

JURGEN HABERMAS'
LIBERAL THEORY OF COMMUNICATION

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2nd course, group 1A

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Jurgen Habermas is a German philosopher who is currently one of the most influential philosophers in the world. He is a sociologist in the tradition of critical theory and pragmatism. His extensive written work addresses topics stretching from social -political theory to aesthetics, epistemology and language to philosophy of religion and his ideas have significantly influenced not only philosophy but also political-legal thought, sociology, communication studies, argumentation theory and rhetoric, developmental psychology and theology.

Habermas creates the two level concept of society and lays out critical theory for modernity. After writing the theory of communicative action, Habermas expanded upon the theory of communicative action by using it as the basis of his theory of morality, democracy and law. The author develops a concept of rationality that is no longer tied to, and limited by the subjectivistic and individualistic premises of Morden philosophy and social theory. With this failure of the search for ultimate foundations by first philosophy or the philosophy of consciousness” an empirically tested theory of rationality must be a pragmatic theory based on science and social science. This implies that any universalist claims can only be validated by testing against counter examples in historical contexts-not using transcendental ontological assumptions. This leads him to look for the basis of a new theory of communicative action in tradition of sociology. Fundamental disunity of reasons constitutes the danger of modernity. This danger arises not simply from the creation of separate institutional entities but through the specialisation of cognitive, normative and aesthetic knowledge that in turn permeates and fragments everyday consciousness.

This “purposive rational action” is steered by the media of state, which substitute for oral language as the medium of the coordination of social action. An antagonism arises between these two principles of societal integration-language, which oriented to understanding and collective well being and media, which are systems of success oriented action.

Habermas develops his concept of communicative action: communicative action serves to transmit and renew cultural knowledge, in a process of achieving mutual understandings. It then coordinates action towards social integration and solidarity Finally, communicative action is the process through which people form their identities.

There is a transfer of action coordination from “language” over to “steering media” such as money and power which bypass consensus-oriented communication with a “symbolic generalization of rewards and punishments’. After this process the lifeworld “is no longer needed for the coordination action”. This results in humans losing a sense of responsibility with a chain of negative social consequences. Lifeworld communications lose their purpose becoming irrelevant for the coordination of central life processes.

This has the effect of ripping the heart out of social discourse, allowing complex differentiation to occur but at the cost of social pathologies.