out of this modern riddle; the objectively existing *Things*, which Berkeley called Ideas, could not resolve the problems of knowledge of the external world. Even if they are claimed to be Ideas, they could not stop to be external. Hence it had called for different mechanisms of justification like *correspondence, representation, similarity, and participation* that had failed to prove our subjective knowledge is really about the external world that are declared to be Ideas by Bishop Berkeley.

Kant, however, gave modern epistemology its critical perspective. Not a critique of theories of knowledge but a critique of Reason itself. The

question, therefore, became not what we know for certain like Descartes, but what are the very *conditions of understanding*. Here Kant declared our world of experience to be a synthetic of *a priori* principles of the mind and the objective world in-itself. Universality, necessity, and certainty were tried to be secured through these natural *a priori* conditions of possible experience. But this was conceived at a huge cost of losing access to *the-things-themselves*.

This theory about universal *a priori* principles of the mind, at most, could explain the uniformity of experience across experiencing subjects and their intersubjective intelligibility; but it does not guarantee against a possibility of total illusions (across experiencing subjects) as far as experience is limited only to phenomena (without having access to the-things-themselves). Hence establishing an objective standard for our validity claims could not come out of subjectivity. The possibility of deception becomes a standing epistemological problem.

Habermas is not that much interested in the general epistemological history of modern subjectivism. His focus was on the problem that this subjectivity had faced in modernity; or the problem that modernity faced in its subjectivity. It is the challenge of establishing modernity's own normative standards by itself and out of itself. It is a determined search for an *objective* ground for a universal normative orientation that would help to standardize this autonomous rational subjectivism.

The effort to make the external world an objective standard for truth through theories of representation and reflection in many ways failed because of its unjustified metaphysical assumptions regarding the *rationality* and *reality* of the objective world. The traditional authorities that were used to serve as standards for validity claims were critically suspended and in some instances obliterated. It is only the structure of subjectivity: the *individual, rational, and autonomous* subject that remains to define the age. Modernity, therefore, was in a position that it "can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by

another epoch; it has to create its normativity out of itself” [Habermas 1987: 7]. The question is whether subjectivity by any means could execute the mission of establishing a justified and coherent normative orientation for modern ways of life.

When modern philosophy was struggling to ground the principles of subjectivity in unshakable grounds, the same principles had already infiltrated the social, political, economic and cultural life of western society. *The Reformation, The Enlightenment, and The French Revolution* were realized. In the lived life of modern Europe “the religious life, state, and society as well as science, morality, and art are transformed into just so many embodiments of the principle of subjectivity” [Habermas 1987(b): 20].

Hegel recognized an *unexampled* power of subjectivity in realizing human freedom for reflection that had undermined all fetters in the traditions including religion. But the alternatives that it provided were so multiple (rooted in each individual rational subject) to serve as a universal standard for a coherent practical life in a meaningful way. Hegel, therefore, is worried about the fact that the principle of subjectivity “is not powerful enough to regenerate the unifying power of religion in the medium of reason” [*Ibid.*]. Puzzled by the expression of *modernity as subjectivity* and its *lack of unifying normative orientation*, Hegel engaged himself in to criticism of *subjective idealism* for solution; which he identified with critique of modernity.

According to Hegel, subjectivity cannot be the starting point. It is only a moment of *Reason* actualized in a specific time, “[t]he modern world suffered from false identities because in day-to-day life as well as in philosophy it posited as absolute something that was conditioned” [Habermas 1987:33]. The transitory/the accidental [i.e. the subjective], therefore, cannot serve for normative orientation. That is why he projected a conceptual mechanism of an *Absolute Spirit/Absolute knowledge*, which, according to Habermas, is “an ethical totality that did not grow from the soil of modernity but was borrowed from the idealized past of the primitive Christian communal religiosity and the Greek polis” [Habermas 1987(b):30].

This Hegelian retreat, by *borrowing* the Absolute from non-modern *paradigm*, in order to fend the problem of modern subjectivity is, according to Habermas, a betrayal of the spirit of modernity's self-sufficiency. It should have to "obtain...criteria that are taken from the modern world and are at the same time fit for orienting oneself within it...from the spirit of modernity, one that neither just imitates the historical forms of modernity [in being subjective] nor is imposed upon them from the outside" [Habermas 1987:20]. Habermas further added that this criterion should have to be "fit for the critique of a modernity that is at variance with itself" [*Ibid.*].

Descartes, as we have seen, put subjectivity at the heart of modernity through *unmediated* discovery of *an existing rational Self*. David Hume casted an important doubt on the certainties of some of our rationalities, and proposed the legitimacy of *the probable* in knowing. Kant, through his critiques, tried to establish a justifiable field of inquiry for the autonomous self in the triple value spheres—the *theoretical*, the *moral and legal*, and the *aesthetical*. Generally, however, it is possible to say that modernity up to Kant dominantly lived the euphoria of a liberated rational self with strong hope in the new experimental sciences. There was no serious concern about the burden of the problem of modernity's *self-reassurance*; which, however, according to Hegel and Habermas, is the central problem of modernity. [Habermas 1987(b): 43]

It is primarily to Hegel that 'modernity become[s] a problem' [*Ibid.*] and it is this identification of the problem of modernity that heralded, according to Habermas, the 'discourse of modernity' [Habermas 1987:51]. Since Hegel, therefore, the problem took a clear form of justifying the rationality of subjectivity through an *objective* criterion within the paradigm of modern spirit [*i.e.* by reason and reason alone, without any form of regression to the traditions].

Habermas has found Hegel unable to solve the problem of modernity due to his retreat to traditions. The other three efforts, in the line of Hegel by Young Hegelians, to give birth to a solution for modernity's problem were a

miscarriage [Habermas 1987(b):86]. It is possible to assume the influence of these unsuccessful trials on Nietzsche's total decline from the project of redeeming modernity. Nietzsche, rather than looking for a solution, started to question the question itself: whether there is a need for an objective rational justification for subjectivity at all? He tried to show how the *concept* of *Rationality* is embedded in an irrational mood/attitude of 'the will to power'. He, therefore, undermines the whole ideals of modern rationality as a basis for coherent and liberated life of Humanity. This way, Nietzsche pioneered the whole constellation of postmodern movement against marginalization of the 'non-rational' and the different.

Unlike most of the postmodern critiques, Habermas believes that modernity can be redeemed. For him the failure to fend the problem of modernity does not lie in its essential Ideals; but it is due to a misguided search of its solutions within a wrong paradigm (*i.e.* the philosophy of consciousness) and from a wrong perspective (*i.e.* the subject-centered reason). He suggests "that the paradigm of the knowledge of objects has to be replaced by the paradigm of mutual understanding between subjects capable of speech and action" [Habermas 1987(b): 295].

He, therefore, changed the paradigm of rationality from consciousness to *language*, which is commonly referred to as *Habermas's linguistic turn*; and, totally dropped the perspective of *subject-centered reason* for an *intersubjective* communication act directed towards understanding. But it is important to question his claim too and see if it is possible to transcend subjectivity through intersubjectivity for an objective normative orientation? This is what we will discuss in chapter three, but now let us see another aspect of modernity – *rationalization*.

Modernity as Processes of Rationalization

Habermas started his *Twelve Lectures on Modernity* with a very provocative question of Max Weber: "why outside Europe 'the scientific, the artistic, the political, or the economic development...did not enter upon that path of

rationalization which is peculiar to the Occident?” [Habermas 1987(b):1]. Here Weber is referring to the socio-economic *advance* of modern Europe.

He tried to explain this specialty of *The Occident* through an extensive empirical study of *world religions*; where he attributed the Judo-Christian world-view with peculiar values that are responsible for the emergence of modernity. Here what interested Habermas most is the intrinsic relationship that Weber made between modernity and rationalization [Habermas 1984:6&7].

Weber developed a complex theory of rationality in line with his theory of social action. Two of these social actions that are relevant for our purpose are *instrumental rational actions* and *value rational actions*. The former is a kind of *formal rationality* where means and choices of means for an end are weighed; while the later is a *value rationality* which is directed by the virtuousness of the end, *where what costs matter little if the [valuable] end is successful* [Clarke 2006:12].

According to Weber the process of rationalization by which modernity has become real and also expressed itself took two important forms. *First*; “the process of ‘disenchantment’ which led in Europe to a disintegration of religious world views that issued in a secular culture” [Habermas 1987:1]. Due to this disenchantment process the instrumental rational actions were getting stronger and full control of the rationalization process at the expense of value rational action.

Second; the development of modern society and its rationalization was also a process of *differentiation*. This differentiation was primarily rooted in the two systems—the *capitalist enterprise* and the *bureaucratic state apparatus*. Through these systemic differentiations, Weber explained the process of “institutionalization of purposive-rational economic and administrative action” of modern life [*Ibid.*]. It is this purposive-instrumental rationalization that has penetrated the day to day life of modern society, which Weber finally universalizes as the only form of societal rationalization in the modern world. This concept of one sided rationalization has one significant

objective: “mastery of the world in the service of human interest” [McCarthy (in) *Introduction to Habermas* 1984: XVII].

Weber, therefore, could not find modern reason and rationalization as liberating as it has been promised in the Enlightenment Ideals. Even if he recognizes its ‘disenchanted’ power over traditional *world views*, *errors*, *superstitions*, and *prejudices*; he also counted the loss it has brought due to its failure to realize “anything that could fulfill the functions of ...giving meaning and unity to life” [*Ibid.*]. Moreover the institutionalization of modern purposive-instrumental reason led “to the erosion of freedom, as bureaucracies become an ‘iron cage’ that constrain human action forcing it into narrowly instrumental channel and stifling spontaneity” [Edgar 2006: 74].

Weber was not able to see a way out from this totalizing and constantly strengthening institutionalization of modern instrumental reason. He therefore ended in an *ambivalent* and obscure hope about the *fate* of modern society:

No one knows who will live in this iron cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth or old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For the last stage of cultural development, it might well be truly said: ‘Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.’
[Weber quoted in Clarke 2006:18]

Weber’s idea about the loss of meaning in the modern world is an old blame against modern subjective rationality since Hegel. But his conception of modernity as a function of societal rationalization, through disenchanting of traditional world views [*it does not mean irreligious for Weber but the emergence of a different structure of modern consciousness*], is an important contribution that even attracted

Western Marxists like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and the latter Herbert Marcuse against their master's [Marx's] thesis. Habermas also critically appropriated this perspective of Weber [Habermas 1984:144].

Marx considers reason and rationalization simply as reflections of the economic base that lacks any progressive potential. They serve class interests, for they can be no more than a partisan interpretation of the world from their specific economic position. But the realities of capitalism by late nineteenth and early twentieth century could not support this Marxist thesis. The rationalized ideologies of modern capitalism were able to manipulate everything across classes including Marx's progressive class: *the proletariat*. Hence the power of rationalization as a universal process that Weber advocated were an alternative for explaining modern capitalism even for the Marxists who were in some sort of theoretical crisis. This prioritization of 'societal rationalization' in characterizing the essence of modernity has also become the major theme of Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action.

Habermas, however, raises one basic point against Weber and his Marxist followers from the Frankfurt School; that their conception of modernity as rationalization based on social action is "not complex enough to capture those aspects of social action to which societal rationalization can attach" [Habermas 1984:145]. Here Habermas is referring Weber's reduction of all forms of social action into a single perspective of purposive-instrumental rational action. It is this *narrow* perspective, Habermas argues, that Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse have inherited too.

It is due to this limitation, according to Habermas, that Weber and his Marxist followers were unable to see another emancipative alternative form of social action; and ended losing hope in the possibility of any future human emancipation through *reason*. But Habermas has found another form of social action with emancipative potential; that he called

Communicative Action. Here Habermas is not substituting Weber's idea of purposive-instrumental rationality for a communicative rationality, but he is complimenting it with another important rational action by defining their respective (two) worlds within a world: the *system* and the *life world*. Hence in Habermas what we have is not a process of rationalization but two parallel processes of rationalization in modern society.

Habermas basically challenges all forms of distrust towards the emancipative potential of human reason. He believes that his *theory of communicative action*, as fundamental form of social action, helps to rejuvenate the Enlightenment Ideal and open a justifiable foundation for Critical Social Theory. Thus before our discussion of his theory of communicative action, it is better to raise some issues within the paradigm of Enlightenment and Critical Theory; which are significant in understanding the background of Habermas's emancipative theory of communicative rationality.

Enlightenment: The Project of Modernity.

Modernity as a process of subjectivity, from Descartes to Kant, theoretically realized an abstract individual subject that is let free from the burdens of *traditions* to stand by its own light of reason alone. The spirit of enlightenment arose from a strong belief in this *Autonomous Reason of the subject* as the ultimate appeal for solutions. The motto that the modern *man* should dedicate *her/himself*, according to Kant, is “[h]ave courage to use your own reason!” [*Kant in Foucault 2007:29*].

Habermas agrees with Kant's general definitions that the “Enlightenment is [*man's*] release from his self-incurred tutelage [*immaturity*]. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another.” Apparently this definition seems a plain radical call for subjectivity: to use one's own understanding *without direction from another person*. But it is also tied to the very problematic that modernity struggles to address as an issue of self-understanding—understanding of its own age.

Michel Foucault is, therefore legitimate to characterize the article where Kant defined Enlightenment—*What is Enlightenment?*— as marking

the discreet entrance into the history of thought of a question that modern philosophy has not been capable of answering but that it has never managed to get rid of, either. From Hegel through Nietzsche or Max Weber to Horkheimer or Habermas, hardly any philosophy has failed to confront this same question, directly or indirectly. [Foucault 2007:97].

To understand Foucault's insight on the potentiality of this engaging but constantly puzzling Kantian riddle to modern philosophy, we need to see a little further on Kant's article especially about what it means when he told us *making use of our understanding without direction from another*. More specifically, the problem in defining what constitutes this *direction from another*?

While the ancient Greeks were constantly uncomfortable with *the world of flux* in metaphysics, modern epistemology seemed to be worried about harnessing its own *self*-- as an *autonomous, subjective, rational* subject. Modernity has been very much befriended with subjectivity in its 'disenchanted' mood of deconstructing the traditional world-view. Weber explained this process of disenchantment as a process of societal *rationalization*. But this 'disenchanted' world that resulted from a rationalized subjectivity ended in a certain loss of common objective meaning except its strong faith on the liberating power of Reason. According to Guenter Zoellar, "Enlightened reason provided freedom from traditional authorities but left as their only replacement abstract rational principles of theoretical, moral-practical and aesthetical knowledge [*referring Kant*] with no significant integrative cultural force" [1988:152]. This loss of meaning also started to breed different forms of suspicion on the overall project of Enlightenment.

Formally, however, Enlightenment as a project 'to make use of [one's] *understanding without direction from another*' is the only perspective that remained relatively stable in all spheres of knowledge in the rubbles of

traditions. But this formal imperative alone could not re-establish the meaning lost in the same way as the previously binding *traditions* and *religion* had done. Hence, harnessing subjectivity for a common meaning and normative orientation occupied the central discourse of modernity. Habermas, following Hegel, termed this quest, a quest for modernity's *self-reassurance* [Habermas 1987(b): 43]. The paradigm of this search for self-reassurance, however, must be *without direction from another*.

What is this *direction from another*? What is excluded from the paradigm of modernity and its liberating project--The Enlightenment? Apparently Kant seems to answer it, as Foucault has also interpreted, that the direction of "someone else's authority to lead us in areas where the use of reason is called for" [Foucault 2007:100]. But this '*someone else's authority*' should not be limited to a certain form of rational self defense from external human authorities alone. It has to be seen in the general framework of the enlightenment; referring to so many things *other than Reason*, including human internal *desires, wills, and imaginations*. Besides; reason is also taken in its *individualistic* version where each subject must rethink the reason of others to make it his own.

Due to this refined appeal for a radicalized subjective reason, Kant could not dare to call his own age *enlightened*. As a friend of the *belief in the liberating potential of reason*, he was thinking about a *more rational* future. Hence he declares of his age positively, as an age that joined a process of the '*age of enlightenment*'.

This positivity about the Enlightenment is not equally shared. The exclusion of our *intuitions, imaginations, wills...* and reliance on *reason* alone was taken as dehumanizing instances of speculative philosophy. Nietzsche directly rejected the purity of reason and its supremacy over our will. For him any normative claim that is/can be promoted in the name of reason is nothing but a "transsubjective will to power ... manifested in the ebb and flow of an anonymous process of subjugation" [Habermas 1987(b):95].

Romanticism, in general, argues that the Ideals of *The Enlightenment* do not fully address humanity. It simply recognizes one part, not to say the least guiding and the most manipulating, of being human. It is the same humanity that is *willing*, also is *thinking*. Schelling, therefore, declares against a theory of the reconciling potential of reason, that it is “not speculative reason, but poetry alone [that] can ...replace the unifying power of religion” [Habermas 1987(b):89].

Habermas, however, sticks to the original ideal of enlightenment on the purity of reason and its emancipative potential. This unflinching position of Habermas has resulted into different debates, for instance, with Michel Foucault and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Enlightenment, by the definition, is to make use of one’s understanding *without the help of another*; and Hegel’s appeal for *love* and *life* as a *unifying power for intersubjectivity* is treated by Habermas as a retreat to traditions and a betrayal on modern ethos [Habermas 1987(b):30]. Hegel, therefore, was found guilty of appealing for a direction from *another*.

But, unlike Habermas, Foucault thinks that the purity of modern rationality is an illusion. It is always essentially infiltrated and inseparably mixed with *Power*. *Gadamer* too consider this claim for purity as one variety of prejudice. According to him,

the transition from the old theological hermeneutics to the enlightenment interpretations is not to be seen as a victory of reason over prejudice but as a change from one prejudice structure to another. For the Enlightenment, the key prejudice was the belief in reason itself, i.e., the belief that it could free itself from all involvement in tradition and then, from the side so to speak, examine these traditions in the clear light of reason [Mendelson: 60].

Unlike Nietzsche and Romanticism, Gadamer and Foucault do not totally reject the *critical role* of reason but question its purity in the production, distribution and use of knowledge. Habermas, however, argues that it is impossible to keep the critical spirit of reason without recognition of its

neutrality. He believes that such an effort will lead nowhere for it will be self-defeatist and fall in performative contradictions. We will see this issue in detail later in chapter three. Here it is only sufficient to mention this point of divergence.

Moreover, it is also important to note that, it is this objective of keeping the critical spirit on a neutral ground that has led Habermas to a *quasi-transcendental, post-metaphysical* and *fallible* but *non-defeatist* theory of communicative rationality. His theory of rationality will be clearer if we add one more perspective: idea of *critical theory*, besides *Subjectivity, societal rationalization, and enlightenment ideals*.

Habermas and Critical Social Theory

David Rasmussen has set the origin of Critical Theory in Hegel and Marx; its systematization in the Frankfurt School, especially Horkheimer and its development and sustenance to the present day in Habermas. According to Rasmussen Habermas is able to sustain critical theory through ‘various redefinitions’ [Rasmussen 1994:210]. Here we are not interested to deal with the whole up and down of critical theory but only to the point where it is related to Habermas’s theory of rationality and his conception of modernity.

Habermas had his mentors, Horkheimer and Adorno, in the Frankfurt School initially very much dedicated to the emancipative potentials of reason through critique. But they had already made some deviations from the orthodox Marxist version for updating critical theory to the realities of their period. Here the older version to realize social change through a critical engagement of capitalist economic system for the revolutionary class called *the proletariat* that would practically materialize the new liberated world socialism, was proving hopeless. Socialism took a very repressive form of Stalinism; Fascism developed at the hay day of the rationalization of modern western life; the working class movement was extremely weakening. Hence Orthodox Marxism could not sustain critical theory at least by the old assumptions.

Horkheimer and Adorno now turned towards an epistemological paradigm, to sustain critical theory in the form of a critique of Instrumental Reason. But this new direction led them more towards Weber than Marx. This attraction towards Weber finally ended by sharing the pessimism that we have seen in Weber's theory of a one sided understanding of societal rationalization. Thus they did not only lose hope in the liberating power of a critical theory, but in the whole project of the Enlightenment. They concluded like Weber that "the permanent sign of enlightenment is domination over an objectified external nature and a repressed internal nature" [Habermas 1987(b):110].

Habermas tried to explain the root of this problem, in Horkheimer and Adorno, through the philosophical tradition of subject-object dichotomy that they simply appropriated from Weber's theory of modern rationality. It is this dichotomization that always reduces all forms of rationality only into a dominating and controlling form of instrumental reason.

Habermas, therefore, wanted to drop this subject-object dichotomy for an intersubjective communicative action oriented towards understanding. This subject-object dichotomy is at the basis of instrumental thinking that is guided by subjective interests to exploit the object. Hence critical theory, according to Habermas, should escape the limitations of subjective and instrumental rationality. This, therefore, needs an important shift in conceiving and defining philosophy from a new paradigm- the paradigm of language. This linguistic turn in Habermas is meant to establish a non-repressive alternative theory of reason called communicative rationality.

Generally, therefore, Habermas has put multiple values upon this theory of communicative action that grounds the idea of communicative rationality. It is meant to serve as a means to justify his intention of completing the project of modernity; it is a way of harnessing modern subjectivity through an intersubjective validity claims implicit in everyday language; it is taken as a legitimate expression of the virtuousness of the Enlightenment hope in reason and modern rationality; it is also a way of keeping the critical fervor

alive for a better future. It is almost conceived as a solution kit for modern philosophical discourses. What is this theory of communicative action and communicative rationality?

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Chapter Two

Theory of Communicative Rationality

It is true that Habermas is an ardent but critical defender of the ideals of modernity: a belief in the emancipative powers of human reason and rationality both at the level of the individual and society. But his commitment on the possibility of realizing a *better* future through constant rational and critical engagement was made at the background of varieties of modern social pathologies. Europe, in its *age of enlightenment* specifically by the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, was full of *irrational* passions dominated by nationalism and colonialism which finally exploded in the First World War. The general hope for emancipation of mankind through socialism, as rationalized by Karl Marx, took the most repressive totalitarian shape under Stalin in USSR. Nazism and Fascism were *justified* as a way out to fight *enemies of social progress* in parts of Europe during the Second World War. The rationalization of irrational dominations through *mass deception in the culture industry* and the development of *mass culture* (Adorno and Horkheimer), were taking a strong social hold against possible hopes of emancipation.

Apparently, therefore, seen from the concrete life of modern western world throughout the '*age of reason*', Habermas's position sounds very odd before these despairing and open historical facts. Here it is tempting to invoke Herbert Marcuse's wonder against Weber and pose it again to Habermas: "*and this you call reason?*" [Clarke 2006:21]

Habermas's answer would be a clear '*yes*' like Weber before him. But, unlike Weber who takes this *manipulating reason* to be the only rationality of modern world, he further qualifies it as one among other forms of rationality. It is a reason based in an autonomous subject that contemplates an external or externalized object of manipulation for speculated ends. It can have no other *virtue* than domination and control. It is *purposive-instrumental* rationality that leads to unmediated interference in the object

of its desire to realize changes, indiscriminately towards both on the natural and the social world. It can only establish instrumental relations throughout; and this

instrumental relation between subject and object regulated by instrumental reason determine not only the relationship between society and the external nature ...[but also] both...interpersonal relations marked by the suppression of social classes and... intrapsychic relations marked by the repression of our instinctual nature [Habermas 1984: 389].

According to Habermas it is not, therefore, modern reason and rationalization in the nutshell that materialized all forms of unemancipated and repressing social existence; but it is a specific form of reason that has been identified as *cognitive-instrumental rationality*. Hence it is important to be checked from a destructive rush of judging the whole of modern reason and rationality by its non-representative and partial expression alone. Even within this partial feature of modern rationality, Habermas does not put the blame on the very nature of instrumental rationality but on its *sole monopoly* over rationalization of modern social existence.

Habermas, therefore, has no illusion that *any form* of reason and rationalization in modern society would result in a liberated state of existence. He rather admits that rationalization, in its one-sided development, is responsible for the crisis of modern society ranging from particular anxieties to total meaninglessness. For him;

the process of enlightenment is from the very beginning dependent on an impulse of self-preservation which mutilates reason because it can only make use of it in the form of purposive-rational domination of nature and instinct, i.e., in the form of instrumental reason. This does not yet prove, however, that reason remains subject to the dictates of purposive-rationality... [Habermas & Levin 1982: 17].

Habermas, therefore, dedicated his intellectual life to show how reason could emancipate itself from the *dictates of purposive-rationality* through another form of reason which he called *communicative rationality*. Thus he could not see any convincing reason to try an *impossible* retreat from the

belief in the project of modernity as a process of rationalization through a radical criticism of reason.

In the first place, Habermas considers this retreat as a logical *impossibility*; for it will be self-refuting to make a retreat from a belief in an emancipative power of reason, and try to perform this emancipation from the very belief by providing a *rational* explanation through reason itself. This, according to Habermas, leads to a trap of *performative contradiction*, a contradiction of performing what one tries to prove not to be performed. This is the trap, which he believes, that most *postmodern* radical critiques against modern rationality have been caught by.

Secondly; in order to get out of these aporias of modern social pathologies, Habermas pointed an important form of *alternative* reason and *rationality* left unnoticed and neglected at the *cross-road* of philosophical discourses of modernity. *Communicative reason*, for Habermas, is “an alternative way out of the philosophy of the subject” that underlines instrumental rationality [Habermas 1987(b): 294]. He also believes that it is not a new alternative, but it was an alternative that had been open to “the young Hegel, the young Marx, and even the Heidegger of *Being and Time* ...[but] they did *not* choose” [Habermas 1987(b): 295].

This communicative reason, however, due to its *communicative* essence, demands a replacement of the *paradigm of the knowledge of objects* by the *paradigm of mutual understanding between subjects*. This, to Habermas, means a departure from the philosophy of *consciousness* to join the philosophy of *language*.

Through this new perspective of communicative reason, Habermas wanted to show that the problem of modern rationality lies in unbalanced promotion of instrumental reason at the expense of communicative reason. Thus he wanted to challenge any form of totalized critique against modern enlightenment ideals of reason with a firm stand that “Enlightenment can only be made good by further enlightenment” [McCarthy (in) introduction to Habermas 1987(b): XVII].

The critique of modernity, therefore, should be limited to a critique of an abuse of rationality rather than swinging to an extreme position of distrusting modern reason as a whole. This can be possible, according to Habermas, when we change the old paradigm of consciousness for a new paradigm of communicatively structured life world towards mutual understanding. It is within this new paradigm shift that Habermas claims to develop his *universal* and *non-dominating* theory of communicative rationality. It is a new rationality perspective that will encourage pursuing and completing the project of modernity as a process rationalization.

The *Linguistic Turn* and *Communicative paradigm*

In the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness, we have a subject that is “an autonomous *monological* knower of an objective world or an autonomous instrumental intervener in the world” [Bernstein 1988: 586]. Modern subjective rationalism since Descartes has a problem of coming out of this *autonomous monological knower* to justify even the existence of *other minds*. Thus we find each philosopher of the paradigm “quarrel endlessly over the same issue” [Rorty 1967:1]; an issue of establishing universal and objective criteria for evaluating philosophical truth from its solitary meditation.

According to Richard Rorty, previous attempts to end this quarrel “[i]n Descartes [*‘clear and distinct ideas’*], in Kant [*‘transcendental method’*], in Hegel [absolute spirit], in Husserl [bracketing], in Wittgenstein [initially *‘by due attention to logical forms’* and latter on *‘by diagnosing the cause of their having been propounded’*]...” were unsuccessful. The failure was due to the fact that each new beginning, which he called a *revolution*, “were found to have presupposed, both in their criticisms of their predecessors and in their directives for the future, the truth of certain substantive and controversial philosophical thesis” [*Ibid.*]. He further pointed about the dilemma of this paradigm, in the manner of Hegel’s critique of Kant, that:

To know what method to adopt, one must already have arrived at some metaphysical and some epistemological conclusions. If one

attempts to defend these conclusions by the use of one's chosen method, one is open to a charge of circularity [*being self-referential*]. If one does not so defend them,...one is open to the charge that the chosen method is inadequate...[*the charge of having begged the question*']. [*Ibid.*]

Habermas, in his part, primarily attributed this predicament, not to the philosophers or its presuppositions as such, but to the very paradigm of subject centered reason or philosophy of consciousness. He therefore made his *linguistic turn* that will give him "advantages not only from the stand point of method but from the stand point of content as well" [Habermas 1992: 44].

Whether this linguistic turn in Habermas too is free from substantial presuppositions that will invite a problem of *circularity* or of *begging the question* is a problem for the next chapter. But for the time being let us focus on the exposition of what this linguistic philosophy is and the implications of the linguistic turn.

Rorty defines the linguistic philosophy as "the view that philosophical problems are problems which may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use" [Rorty 1967: 3]. By the virtue of this definition, we see that Habermas is not mainly interested on transforming language for philosophy; rather he is interested to *reconstruct* the *universal conditions of understanding* from communicative action directed towards consensus in ordinary day to day life experience. Here he claims to find the potentials of rationality (emancipative rationality) implicit in the validity claims of common speech acts.

The major thesis within this linguistic turn, as summarized by Anthony Pagden, helps to see more clearly and specifically where Habermas is heading through this paradigm shift. According to Pagden;

To assume that there is a clear external world available for "objectifying" description in a neutral language, that, ... ['] private mental reflection was . . . prior to public intersubjective

discourse['], is an *ontological error*, since our only understanding of that world, our private mental reflections, are them-selves linguistic, drawn from and thus drawn into, the public intersubjective discourse. The world cannot, for us, be prior to our description of it. [Pagden 1988: 522 *emphasis is mine*]

Here language is not simply taken as an instrument by which we name or represent reality; it is a *horizon or a paradigm* by which we exercise an intersubjective and communicative action oriented towards *understanding* and consensus. Intersubjectivity also should not be taken simply to signify a sum total of *impenetrable* but *interacting* autonomous subjects with their specialized rational claims, but it is a way of constituting one another by “recover[ing], highlight[ing] and explicat[ing] our dialogical being-in-the-world” [Bernstein 1988: 586].

Within this paradigm of language, Habermas identified a potentially emancipative rationality, that it is not identical with other theories of language paradigms. . According to Habermas other theories of language like *intentionalism*, *the use-theory* and *truth-semantics* suffer a limitation that “each of them captures only one of the three functions performed by language when a speaker comes to an understanding with another person about something in the world” [*Hohengarten in Introduction*, Habermas 1992: VIII]. It is therefore important to note the fact that Habermas did not simply join but *made* his linguistic paradigm within the philosophy of language.

Habermas, expanding on the ideas of a German psychologist Karl Buhler, states that communicative language has the following *irreducibly simultaneous* functions: first, ‘*to express the intention (or experience) of the speaker*’; second, ‘*to represent states of affairs (or something the speaker encounters in the world)*’; and third, ‘*to establish relations with an addressee*’ [Habermas 1992:58]. These functions are also reflected in the three ‘structural components’ of an utterance: *the propositional* (related to the truth of the utterance), *the illocutionary* (related to the rightness of the utterance) and *the expressive* (relate to the *sincerity* or *truthfulness* of the utterance). Each structural component again points to a world of its own: the *objective*, the *social*, and the *subjective* consequently.

Habermas argues that the three traditional theories of language fail to comprehend simultaneously the relationship between '*what is intended*', '*what is said*' and '*how the linguistic expression is used in speech act*'. [Cooke 1994: 55]

The Intentionalist Semantics (*from Grice to Benneth and Schiffer*) focus only on what the '*speaker means*' in a given context. Here one's own subjectivity is used as an instrument to influence '*an alien subjectivity*'. The intentions or purposes of the language user exclusively define the meaning- for- understanding at the expense of the *autonomy of internal structure* of the language. [Habermas 1992: 59&60]

Formal Semantics (*from Freg to Dummett*) is concerned with '*the grammatical form of linguistic expression*' where the role of '*the intentions and ideas of speaking subjects*' are excluded from constituting linguistic meaning and understanding. [*Ibid.*]

The Use-theory of meaning (*which Wittgenstein developed*); focuses on the background (*preunderstanding*) customary *practices* that *regulate the use of words and sentences*. Hence it promotes the idea that "[l]earning to master a language or learning how expressions in a language should be understood requires socialization into a form of life" [Habermas 1992:63].

Habermas, therefore, developed his comprehensive paradigm of language, as a basis of his communicative rationality, by breaking away from these limitations; and irreducibly integrating together the three functions of language developed within the traditional theories of meaning. On top of that, he was attracted towards the central thesis of speech-act theory that "the speaker, in saying something, does something" [Cooke 1994: 56].

What the speaker does in saying something and his explication of communicative rationality will be our next concern. But here we need to have a general impression that Habermas is after developing a system of *linguistic communication* that focuses on both the idea that *speaker does something in saying something* and this is related to a *conception of validity*.

This concept of validity, in Habermas, is not only limited to the *truth of propositions* but also give recognition to those validity claims in the *expressive* (subjective) and *moral* (normative) dimensions [Cooke 1994: 58] that were excluded by formal logic.

The Locus of Reason and Rationality

Habermas has two candidates for being *rational* and *irrational*; the *first* is persons who have knowledge and *second*, personal actions like “apologies, delays, surgical interventions, declarations of war, construction plans, conference decisions” that embody knowledge [Habermas 1981: 8]. He at the same time excluded non-human entities and natural phenomena like *storms* and *illness* from the rational/irrational domain [*ibid.*].

This form of specifying and defining the locus of reason in the human subject and his calculated actions share a strong commitment of modern *humanism*. The *logos* of Heraclitus, Plato’s *world of Ideas*, Aristotle’s *Unmoved Mover*, the Scholastic *Absolute Rational Creator* and such metaphysical repositories of reason that had been depersonalizing rationality (or minimizing the role of *active* human rationality) were disenchanting in modern philosophy. At least Habermas recognizes that modern subjective rationalism succeeded to this level.

Descartes has given the final shape of modern philosophy’s concern about the locus of reason by *proving beyond doubt* in the *individual subject* that is trusted with the whole world for rational reflection. He has shown, in *The Meditations*, how the human subject is more *clearly* and *distinctly* a *thinking substance* rather than a body. Modern philosophy, from Descartes to Kant, took reason and rationality as an intrinsic essence of the ‘*self*’. Habermas is very critical of Hegel when he tries to divert from this humanistic perspective through his concept of ‘Absolute Spirit’. Generally, therefore, it is plain to see how Habermas shares with modern rationalists the belief that reason and rationality is only human in the real sense of the term.

But, as we have discussed in the previous chapter, Habermas claims to find some weaknesses in modern subjective rationalism; which according to him is the central problem of the philosophical discourse of modernity. As the enchanting world of metaphysics had denied the subject an active rationalizing role through externalizing transcendental reason in the form of *God* or *Absolute Spirit*; the disenchanted modern world of subjective rationality could not justify its validity claims as a binding social norm. Each rational *ego* was left suspended to revolve in its own axis without producing a unifying truth or moral principle. Thus it is possible to see how throughout modernity that reason and rationality could not realize a justifiable common norm for all.

Habermas “could not consider the proposal to reduce rationality to a disposition of rational persons promising” [Habermas 1998: 308], he, therefore, turned to another proposal where he claimed to find the rightful place of reason and rationality—the day to day world of social action oriented towards mutual understanding.

According to Habermas there are two important aspects of social action: *strategic* (directed primarily towards control) and *Communicative* (directed primarily towards understanding) [Habermas 1981: 333]. These actions are guided by *instrumental* (or purposive) rationality and *communicative* rationality consequently. Habermas argues for their irreplaceable benefits; because “in order to survive and flourish human beings must be able to both to *control* their natural environment (through science and technology), and *communicate* effectively, so as to organize themselves in viable and complex social groups” [Edgar 2006: 24. *emphasis is mine*]. Essentially, it is important to note that Habermas does not favor the one for the other.

In strategic action participants are interested towards their respective success. The relationships that define this action are instrumental; every participant is seen as a means to an end for each other. In success, there is no serious concern about understanding the values of both the procedure

and the goal. The success of a strategic action is measured only by an achievement of an intended end.

Instrumental reason is therefore at the centre of this strategic action. It is only rationality of calculating the best possible means for a specific end. Weber had clearly explained how this purposive rationality had been institutionalized specifically in the economic and administrative channels of modern bourgeois society. This process of ever increasing purposive rationalization however created a system that increasingly dominates the freedom of each individual subject. From this perspective rationalization is also found leading humanity towards *loss of freedom* rather than liberating from *self-incurred immaturity*. This pessimism on the rationalization of modern society towards a rational/irrational [*Janus faced*] domination by instrumental reason was shared by Adorno and Horkheimer too.

Habermas also saw the danger that Weber, Adorno and Horkheimer had seen, he charted how *concealed strategic action* leads to *conscious manipulation* or *unconscious deception* in the form of *systematically distorted communication* [Habermas 1981:333]. But he did not reject the positive values due to the *apparent* problem that modernity as a process of rationalization surfaced. He rather pointed that “the problem occur when instrumental reason alone is used in the organization of social life” [Edgar 2006: 24]; and he suggested that the one sided purposive rationalization should have been complemented by another process of social rationalization which is called communicative reason.

This communicative reason belongs to the second aspect of social action which we stated as communicative action. Communicative reason “is expressed in the unifying force of speech oriented toward reaching understanding; which secures for the participating speakers intersubjectively shared life worlds” [Habermas 1998: 315]. Because of this communicative essence this action calls for a “presupposition of a *linguistic medium* that reflect the actor’s world-relations as such” [Habermas 1981: 94]. Here social actions are coordinated in an atmosphere of shared

understanding and intersubjective consensus and also helps to reproduce this shared life world.

Unlike strategic action where success is measured by an achievement of a goal, the success of communicative action lies on the shared understanding of validity claims made by participants that are *capable of speech and action*. Even though Habermas argues for the complementarity of these two social actions, he has also created an internal hierarchy between them. According to Habermas, “communicative action is the primary mechanism of social integration (in modern societies), and that strategic action is merely a secondary one” [Cooke 1994: 22]. He argues for the priority of communicative action because “the use of language oriented towards understanding is the original mode of language use, and that other modes of language use [for instance the ‘instrumental mode’] are parasitic on it” [*Ibid.*].

Habermas, therefore, neither situated reason and rationality in a ‘*pure ego*’ nor in any form of *metaphysical whole*; but in this ‘fundamental’ unit of social action called communicative action. But how?

Communicative Rationality

Through a reconstructive analysis of “the general structure of everyday communication”, Habermas tried to show the “potential for rationality implicit in everyday speech” [Cooke 1994: 4]. Here in the world of communicating subjects, participants *raise, accept or reject* different validity claims. These validity claims are, explicitly (at least one) or implicitly, about the three worlds that we have mentioned as *objective, social, and subjective*. Here the validity claims are meant to express that something is *factually true, normatively right, and subjectively sincere*.

The validity claims are mere claims of speakers that are *relativized* by its state of appeal to a hearer, as a yet to be justified claims. For Habermas this form of relativity and contingency are always a starting point of communicative action in modern societies where reason is *discentered*. It is

when reason loses its former guidance from established social norms. The simplest communicative act will complete its full course when a hearer responds with a 'yes' or 'no', where understanding is assumed. Here an intersubjective agreement *universalizes* the *relative* and *necessitates* the *contingent* as long as the reasons that supported the consensus continue to be accepted. Hence intersubjective understanding is possible not merely by the virtue of the propositions uttered, but mainly by the reasons that are forwarded to support the claims to validity.

We have already raised Habermas's idea that the speaker is '*doing something*' in '*saying something*'; hence a speaker is saying something by raising validity claims and he/she is doing something by getting in to an implicit obligation to provide good reasons for them if questioned. A speech act, the simplest unit of saying and doing in communication, is said to be successful when a hearer's response ends with 'yes', and is said unsuccessful when this response ends with a 'no' position.

Still the success or failure of communicative action is mainly dependent on the mutual understanding of the *rationale* given in support of the validity claims. Thus "we understand a speech act when we know the kinds of reasons that a speaker could provide in order to convince a hearer that he is entitled in the given circumstances to claim validity for his utterance—in short, when we know *what makes it acceptable*" [Habermas 1998: 232].

Understanding in Habermas, like Hans-George Gadamer, entails an agreement (a consensus) on the specific validity that is claimed by a speaker. But, unlike Gadamer, this understanding is not an issue of a hermeneutic process (a matter of interpreting speech act), rather it is an issue of justification (on the part of a speaker) and challenging (on the part of a hearer) the reasons provided on behalf of those validity claims at hand.

Rationality, therefore, is rooted neither in the speaker nor in the hearer alone, but in their intersubjective responsibility to engage in a speech act with good reasons. It is only from this perspective of an intersubjective paradigm of communication that each of the participants could be entitled

with the predicate of being *rational*. Habermas sometimes refer this universal responsibility of being rational: *accountability* [Habermas 1998: 310]. This gives us the impression that rationality is not a matter of choice in modern social existence (*i.e. postconventional* society).

Generally Habermas concludes that, within the communicative paradigm, rationality “has less to do with the possession of knowledge than with how speaking and acting subjects acquire and use knowledge” [Habermas 1981: 8].

It is through this paradigmatic shift, from cognitive and subjective rationality towards communicative and intersubjective rationality that Habermas thought to dissolve the problems of modern subjectivism. For him “[t]he transsubjective structure of language thus suggest a basis for answering, from the point of view of action theory, the classical question of how social order is possible” [Habermas 1998: 234]. Order can be maintained through intersubjectively developed universal norms.

Here in the new paradigm there is no need for an individual subject burdened to be rational for the whole of humanity (like Descartes) about valid principles of any sort; rather any valid norm will be reconstructed by intersubjectively communicating social actors who took an implicit burden of being rational in speech acts. Here again there is no need for *apriori* preconditions of understanding (like Kant) for justifying possible truths across subjects uniformly; rather it will be achieved with an intersubjective consensus only through/by the *power of a better argument*. This *objectivizing* of an intersubjective consensus, for Habermas, is not only for realizing a common normative ground in social life but also serves as a *neutral* stand for *objective* [as far as the reason holds the consensus] criticism of society (*i.e.* a possibility of *critical social theory*).

Habermas at last wants to make two important considerations that will have an adverse effect on his theory of an intersubjective consensus. *First* the non-argumentative consensus of conventional societies; and *second* the

possibility of strategic distortion in arguments that are made even towards consensus.

In *conventional societies* usually communications do not proceed forward from an initial 'yes' or 'no' response of a hearer [Cooke 1994: 29]. Because, established conventions within these societies make understanding (agreement) on validity claims almost *intuitive (unargued)*. Rather than engaging in arguments of *justification* and *criticism*, they usually endorse by a reference to an *accepted values of the tradition*. Here Habermas only tell us that a speech act, in such societies suffer lack of *openness* and *critical fervor* compared to *post-conventional* one's. Maeve Cooke thinks that Habermas did not give an adequate account for *this critical* [important] aspect of communication [Cooke 1994: 13]. But this alleged lack of emphasis can be excused from his conception of the general pattern of modern social progress as a process of rationalization, which will make these types of societies on the verge of collapse [a process of *disenchantment*].

The second problem is a possibility of distortion in arguments towards consensus and its impact on destroying the universal validity of an agreed claim. Thus Habermas, to avoid this danger of destruction of universal validity, goes on to discuss about 'necessary presuppositions' or 'strong idealizations*' that are implicit in communicative action towards consensus [Cooke 1994: 30]. These are universal presuppositions in all communicative actions whether arguments are very rudimentary or a standardized discourses.

Some of the *strong idealizations* include; "that participants are using the same linguistic expression in the same way, that no relevant argument is suppressed or excluded, that the only force used is that of the better argument, and that all participants are motivated only by concern for the better argument" [Cooke 1994: 32&33]. Moreover in more demanding arguments, he added the presuppositions that;

everyone would agree to the universal validity of the claim
thematized ;...that everyone capable of speech and action is

entitled to participate, as well as the idea that everyone is equally entitled to query any assertion, to introduce new topics, and to express attitudes, needs, and desires [*Ibid.*]

But Habermas does not argue that these presuppositions are realizable in everyday communicative action, nor are they to be realized in future societies; these are only *counterfactual* idealizations from implicit assumptions of communicative practice towards consensus in everyday life. They do not serve as achievable goals of communicative action, but as a *regulative* mechanism in non-coercive argument towards consensus. They regulate by avoiding possible conditions of distorted communication.

Generally this *regulative function* set in the ‘*necessary presuppositions*’ of arguments and Habermas’s concept of rationality rooted in the responsibility of giving *good reasons* (without specifying these reasons) in a speech act towards consensus shows how Habermas’s concept of rationality is developed in the form of a *procedural rationality* rather than the *substantive* one of the metaphysical tradition. Hence what we find in Habermas is not a rationalized value but a procedure of realizing rational values. This is one of the reasons why Habermas termed his theory of rationality *postmetaphysical* [Cooke 1994: 38].

This procedural rationality, though claimed as counterfactual, is also meant to serve for justifying a non-substantive (value neutral) critical ground for modern society. This means securing a justified position for Critical Social Theory that had been left in ambivalent despair by Horkeimer and Adorno of the Frankfurt School. Thus Habermas argues that he has successfully developed a theory of rationality which is not only *postmetaphysical* but also *non-defeatist* [Cooke 1994:43].

Meave Cooke referring to Habermas’s self-evaluation of his theory wrote that this theory

express a concept of rationality that does justice to the most important impulses of twentieth-century philosophy while escaping relativism and proving standards for critical evaluation ...This double aspect allows him to regard his conception of

reason as a distinctly modern one and to describe it as postmetaphysical yet non-defeatist [Cooke 1994: 37]

It is important here to expound further these summarizing concepts of communicative rationality as *distinctly modern*, *postmetaphysical*, and *nondefeatist*.

As Distinctly Modern: Habermas identified *four themes* that define a break of modernity *with the tradition*. He enumerated these defining concepts of modernity as “postmetaphysical thinking, the linguistic turn, situating reason, and reversing the primacy of theory over practice- or the overcoming of logocentrism” [Habermas 1992: 6]. Since these same themes are also referred by Habermas as themes of postmetaphysical thinking [Habermas 1992: 35-41]; I will discuss them there with the concept of being postmetaphysical. Here, however, I want to focus on one important theme that I think is not explicitly expressed while it is central in making Habermas’s theory of rationality *distinctly modern*.

We have already seen how Habermas conceptualized the philosophical discourse of modernity and its inauguration by Hegel in chapter one. Hegel was credited for starting the discourse because Habermas thinks that it was Hegel who for the first time identified the problem of modern philosophy. Habermas defined this problem as a problem of ‘*obtaining*’ objective criteria both for common orientation and critical stand point that had been formerly possible through religious world views and metaphysics.

Habermas therefore is satisfied to formulate this communicative rationality for establishing objective criteria out of the *spirit of modernity*. This spirit of modernity can be expressed by Kant’s enlightenment concept of making use of one’s ‘*own understanding without direction from another*’.

First, in Habermas, objective criteria for common orientation and critical engagement were made possible through an intersubjective consensus that encourages and even made it a *rational responsibility* to think for oneself independently. Rationally argued and agreed validity claims are meant to

serve as common standards for normative orientation and critical engagement.

Second, this was made possible through a theory that neither postulate *apriori* transcendental *preconditions of understanding* [like Kant], nor by presupposing the dialectics of a mysterious *Absolute Spirit* [like Hegel], that betray the modern spirit of a liberated (autonomous) subjective reason. Habermas made his achievement possible through a reconstructive activity of the rational potential in communicative action of everyday speech oriented towards understanding. Hence besides all other reasons, I strongly think that Habermas called his theory ***distinctively modern*** due to this major dissolution of the central problem of modernity.

As Postmetaphysical: Habermas identified metaphysical thinking with *identity thinking, Idealism, 'prima philosophia' as philosophy of consciousness, and strong concept of theory* [Habermas 1992: 29-34]. On the other hand he also put the following concepts as themes of postmetaphysical thinking: *procedural rationality, situated reason, the linguistic turn, and deflating the extra-ordinary.*

We have already discussed Habermas's theory of rationality (its procedural essence) and his argument for a shift from the philosophy of consciousness to a philosophy of language. But there are other themes in the postmetaphysical thinking that needs our attention, especially its non-foundational character, the situatedness of reason, and the pragmatic aspect.

Maeve Cooke defines foundationalism as "an attempt to establish the absolute, universal validity of some conception of knowledge or morality" [1994: 38]. It is true that Habermas's theory of communicative rationality does have a claim to universal validity. The validity claims for truth and moral principles acquire a universal status through uncoerced coercion of the better argument in an intersubjective consensus.

This Habermasian universal validity claims do not entail any form of final or absolute status; for they are always to lose this status of universality when another better argument proves to be more rational than what had supported these validity claims. But this new reason does not lead to an end for claims to universal validity; rather they take the temporal chair of serving as an improved universally valid truth or moral principle in an ongoing rationalization and reflection of the objective, social and subjective worlds. Hence Habermas has no foundational conception of validity claims that are held for ever and absolutely.

Habermas does not only deny absolute validity to the factual truth claims and moral principles, but he also argues that all the procedures and 'necessary presuppositions' for argument are open for criticism and change. Hence his theory of rationality should be understood fallibilistically both in content and procedure of raising, challenging and securing universal validity claims. It is this state of openness for criticism and change that made Habermas's theory of rationality, non-foundational and postmetaphysical.

Another postmetaphysical theme besides non-foundationality is the issue of a *situated reason*. Habermas does not have an idealist conception of a transcendental pure *ego* that solely rationalizes and produce truths of every kind for all. He, therefore, shares the idea of other modern empirical sciences in the *humanities* that "were infused with a historical consciousness that reflected the new experiences of time and contingency within an ever more complex modern society" [Habermas 1992: 34].

Within communicative rationality, the context-transcending reasons through intersubjective consensus are understood initially context-bound; for they are raised by historically and socially contingent participants of a speech act. It is through an argument, an understanding, and a consensus that rationality will get the status of context-transcendence. This conception of reason as situated in specific time and definite socio-cultural practices, according to Habermas, is again one of the reasons why his theory of rationality is properly postmetaphysical.

Lastly Habermas strengthen the postmetaphysicality of his theory through the idea of '*deflating the extraordinary*'; which is meant to abandon the priority of theory over practice and philosophy's privileged role over all other sciences. Habermas's philosophical engagement itself is not only theoretical and analytical; but it is also a reconstruction of potentials of rationality from particularly communicating participants oriented towards understanding. It is due to this mutual reconstitutive undertaking of theory and practice that he called his project a *Formal (Universal) Pragmatics* [Habermas 1998: 1].

Habermas, therefore, is against an exaggerated emphasis on theory and also the traditional provision of a specialized role *as interpreter and usher* to philosophy. He argues that philosophy should take its symmetrical role as *stand-in* with other reconstructive sciences. This, according to Habermas, liberates philosophy from western logocentrism that reduces validity only to *propositional truth* and *theoretical reason* [Cooke 1994: 41]. It is only through unprivileged engagement with theory and practice that philosophy could overcome the limitation to propositional truth and develop a comprehensive multi-dimensional perspective towards the worlds of *facts, moral and legal principles, and art and expression* [*Ibid.*].

As Non-defeatist: Maeve Cooke discusses the non-defeatist nature of Habermas's theory of rationality from two sides [Cooke 1994: 43]. The first is its claim to triumph over *relativism*. The problem of relativism is said to be a lack of unifying normative principles due to contingencies rooted in different forms of life. Habermas's argument to transcend contexts, through an intersubjective consensus by the only power of a better argument, makes his theory of rationality non-defeatist. In Habermas, there is no way of degenerating universal consensual meaning for a non-prescriptive norm of '*anything goes*'.

The second point for being non-defeatist in Habermas is his idea of 'undistracted subjectivity and intersubjectivity'. In the theory of communicative rationality, each subject is free to raise a universal validity claims and get into the argument. It is possible to think that part of initial

subjective validity claims do not get an intersubjective universal recognition. But this exclusion can only be made when the subject fails to support them with good and acceptable reasons or another well supported argument comes out of the argument. Here we should remind that the subject participates freely in the exclusion of his unjustified claims and also in creating the subject transcending universality out of the discourse. It is due to this free consent that the subject is said *undamaged*.

On the other hand once participants rationally set their universal validity claims, it will have the power to *coerce (uncoerced coercion due to the better argument)* for common normative guidance. Practical life is not left to personal discretion but to undamaged intersubjective values. Thus Habermas's theory of rationality does not fail both the free promotion of the subject and the power to a meaningful coercion of intersubjective universal validity claims. This undamaged subjectivity and intersubjectivity in Habermas's theory of communicative rationality is, therefore, called *postmetaphysical yet non-defeatist*. But one has to note carefully that these claims to undamaged subjectivity and intersubjectivity are always counterfactual, they have *only a regulative function* for normative guidance and critical undertaking.

Generally Habermas's effort to show an alternative form of rationality to challenge the despairing instrumental rationality of the system is meant to regenerate the enlightenment ideal of human liberation through rationalization. This is also the central project of modernity. Habermas therefore conceive modernity as two important processes of rationalizations (the life-world and the system) against the reductive theories of modern rationalization to its instrumental feature. He attributed all pathologies of modern society to unbalanced promotion of the system at the expense of the life world which further went to the extent of what he called *colonization of the life world*. The next chapter will raise Habermas's thesis of the colonization of the life world and critically question his theory of modernity as processes of rationalization from a postmodern perspective.

Chapter Three:

Modernity, Rationality, and Postmodernity

This chapter tries to evaluate Habermas's theory of modernity as double processes of rationalization, from a postmodern perspective. Postmodernity is made a part of this chapter, for its different and sometimes opposite perspective on modernity that would help to enrich our insight for both understanding and evaluating Habermas's position.

Due to our traditional positivity towards rationalization, the very title of this essay: *Modernity as Processes of Rationalization* could suggest positive valuation on modernity. But by now our discussion reached to a point that modernity as rationalization could mean *domination* [at least for Weber, Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas] and a potential for *emancipation* [at least for Habermas].

Maeve Cooke classified Habermas justifiably in both traditions of *pro-enlightenment* and also *counter-enlightenment* [Cooke 1994: X]. He really shares both the negative and positive hermeneutics of modern rationalization. While Weber, Adorno and Horkheimer conclude that modernity has no rational hope for societal emancipation; Habermas argues that this pessimism is a result of hasty generalization from an incomplete and one-sided process of modern rationalization. Hence he wanted to speed up the other tier of the rationalization process for balanced emancipative and *complete* processes of rationalization in modern society.

It is not only the moderns [Weber, Adorno and Horkheimer] that had immanently developed a negative hermeneutics of modern rationalization but also major figures of the *postmodern* philosophers [Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty] has critically challenged Habermas's hope for a better future through cultural rationalization of modern social existence. They basically attacked the core ideal of Enlightenment on 'purity of reason'. They argued that there is no

clear border between *reason/rationality* in one side and the *other-of-reason/the non rational* on the other. Besides, they suspected the success of such a universal project as societal/human emancipation.

So much so, however, it will be unjust to generalize the position of these friends of *negative dialectics* [Adorno] *deconstruction* [Derrida] and all *tendencies to unmask the non-rationality of the project of modernity* [Foucault, Rorty, Lyotard,] as antithetical to Habermas's theory of communicative rationality. It is very crucial to see how Habermas also shares, in part, their significant critique against the processes of modern rationalization. An important perspective of Habermas's affinity with the radical critiques of modern reason is clearer in his theory of *colonization of the lifeworld* by the system.

Colonization of the Lifeworld

Habermas defines the problem of mythical worldviews as a problem of differentiating between nature and culture. In the world of *myths* and *magical practices*, there is no conceptual difference "between things and persons, between objects that can be manipulated and agents--subjects capable of speaking and acting to whom we attribute linguistic utterances" [Habermas 1984:48]. Hence any form of physical disability or natural calamity is taken to be a *moral failure* [Ibid.].

This confusion of nature (objective world of facts) and culture (objective world of social relations) results in what Habermas called *a reification of worldviews* [Habermas 1984:50]. This reification, in turn, could not let free individual's internal-world or subjectivity to which they only can have a privileged access.

Habermas does not consider this insufficient differentiation of the *objective*, the *social* and the *subjective* worlds, and their accompanying lack of reflexivity on the mythical worldviews, as colonization of the lifeworld. He takes it as a state of *closedness* [Habermas 1984:52]. He reserved the colonization thesis for a rationalized [not mystified] imposition of the

institutionalized and systematized worldviews (intentionally or unintentionally) upon free communicative action oriented only towards consensus in everyday life. Thus his thesis of *colonization of the lifeworld* is specifically a *modern* phenomenon.

The characterization of *emergence* of modern society can therefore be interpreted not as a movement towards *freedom* in the strict sense, but as a movement towards *openness*. According to Habermas, “[t]o the degree that the lifeworld of a social group is interpreted through a mythical worldview, the burden of interpretation is removed from the individual member, as well as the chance for him to bring about an agreement open to criticism” [Habermas 1984:71]. As long as worldviews remain *sociocentric* [*in Piaget’s sense*] and *reified* “actions cannot reach that *critical zone* in which communicatively achieved agreements depend upon autonomous yes/no responses to criticizable validity claims” [*Ibid. emphasis is mine*].

Habermas is not explicit about what this *critical zone* is, but it is very plain to see that it refers the project of modernity and enlightenment where *its motto* is declared to be “*sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own reason!” [Kant in Foucault 2007:29]. Habermas is careful not to judge that mythical world views are inferior directly, but he boldly declares that they do not qualify to be *rational*. For him, without realizing an autonomous subjectivity that can freely engage in communicative action oriented towards understanding, it is impossible to be rational.

According to Habermas, therefore, “[t]he project of modernity signifies the emergence of autonomous critical rationality and the differentiation of western culture into the three autonomous value-spheres of science, universal morality and law, and art ...[that have] issued from a historical breakdown of the classical Judeo-Christian worldview” [Matustik 1989:144].

These differentiations, within western culture were accompanied by institutionalized professionalism. This again facilitated the way towards

rational and strategic interference on the communicative rationality of the lifeworld. Habermas briefly summarized this process as

This professionalized treatment of the cultural tradition brings to the fore the intrinsic structure of each of the three dimensions of culture...[i.e.] cognitive instrumental, moral practical and aesthetic-expressive rationality, each of these under the control of specialists who seem more adept at being logical in these particular ways than other people are . As a result the distance has grown between the cultural of the experts and that of the larger public. What occurred to culture through specialized treatment and reflexion does not immediately and necessarily become the property of everyday praxis. With cultural rationalization of this sort, the threat increases that the life-world, whose traditional substance has already been devalued, will become more and more impoverished. [Habermas 1981: 8-9]

It is this impoverishment of the lifeworld according to Habermas that resulted in one of the pathologies of modern society: *loss of meaning* [Habermas 1987:325-827]. The lifeworld, in Habermas, is not for direct definition. It is “formed from more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions”, and “also stores the interpretive work of preceding generations” [Habermas 1984: 70].

The rationalization of a lifeworld means the *decentring* of a background *cultural stock of knowledge* and increasing *openness* of this *lifeworld* for communicative action oriented towards consensus. It is a decentring of hegemonies of interpretive paradigms and an increasing openness to intersubjective critical evaluation. The more the life-world gets rationalized, the more this unproblematic background consensus of traditional norms becomes questionable to be *redeemed or rejected* only through communicative action oriented towards understanding.

This means at the same time *overburdening* of the means for realizing communicative action oriented towards understanding. Here lies the root of the second pathology of modern society: *the loss of freedom* which is clearly what Habermas calls the colonization of the lifeworld by the system [Habermas 1987: 325-327].

Habermas discusses two strategic moves towards the lifeworld that modern rationalization has made to relax the overburdened medium of communicative action for social integration. These are the

one that 'condenses' communicative action and one that replace it. The former refers to generalized forms of communication [like the mass media] that do not replace reaching agreement in language but merely condense it (make it both *denser and more abstract*), and thus remain tied to lifeworld contexts. The latter refers to money and power, the 'steering media' that uncouple the coordination of action from reaching understanding altogether [Cooke 1994:135].

Though the media tends more towards professionalization, and promote expertise perspective; it always is open and *opens up a general public sphere*. Hence it does not totally lose the emancipative potential, as far as it is in the paradigm of communicative action towards consensus. But money (the market and the economy) and power (the state and the administration), *uncoupled* from communicative action, could be used *either positively* to protect the life-world from organized domination *or negatively* to "subordinate the lifeworld to the systematic constraints of material production ..." [Habermas 1987:328].

Habermas sadly declared that *it is the negative interference of money and power* that really happened due to the rationalization of the lifeworld in modern societies. It is this clear imbalance of interference that brought the colonization of the lifeworld by the system and its deformation. It is this deformation by loss of freedom that initiated, according to Cooke's interpretation, the

emergence of new social movements ...[including] the ecology movements, the feminist movement, experiments with 'alternative' lifestyles, local autonomy group, gay liberation, etc...[which] are primarily concerned not with the compensations that the welfare state can provide but with defending and restoring endangered forms of life [Cooke 1994:137].

Here it is important to note the relations between these new social movements as evidence and a reaction to the pathologies of modern societal

rationalization; and the ideas of postmodern thinkers. Especially a postmodern distrust to systems theories and grand narratives in one hand, and their fellowship with the *particular*, the *different*, the *marginalized* (including the other- of- reason). Habermas does not seem happy about grounding philosophical reflections (of *postmodernity*) on what he argues are symptoms of modern social pathologies. He seems to think that this type of philosophical reflection is a reflection on a colonized and colonizing pathology of modern rationalization process; which curtains the emancipative potential on communicative rationality.

Before passing to the next topic of Habermas's postmodern challenge, I want to comment on Maeve Cooke's idea on how Habermas "is guided by the spirit of Karl Marx... [how] Habermas...finds it useful to operate with a two-level model. Where Marx refers to a base and superstructure,...Habermas distinguished between a system and lifeworld as the dimensions of material and social reproduction, respectively" [Cooke:1994:X].

It is true that Habermas is more than being guided by Marx; he himself declared that he *value[s] being considered a Marxist*, in one of his interviews [Habermas 1979: 6]. But I strongly insist that Habermas is more guided by the spirit of Kant than Marx at this specific scheme of a bi-pedal [lifeworld and system] process of societal integration and rationalization. I think it is legible to digress a little and show the Kantian link.

One of the important conceptualization of reason set in Kant's *What is Enlightenment* is the distinction he made between *public* and *private* use of reason [Kant in Foucault 2007:31-32]. Habermas did not only share the double nature of this classification of reason in the form of communicative and strategic reason but also the background explanations that Kant forwarded for these distinctions.

First, Kant made freedom a precondition for Enlightenment [Ibid]; and we have seen how Habermas too made freedom from traditional normative dictation a precondition for communicative rationality.

Second, Kant argued that *public use of one's reason must always be free* to the extent of letting people to *argue as much as and about what one will[s]*; that is without substantial limits to realize *enlightenment among 'men'* [*Ibid.*]. Habermas also claims to have a communicative rationality that is *procedural* without substantial limit, where any query by anyone interested could come to the argument; for it is the only way towards the ideals of emancipation.

Third, Kant argued that when we are part of a system by taking *a particular civil post or office*, which he called, *private use* of reason, freedom is restricted and obedience is demanded [*Ibid.*]; Habermas too argues that in strategic action when instrumental reason takes the place of communicative reason, freedom is lost and domination/colonization reigns.

Lastly and importantly, Kant tried to calculate the balance where restriction in private reason could be justified. He believes that

[m]any affairs which are conducted in the interest of the community require a certain mechanism through which some members of the community must passively conduct themselves with an artificial unanimity, so that the government may detect them to public ends, or at least prevent them from destroying those ends [*Ibid.*].

Habermas too acknowledges the importance of 'normal dose' of strategic interference to relax the over-burdened medium of communicative rationality through an instrumental reason that *overpass the consciousness* of the individual actors (which Kant called *passivity*).

Generally with all her proper and revealing insight on interpreting Habermas's theory of communicative rationality, I do not think that Cooke did right in *Marxization* of Habermas in the lifeworld/system scheme of modern societal integration and rationalization.

Communicative Rationality and Postmodern Challenges

Habermes tried to develop his theory of rationality from *double battlefront[s]* that has made “the rehabilitation of the concept of reason a double risky business” [Habermas 1987b:341]. The first battle field is against the *traps* of subject-centered reason that has taken a shape of totalitarian instrumental rationality. Here a subjective autonomous ‘ego’ monopolizes the regime of truth and normative standards. This had been what Descartes and other modern philosophers up to Kant were trying to accomplish.

The second battlefront is not totalitarian but against a “totalizing characteristics of an inclusive reason that incorporates everything and, as a unity, ultimately triumphs over every distinction” [*Ibid.*]. This is where the boundaries of reason and ‘other-of-reason’ are lost in the name of transcendental unity [in Hegel]; and most of postmodern discourses that has *blurred* the boundary between reason and ‘non’- reason [in Nietzsche, Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault].

Even if there are disagreements between modern and postmodern perspective of rationality, one thing is not so much controversial between them. Both conceive modernity essentially to be about exaltation of subjective reason and strong trust in its emancipative potential. But they differently value this essence of modernity upon which they have a relative agreement. As we have already discussed, while Habermas critically develops a positive liberating potential out of modernity; postmoderns only see its repressive negativity.

Here my intention is neither to dichotomize Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality with the whole philosophical corpse of postmodernity; nor to make it a generalized modern versus postmodern discussion. But it is to raise major questions forwarded against Habermas by important representatives of the postmodern movement; so that we can get a more critical insight for understanding and evaluating Habermas’s theory of modernity as processes of rationalization.

It will be wrong to throw all postmodern thinkers into an identical basket, for there are some basic internal differences among themselves. But one perspective seems to be shared across these thinkers with different intensities. Postmodern thinking, as Stuart Sim wrote, is “more concerned with destabilizing other theories and their pretensions to truth than setting up a positive theories of its own”; he also legitimately commented that “to be sceptical of the theoretical claim of others is to have theoretical claim, a definite program of one’s own, if only by default [Sim 1998:13].

It is this nihilistic [Nietzsche], deconstructive [Derrida], solidly contextualistic [Foucault], ethnocentric [Rorty]; and general distrust for foundations and grand narratives [as in Lyotard] that tried to challenge Habermas in his theoretical reconstruction of formal (universal) pragmatics. But when we see the arguments of these philosophers ‘for’ or ‘in’ their positions; we also get some basic shared worries and suspicions, regarding traditional epistemology, between Habermas and these postmodern thinkers.

Lyotard and Rorty

Jean-Francois Lyotard argues against *grand narratives* and *system theories* for what he called *little narratives* with particular objectives of a limited time; this is due to the fact that such theories used to be *authoritarian* and are *losing their credibility* [Sim 1998:8-9]. He however doesn’t want to preach *social disorder*; rather he is interested in *decentring* the monopoly of founding value judgments within totalizing theories. He wanted to establish it *on a case-by-case* pragmatic basis [sim 1998: 331]. To reinforce his arguments against any tendency of universal validity; he uses two concepts *the event* and *Defferends*. The former refers unexpected *occurrences* which “cannot be predicted or encompassed within any neat universal theory”; and the latter refers an existence of unavoidable conflict of interest in each group which Lyotard points as “a different *phrase regime* whose objectives are incommensurable with the other, and neither of which has any ethical right to make the other conform to its wishes” [Sim 1998:10].

We can see that what worried Lyotard most is the possibility of a resulting subjugation in the name of universal truth or moral principle against the

value of an individual or a particular group (*phrase regime*). It is also these same worries that partly define Habermas's theory of communicative rationality.

Habermas really showed how he shared Lyotard's and most of other postmodern worries about the possible marginalization trend in grand narrative such as his theory of communicative rationality. But we have already discussed how he argued that his theory successfully reconciled the universal and the particular in a way realizing, what he called *undamaged subjectivity*, and *undamaged intersubjectivity*.

The problem with Lyotard and other postmodernists, who are skeptical about grand narratives, is their own implicit *negative grand theoretical perspective*, that the *different*, the *individual*, the *other* ...will not get justice from any form of universal theoretical approaches. That is why Habermas accused their arguments for committing a performative contradiction. Habermas, however, is trying to tell them always that he has already made possible a theory of communicative rationality that allows universal validity claims of truth, rightness and truthfulness without any coercion or marginalization; and without falling to performative contradictions too.

It is true Habermas's theory of communicative rationality tried to accommodate openly issues of Lyotard like *The event* and *The differend*. Lyotard in his part did not directly argue point by point on how Habermas's theory of communicative rationality fail to be open and become authoritarian; he rather prefers "not to fight [any] grand narrative but simply to stop believing in them: in which case, they will be assumed to wither away" [Sim 1998:9].

It is also common to charge Habermas's way of promoting the project of modernity, as a promotion of perspectivism; while Habermas in his turn backfires the same bullet on postmodern thinkers. For instance Richard Rorty, one of the postmodern thinkers, expresses modernity as promoting the idea that the "philosophers as knowing something about knowing which nobody else knows so well" [Matustic 1989:152]. But I do not think that this charge will prove valid in Habermas's case; *primarily*, because he strongly argue for unprivileged role of philosophy, and its symmetry with other

empirical sciences; *secondly*, he is not claiming a privileged insight but reconstructing what is empirically and practically open in an everyday speech acts of communication oriented towards understanding.

On the other hand, however, Lyotard conceives the duties of philosophers as a responsibility to “help [a] suppressed *phrase regime* find voice, which he called, *philosophical politics*” [Sim 1998:10]; Derrida’s advise to read between the lines in written literature for varieties of meaning; Foucault’s archeological and genealogical method of exposing knowledge/power nexus,....and all forms of defense for the different and marginalized in postmodern thinking, make these thinkers more susceptible for a change of perspectivism than Habermas. After all what is the peculiarity of Lyotard’s responsible philosophers to be trusted as a mouth piece for the different and marginalized? How could they, including Lyotard, triumph over the battle of *phrase regimes* to serve their role a disinterested purpose of the suppressed? Rorty, of course, has a typical postmodern answer; that he need not justify his position; for the very reason that postmodernity is anti-foundational and as a *pragmatist* he is “less interested in whether theories are true or false than whether they are useful and interesting” [Sim 1998:13] in specific practical instances.

Rorty further argues that “any move beyond the *floating, ungrounded conversation* to specifications of that which counts as *undistorted conversation* commits the philosopher to some form of foundationalism” [Matustic 1989:152]. It is this quest for foundation that could not be satisfied without questionable presuppositions, finally leads to modern skepticism. Hence he concludes that skepticism and trends in modern philosophy [to which Habermas is included] have a *symbiotic* relationship [*Ibid.*]. Since a quest for any foundation is wrong, it will not get us some where. The *no-where* could mean nothing but scepticism in epistemology. His final suggestion is to end philosophy as an *agency of criticism* so that one would escape scepticism fully [Matustik 1989: 150]. This is clearly against Habermas’s intention of redeeming the critical side of modern social philosophy.

Rorty's alternative for philosophy is again very anti-*Hebermasean*. He advises to "remain ethnocentric [that is prejudiced] and offer examples rather than raising universal validity claims in communicative action" [*Rorty quoted in Metustik: 153*]. Here there is neither a need to justify positions nor a norm to evaluate others, but only free engagement to conversations. Besides, Rorty argues that neither success nor consensus is the objective of the conversation; but it is simply living a way of life in the western culture [*Rorty 1980: 732*]. It needs no final commensuration and also "subverts any attempt to close off conversation by some privileged stand point" [*Rorty quoted in Matustik: 153*].

Rorty specifically challenges theories like Habermas's communicative action oriented towards consensus as follows "The anti-pragmatist who insists that agreement is its [conversation's] goal is like the basketball player who thinks that the reason for playing the game is to make baskets. He mistakes an essential moment in the course of an activity for the end of the activity..." [*Rorty 1980: 734*].

Habermas in his part, however, "point out that postmodern discourses appeal to quasi-or crypto-foundationalism through the irrational other: Nietzsche's 'will to power'; Heidegger's 'event of Being', Foucault's 'discipline', Derrida's 'difference'..." [*Matustik: 153*]. Hence we see that Rorty is also founded in what he called *free floating conversation* that does not have a preferred position of truth (as what is) or value (as what ought to be) judgments. Moreover he does not differentiate between reason and desire, which Habermas rejects for its 'totalizing' and 'inclusive' [undifferentiating] conception of reason.

Here it is important to state that Habermas constantly suffers a misunderstanding by his postmodern critiques. Basically it is their undifferentiated attack on all friends of enlightenment and project of modernity that backfires them through Habermas. He meaningfully shares their criticism against modernity while in so many other ways differ from their total rejection of the potentials in modern rationality. Habermas understood the source of this misunderstanding in the postmodernist's

Manichean [either/or: either instrumental rationality or no trustworthy rationality] juxtaposition of their arguments against instrumental reason [Habermas 1981:13]

Habermas is not simply a supporter of the modern project; he should be understood as a *critical* modernist who distances himself from some modern positions. It is this critical side that Lyotard and Rorty did not want to consider when they charge him as a *universalist*, without stating its accommodation of *fallibility*; and *perspectivism* and scepticism, without giving due consideration to the *non-defeatist* side of his theory. But it is these falliblistic and non-defeatist side of Habermas within a universal validity claim that keeps it open for criticizability; and also creates for him a justifiable space for realizing a critical social.

Lyotard and Rorty did not forward strong arguments against Habermas's theory of modernity as a process of rationalization; this could be partly due to their negligence for serious arguments: Lyotard stands for stopping to believe rather than entertaining arguments and Rorty directly reject the value of past philosophical engagement on critical arguments and he committed for his free floating conversations.

But in this loose position of Lyotard and Rorty against formal and serious argument, there is a strong challenge for Habermas's theory of communicative rationality by the very position they took even if they do not want to argue. In this explicit refusal to raise validity claims, and become part of a communicating agent in Habermasian way; they implicitly threaten to refute Habermas's universal communicative scheme by showing the possibility of getting out of it. We remember that Habermas's theory of rationality works, if and only if participants raise validity claims of truth, rightness and truthfulness for an intersubjective consensus. What if then when someone refuses to raise validity claims or unable to respond yes or no like Lyotard and Rorty?

This, of course is a basic challenge that can also boil down to a question of the status of the marginalized, the different, the silent, the mythical... that

could not possibly take part directly in the communicative actions oriented towards understanding meaningfully. Here Habermas does not directly answer, but he questions this very puzzle; whether in our case Lyotard and Rorty are not making validity claims by refusing to participate in this scheme of Habermas's communicative action. Habermas strongly argues that it is not a matter of choice, but of being human with competence (ability) to a speech act that makes us communicate. Hence, according to Habermas, Lyotard and Rorty are raising validity claims of refusal, within communicatively structured action towards consensus but against the very theory of communicative rationality. Thus Habermas claims that his theory of communicative rationality is so comprehensive to include all participants capable of speech act without coercion even when they prefer to keep silent.

Derrida and Foucault

Unlike Lyotard and Rorty who were not attracted to critical discourses; Derrida and more frequently Foucault deal with issues that are very much challenging to Habermas's theory of modernity as a process of rationalization. That is why I want to treat them separately from Lyotard and Rorty.

We have already discussed Habermas's linguistic turn; where this new communicative paradigm is adopted to avoid problems related with subject-object dichotomy of the philosophy of consciousness. The problem Derrida brought, forward however is based on the fluidity of linguistic meaning and unavoidable possibility of *slippage* of these meanings in linguistically mediated communication.

Derrida's *deconstructive* move, to show the instability of language and structures of meaning, shocks the ground for any position based on unproblematic theories of linguistic communication. According to Derrida,

all western philosophy, is based on the promise that the full meaning of a world is 'present' in the speaker's mind, such that it can be communicated, without any significant slippage, to the

listener. This belief is what Derrida calls *metaphysics of presence* and for him it is an illusion [Sim 1998: 316].

He therefore wanted to liberate western philosophy from this illusion by constant deconstructive engagement to expose *the different* in any presumed uniform communication of meanings.

While Derrida reasonably argues about the possibility of slippage and misunderstanding in communication; Habermas argues that the aim of communicative action, as a whole, is understanding. Understanding in Habermas does not mean simply a comprehension of meaning but aiming to establish agreement /consensus. Derrida, however, had already labeled this trend of western philosophical engagement as an *illusion*. Is really Habermas caught by this illusion?

It is hard to catch Habermas by any form of totalized criticism against western philosophy; for he always had his own critically built space within it. Here too Habermas differs from other western philosophical traditions in attributing the possibility of *fallibility* to both the procedure and the validity claims communicated in a communicative action directed towards consensus. If Derrida's deconstruction reveals any form of slippage or difference in meaning (out of the norm) in communication, it can amount to an exposition of failure of that specific communicative action; but this by no means could lead to the failure of Habermas's theory of communicative rationality. This is because, as we have already discussed, Habermas already theorized his communicative action to be understood *fallibilistically* and *counter-factually*. This means that a particular communicative action could be proved a failure by hindsight of only another process of communicative action oriented towards consensus, which should also be open-ended for accommodating another possible fallibility *ad infinitum*.

Here it is important to invoke an issue from hermeneutic philosophers; specifically from the famous *Gadamer-Habermas* debate. Though Habermas's concepts of fallibility and counter-factuality serve him as a first line of defense against Derrida, it could not save him from adopting a problematic position on entertaining pluralism in his theory.

Hans-George Gadamer has changed, the problematic of *prejudices, pre-judgements* and *misunderstandings* in communication [as Derrida did], in to a virtue of hermeneutic success. For him, unlike Habermas, there is no real difference between *interpretation* and *understanding* [Hoy 1978:52].

Interpretation, for Gadamer, is always possible from a certain point of view or situation (tradition). It is this tradition that serves as a condition for possibility of understanding or interpretation. Thus interpretation is always possible from a certain point of view or situation. It is this *situatedness* in tradition that serves as a *condition* for possibility of understanding or interpretation. Without these *pre-judgments* of a tradition, which is our *being-in-the world*, understanding is impossible. Hermeneutics for Gadamer is not an issue of methodology but ontology [Palmer 1969: 47].

Hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, is a continuous process of constant interpretation through a dialogue (conversation) that presupposes a certain misunderstanding that is rooted in each specific tradition. Hence hermeneutics, in this Gadamerian sense, is not to avoid misunderstanding or prejudice but to start understanding from a *prejudice, a pre-judgment, a miss-understanding* of some sort [Medelson 1979:89]

Though Habermas pleads for the concept of fallibility to accommodate openness and possible future revision or change in understanding; he does not attribute this fallibility to the very essence of linguistic meaning [like Derrida] or to the unavoidable misunderstanding or prejudices [like Gadamer]; but to the very reason /rationality that are forwarded to support validity claims in communicative action oriented towards understanding. He does not have theoretical space for a possible failure of understanding in any speech act due to prejudice rooted in participant's traditions. Hence Habermas thinks not only that all traditions are commensurable towards forging a common(universal) validity claims, but also rejects the possibility of plural paradigms of rationalities. The question is whether it is possible to hold a single (universally working) rationality perspective for different lifeworlds without coercion?

Habermas understands the centrality of this problem in the critique and counter-critique of his theory, which he thinks is related to sharpening "*the*

opposition between relativism and absolutism,... pure historicism and pure transcendentalism...[that emanates from] our need for consistency...[and] our consciousness of the fallibility of human knowledge” [Habermas quoted in Knodt 1994: 77]. In his theory of communicative rationality, Habermas tried to avoid this radical dichotomization of relativism and absolutism to reconcile our need (for consistency) and our consciousness (on the fallibility of knowledge); thus he wrote that “[n]o one who gives this situation much thought would want to be left in this bind” [Ibid.].

If Habermas concedes to the possibility of plural rationalities, it will destroy or disintegrate to smaller compartments his objective to continue and complete the project of modernity as a *consistent* and *universal* emancipative need of humanity; if he sticks to the universal and linear project of emancipation, at least, he has to deal with *legitimate* demands for identities of rationalities rooted in each *worldview* and *language games* in the latter Wittgenstein terms [Habermas: 1992:62-63].

I do not think Habermas is convincing in his effort to reconcile his commitments both to an ideas of a *situated reason* and a *universal* theory of communicative rationality. At least it is not possible to have it both ways, without constantly sliding balances between these poles that call back traditional metaphysical problems of the one and the many, the universal and the particular, the whole and the part [Habermas 1992:115-117]. But Habermas’s effort, which I will try to substantiate in the conclusion, has meaningfully extended the borders of traditional *rationalism* to the point of *accommodating fallibility*.

Another important postmodern thinker who importantly challenged Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality to a point of puzzle, besides Derrida, is Michel Foucault. Habermas thinks that Foucault has rejected important values of modernity that *should be saved*; hence he *portrayed Foucault as anti-modern* [Love 1998: 270]. Nancy S. Love, in line with Nancy Fraser, argues that “Foucault does not criticize enlightenment *per se* but rather one aspect of it--humanism” [Love 1998: 272].

Habermas has tried to save a possible distortion of communicative rationality through important counter-factual idealizations, where

opportunity only for the better argument could have the authority to the production of truth and normative principles. Against this theory of Habermas Foucault forwarded a thesis of an intrinsic intertwinement of knowledge/power paradigm; in which every particular validity claim can only be explained “as part of a particular power/knowledge regime.” [Love 1998: 274]. Thus “each society has its own hierarchy of truth, its own politics of truth; that is, each society accepts certain discourses which it allows to function as truth” [Foucault quoted in Bhar 1988:101].

For instance Foucault explains *Man*, which is a distinctive object of western humanism, as a new phenomenon that comes out through “a new power/knowledge regime in the late eighteenth century” [Love 1998: 272]. It is this modern concept of *Man* that constituted the regime’s *epistemological object* [objectified its essential attributes through a specific discourse] and *political subject* [filled with the ideals of enlightenment to think for one self]; here “the subject pole suggests men’s autonomy and rationality, but the object pole denies them” [Love 1998: 272-273].

What Foucault mainly poses against Habermas’s theory of rationality is its constituted nature by a specific knowledge/power regime of modern social existence. Habermas’s claim to truth or for a potentially liberating theory of communicative rationality, in Foucault, can be no more than a product of a certain knowledge/power regime; that cannot only create truths but also sustains it. This intrusion of power in conceptualizing knowledge makes us think the existence of other competing knowledge/power paradigms for regime of truth; where we can see the possibility of *marginalization* and even *demonization* of certain truth/power paradigms through privileged discourses [Sim 1998: 6].

Foucault had made *historico-philosophical* studies to show how this happened during the *seventeenth* and *eighteenth* centuries, in the establishment of *regimented institutions* like *insane asylum*, *prisons*, and *hospitals* [Ibid]. Generally Foucault tried to argue that Habermas’s claim to a non repressive rationality is not immune from exercising the authoritarian modern knowledge/power regime of *the norm at the expense of the different* [Sim 1998: 6-7].

I don't think that Habermas is successful in his defense against this challenge, but made an old Socratic retreat strategy towards digression of deconstructing the causes that underline a philosophical position. As Socrates tried to explain Protagoras's position through its affinity to a *deceiving* world of flux (in a form of *Straw Man fallacy*); Habermas tried to explain Foucault by pointing his limitation to a perspective from a deformed lifeworld due to pathological development of modern society. Habermas, however, could not have historical or existential evidences, except an ongoing hope for an ever increasing proximity towards a non-pathological lifeworld. Here the realism of Foucault seems to expose a utopian aspect of Habermas's *non-repressive* universal theory of communicative rationality; even if Habermas does not want to admit to it. This does not mean that Foucault has his contextualist position without a problem, but at least his position is able to destabilize Habermas's *universalism*.

The difference between these important philosophers, however, should not curtail their similarity, especially after Foucault's reconsideration of the ideals of enlightenment in his latter life. For instance Foucault, like Habermas, wanted to maintain the critical aspect of enlightenment "as a permanent critique of [modern] era" [Bhar 1988: 104].

But to this idea of a *permanent critique*, Foucault has also given its perspective as being caught by a perpetual question; "how not to be governed like that by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by that" [Foucault 2007:44]. Here Foucault is questioning whether we really have, what Habermas is telling us, the *need for consistency*.

He also briefly defined critique as "the art of not being governed quite so much" [Foucault 2007:45]. Thus even if both Foucault and Habermas are interested in critical engagement, they still are in different dimensions. For instance, Foucault, unlike Habermas, who has engaged in a general critique of modernity, wanted to realize this critical project, in a typical postmodern spirit; that is in a manageable and *case by case* [in Lyotard terms] basis.

One thing is important to note that the power element, in Foucault's concept of knowledge/power regime, should not be understood in a negative sense alone. As Habermas's idea of strategic action could serve both negative and positive ends, Foucault's concept of power can also serve positive purposes. Bo Isenberg wrote,

one of Foucault's important inventions is to broaden a traditional concept of power by giving it new meanings : power can be repressive but also productive, power can be prohibiting but also permitting and encouraging. In fact Foucault says, modern power is *mainly* productive, its repressing functions constituting merely 'frustrated or extreme forms [Isenberg 1991:302]

Generally this chapter is consolidating the argument over important dilemma where: on the one hand there is a problem of **suppressing** the *individual*, the *different* and *subjective* for communicating across other identical *individuals* and *groups* in social existence; on the other hand there is a danger of **losing communication** due to incommensurable varieties of rationalities across individuals, cultures, and lifeworlds. These are theoretically contradictory positions that used to challenge philosophers and are still in the shelf of theoretical debates; but most of the postmodernists are arguing that we are practically living this theoretical contradiction without a major social breakdown. Is it? How far is Habermas helpful in resolving this dilemma?

Some Problems of Habermas's Communicative Paradigm

Habermas's idea of modernity as processes of rationalization strikes the core essence of modernity. But I argue that it needs to reconsider some problem areas that I think will cripple the communicative paradigm for common and liberated futurity. Some of the problems that, I think, need to be addressed are:

Evolutionism. It is about formalizing a *uni-linear* path for human history. Habermas thinks that rationalization is a process of opening traditional

worldviews for intersubjective critical examinations. It is a kind of movement from *normatively ascribed agreements* towards *communicatively achieved understanding*. It brings an ever increasing burden over the individual subject to think for her/himself. It is a process of destroying traditional worldviews through intersubjective rationality and reconstruction of a rationalized lifeworld through the same intersubjective consensus.

This scheme of Habermas put different societies in a linear historical trajectory, where the more *disenchanted* tradition becomes the more enlightened. Where the more enlightened are also the more rational.

This hierarchy of reason/rationality had adverse effect in realizing the intersubjective communication across cultures. This also contradicts with his idealization of *symmetrical* relations that we discussed, of participants in communicative action for a hierarchy is already built due to the process of disenchantment.

It is true that Habermas's idealizations for symmetrical relationship are said to be *counter factual*, that only have a regulative function. This, however make things even worse for those cultures that are kept in the *threshold of rationalization* in this scheme. According to Habermas the strong idealizations are *regulatively* symmetrical; thus we see them practically asymmetrical (for they are counter factual). Habermas is explicit about the specialty of western culture for being rational; he even wonders, with Weber, why others fail to join the west in the process of enlightenment. Here it is clear that the ground for communicative rationality has already tilted towards the west. This practical asymmetry in communicative action will not make Habermas's universal validity claim genuinely intersubjective.

As long as practical asymmetry is acknowledged, we can think of the *more equals* and the *more rationals* in communicative action, who enjoy the success of this communication; while others could suffer dominations and manipulations within the paradigm of Habermas's communicative rationality. This will be clearer when see the problem from a point of communicative action across different cultures of the world, where

Habermas already prejudge the western culture more rational than the non-western ones. This prejudice already determines whose validity claim to be taken universal, before the intersubjective understanding is made.

Gerard Delanty, is not far from the truth when he interpreted this aspect of Habermas as an intention to *universalize occidental rationality* [1997:30]. This had been promoted in the name of *the white man's burden* long ago. Is Habermas recalling an old instrument, at least in the form of strategic interference upon traditional societies, to complete the universal project of modernity? If so, I want to raise one important question of Emmanuel C. Eze: Is this [occidental way] the only way to think of Enlightenment? [Eze 2002: 281] I do not think it is .

More over this idea of disenchantment is based on an antithetical conception of the *logos* and the *mythos*. But throughout modernity and where ever human culture is investigated, we find the *mythos* in the *logos* and *vice-versa*. Hence the conception of the process of rationalization as a movement from the *mythos* towards the *logos*, where there is a difficulty of understanding where the *mythos* ends and the *logos* begins, is problematic in Habermas.

Homogenization: Habermas wanted to keep a delicate balance without any form of radicalization between the universal and the particular, the context and the context transcending. But when he conceives of the particular, for instance a particular culture that has to be rationalized, he does not see any incommensurable essence that could not, at least potentially, be shared with other cultures. Here there is no one cultural value that will not be exposed to communicative rationality across cultures; for values are said to be commensurable.

It is Important to remember one aspect of communicative action; that is, the *fate* of those validity claims that could not pass the intersubjective argument for universal validity and the culture that promote these values. These *irrational/less rational* values, that could not pass the rationality check of an intersubjective understanding, will be dropped or subordinated to those that

have passed the check. This continuous rationalization process of forwarding validity claims, challenging them, and universalizing the validity claim *supported by the better argument* through consensus will be equally a process of homogenization.

What is wrong with this homogenization, in Foucault terms, normalization and disciplining? The problem is coercion that leads to losses of certain identities and ways of life irreversibly. We have already seen how Habermas's theory of communicative rationality is practically asymmetrical, thus we do have reasons to suspect those particular validity claims that are, in one way or another, sacrificed for the universal would be unfairly marginalized and forced die. This will happen even by the force of the better argument in which they could be disadvantaged due to an existing asymmetry.

Here I do not think that Habermas's claim to universal validity in itself is a problem. But universalism without recognizing the essential difference existing in the particulars, will not escape what Habermas constantly tried to avoid: domination.

Homogenization could possibly be checked when we conceive universality in the sense of entertaining *genuine plurality*; where the particular, in the plural, is taken as *complementary* rather than a competitor to lose or gain recognition through intersubjective consensus [Mall 2000: 56]. This recognition of genuine plurality should go to the extent of accepting varieties of rationalities which have no place in Habermas's scheme.

Relativism and Rebel of consensus: Habermas does not like relativism and ethnocentrism. He, of course, believes that he transcends relativism through the concept of fallibility. For relativism stands against any claim to universality; and fallibility acknowledges the universal with a condition that it will possibly fail in the future.

I, however, argue that Habermas cannot escape relativism as long as he promotes the communicative paradigm. The smallest unit in communicative

action for Habermas is a speech act that involves two participants. The largest whole will be no less than humanity. When consensus reached about truth, rightness, and truthfulness, it could have different number of participants that range between the smallest unit and the largest whole. Hence these validity claims are agreed to universality (*i.e.* transcending the context of the participants) within the range of the participating subjects. Here each agreed universal validity claim is said to be universally valid *relative* to a specific domain of context where it is raised, argued and challenged. Thus relativism is unconsciously implied in Habermas's theory of communicative rationality.

Moreover, within this communicative paradigm, it is possible to think the existence of different but parallel or hierarchical levels of agreements on identical issues. These agreements can be antithetical to each other. This kind of possible contradiction in the communicative paradigm of rationality might lead to what I call *Babel of consensus* [adopting the fear of objectivists in hermeneutic tradition against *Bebel of translations*]. This possible situation is about having consensus relative to contexts where it is agreed, and comes into contradiction against other agreements of a different context.

Here, therefore, I see the need in Habermas's theory of rationality to acknowledge a normal dose of relativism that is not so rigid to avoid communication with other positions on identical or related issues.

The procedural as essential: Habermas attributed two important values to his *non-substantive (procedural)* theory of rationality. *First*, it helps to avoid totalitarian and coercive aspect of traditional essentialist epistemology; and *second*, it helps to make his theory of rationality non-defeatist that does not fail with every change in essence.

Here I want to show two ways in which Habermas's procedural rationality is also an essential claim. *First*, any procedure has its own essence that differentiates it from other competing procedures, hence the procedural is always essential; *second*, Habermas attributed important essential elements

to his procedural rationality. For instance, that it is communicative (not cognitive), that it ends in consensus (not in difference), and that it begins in context and ends in context-transcendence. Hence the procedural is again essential.

The procedural, therefore, is liable to what the essential is accused of by Habermas himself. For instance being coercive: in reality Habermas has specified the grand procedure not simply a procedure. One may come against this idea that his theory of communicative rationality is open for change through the better argument. But it is important to note that this is only possible if one believes and joins first the communicative paradigm. Thus this apparently open procedural paradigm is so closed for change because it is also essential.

The communicative as instrumental: Habermas argues that communicative action is the primary form of social action; and the hope of avoiding or minimizing modern social pathologies to its least possible level is attributed to the development of communicative action oriented towards understanding.

Concepts like understanding, agreement or consensus means the same for Habermas. Understanding or consensus is always about something, it needs a content to understand. For Habermas these contents are validity claims to truth, rightness and truthfulness. Habermas is arguing that these validity claims are only made for one purpose that is *agreement/consensus* in communicative action.

But I do not think that there is a communicative action only for understanding/consensus. Why we need to understand or agree should be asked, to see the complete picture of the communication; otherwise it will be a half way examination of the process. If we proceed to see the *why* of the consensus, there is always a sense of purpose (*instrumentality*) other than understanding. Even in the most disinterested casual communications, for instance, at recreation centers, it has an instrumental aspect of enjoying ourselves through a company.

The more we become serious about our communication, the more it will become instrumental. Hence what we call as such communicative action and rationality is a part of the instrumental one. But it is possible to have less instrumental or more instrumental actions; which is not based on the degree it *departs-from* or *comes-nearer* to communicative action but by the intensity of its control over participants (i.e. to the degree that it *over passing the rationality* of each participant).

Susceptibility to a cognitive return: one of Habermas's arguments against the radical critiques of Modernity/Enlightenment is about their inconsiderate total rejection of reason by reason which results in a performative contradiction. He substantiates this charge against them by showing how they are using intellectual wealth, like philosophical concepts, of modernity while rejecting its project. Habermas has meaningful reason to forward this charge against them; for concepts of a tradition are not value free. This is clearly reflected in Martin Heidegger's effort to substitute traditional concept of *Man* by *Dasein* to avoid unnecessary prejudice of the tradition.

But Habermas himself was using freely the intellectual wealth of the philosophy of consciousness or subject-centered reason, while claiming to drop it fully. For instance the central thesis which he critically defends: the project of modernity is not developed within the linguistic philosophy. Hence he has to turn the arrow of his criticism towards himself, so that he will be saved from a totalized critique of the philosophy of consciousness; otherwise he will not escape the same charge of performative contradiction he forwarded against the *postmoderns*.

We also find in Habermas some *presuppositions that call for a cognitive return*. For instance his assumption that all participants in communicative action *raise, argue, and agree* on a universal validity claim; begs the question why all are assumed to act in this identical manner? This question points to an implicit assumption, in Habermas, about identical disposition of each participant for linguistic competencies. This cognitive assumption to

ground the communicative paradigm indicates that the linguistic turn by itself is not enough as Habermas tried to argue.

Another important point that Habermas raised to justify his linguistic turn is the possibility of transcending subjectivity through an intersubjective communication. This, according to him, ends philosophy as a business of subject-centered reason. The question is: Is not Habermas himself still in the same business of producing knowledge, from a subject-centered position? Am I not now reading a book written by a subject called Jurgen Habermas about rationality, as I was reading another subject Descartes' book on the same issue? Where is the difference? How is the end of subject-centered reason to be justified?

One may say that the end of subject-centered reason does not mean about Habermas's work but about what reason or rationality should be. But, if Habermas is arguing about the end of subject-centered reason, he should have shown it that practically his work is not subject-centered; otherwise how can we take his claim seriously?

Still it is possible to interpret the end of a subject-centered reason as the end of thinking by subjective authorities; but what is Habermas doing, is it not an effort to establish authority in what modernity is and should be?

Generally I think it is better to search for a critical adoption of the philosophy of consciousness and its complementarity with the linguistic philosophy rather than a total rejection of its perspective.

Rationalization towards the indefinite: Habermas's conception of modernity as processes of rationalization is an important scheme to explain most of modern phenomenon. But this thesis needs to accommodate genuine plurality that will not dissolve in any form of homogenization or universalism.

Habermas unflinchingly wanted to continue and complete the project of modernity. Even if the idea of completing modernity is open to interpretation

and is not precise; we do not miss that it is related with a positive valuation of reason/rationality.

If we inspect what has happened in the world since modernity is said to be on the move; it is hard to trust fully the rationalization project. Let alone a promise of emancipated self and social existence, it seems difficult today to maintain the *status quo* in front of an increasing threat due to *environmental change, nuclear armaments, impoverishment of the poor, marginalization of ways of life* to mention only a few. After Colonialism, and The First and The Second World Wars in the age of Enlightenment, it is legitimate to ask where the world is going in these processes of rationalization.

Habermas could not give us a specific guarantee for a better future, except a belief that, properly used, reason/rationalization will bring *the goodlife* to the world. Thus the general purpose of an increasing processes of rationalization could not surly be more than *indeterminate*.

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Conclusions

The quest after universal, necessary, absolute and objective knowledge has made philosophers pay a 'high price'. While Parmenides sacrificed motion and difference for eternal consistency (Being), Heraclitus had lost the consistent for eternal change (Becoming) in ancient metaphysics.

Due to the crisis of traditional worldviews, modern epistemology radicalized this ancient quest for the absolute to the point of not only doubting but also rejecting truth claims with a flash of single reason, even hypothetical one that makes it dubious [at least in Descartes]. This quest made modern philosophy pay with a theoretical loss of the objectivity of the material world to the point of disembodiment of the thinking subject.

These, however, are huge payments paid not for the sake of knowledge; rather for the prejudice of what they thought knowledge should be. When one starts to search for a sun light, with predefined existence and essence that *it is* and *green*; possible conclusions include: *first*, that the senses are not partially or wholly trust worthy so that we could not perceive the green light in the sun (like rationalists), *second*, we cannot go beyond our perception to prove the objectivity or materiality of the world hence we do not know whether the sun is green or not, what we can tell is only what we experience (like some empiricists), *third*, there is no sun at all for there is no green sun to be perceived uniformly (like a skeptic). The common reasoning for skepticism from relativity of perception is based on a background prejudice that knowledge cannot be relative. The same is true for Cartesian quest of the *indubitable* that could have denied his body and the whole of the external world, had it not been to his mystical twist to a God of belief.

Habermas is telling us that there is no essentially absolute and universal knowledge; but what we have is only what we think, challenge, and agree as true, right, and sincere. But still in Habermas, there is a difference between what one thinks true and what is true universally. Universality, however, is a result of rationally contested agreements that can also be rejected by another consensus. Thus it is fallible.

Traditionally we mentioned that a huge price was paid to save knowledge from being no less than the absolute. Had we been left only to this paradigm, we would not have had other alternative theories about what knowledge is, for these theories are not open for change.

It is Habermas's greatness to accommodate *fallibility* within his theory of knowledge. Even if he argues that he avoided relativism, he shares the relativist worry of being encapsulated in a totalizing narrative of the Universalists. Hence he made the rational fallible; so that not every claim in the name of cultural identity but any claim to validity with a better argument could have an open chance of getting universality.

Again it is also important to credit Habermas for his communicative paradigm where any validity claim to universal truths and norms can only be developed with intersubjective agreements. These universal validity claims transcend validity claim of a rational subject, but not human rationality as used to be in traditional metaphysics and scholastic religion. It is these universal validity claims that serve to orient and maintain consistency of subjective action in society.

It is true that Habermas conceptualizes modernity as processes of rationalization. Normatively he made his point clear that there should be a balanced process rationalization between the lifeworlds and the system. But he is explicit that actually this rationalization is dominated by increasing interest towards material reproduction at the expense of the reproduction of the lifeworld. This imbalance has led to losses of meaning and freedom that modern society experienced and a diminishing of the emancipatory interest through communicative action oriented towards understanding.

His commitment to maintain the critical project for a better world through mutual understanding based on communicative action, as a general perspective, is worthy in a world of diversity. We can think of modern values like *plurality*, *equality*, *liberty* and *fraternity*; they are all results of the general essence of modernity: processes of rationalization. Rationalization process, of course, is not specific to modernity but it has never been so

decentered to the level of a self-conscious individual (*acknowledged* subjective rationality). Hence ***Spare aude!*** is specifically modern.

Generally, it is true that our diverse world needs to communicate for a better future; but it is always important to evaluate and improve the communicative paradigm that Habermas forwarded. We have to watch carefully that it *is not* and *will not* be invaded by *unfairly* privileged contents and methods, which destroy the purpose of communicative rationality: *non-coercing future*.

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