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**Jurgen Habermas:
The Communicative Action and the
Strategic Action**

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Abstract

Habermas thought recovers a classic concept of philosophy: the idea that the reality in which we live is penetrable by reason, and that it can structure the human society. It shows the possibility of a reflection on the historical journey reconstructing the potential rational, communicative and consensus on which society is based.

The problem of rationality in relation to communication is in the Habermas spotlight. He makes a partition on the instrumental action and communicative action. The instrumental action is oriented towards transformation of external reality and is organized for this purpose; the communicative action is oriented towards mutual understanding. This division corresponding with two types of rationality: instrumental and communicative. Referring to communicative rationality, we can say that an action can be defined as rational only if the speaker possesses the conditions that are necessary to achieve the purpose to understand something in this world, at least with another participant in the communication. Instead, a goal-oriented action can be defined as a rational if an actor fulfills the conditions which are necessary to achieve the purpose to intervene successfully in the world.

Habermas discussion is concentrated towards exploration and deepening of the conditions of communicative rationality, which according to the author, is possible only in the presence of a free communication liabilities, based on the principle that arguments can be answered only with other arguments. But the need for a communicative rationality through which individuals may find themselves is constant in the Habermas opinion, although he is leaning towards an evolutionary theory where individual and social evolution lead to free individual and social identities.

Starting from the last century with the industrial technological and economic transformations, the modern society has changed communication instruments and tools used. So, today we can talk about a weaving between communicative action and strategic action.

Keywords: Communicative Action, Instrumental Action, Individual and Social Identities

Introduction

To speak about communicative action requires commitment and knowledge considering what it represents and the social actors who participate in it. Through communication and mainly through discussion and argument we can present an experience, a world of living or another culture.

Habermas makes a separation between instrumental action and communicative action. The instrumental action is oriented through the transformation of external reality and is organized for this purpose, while the communicative action is oriented towards mutual understanding. This division brings two types of rationality: instrumental rationality and communicative rationality.

Rationality, which the contemporary society is based on, is not the right one, because the individuals are instruments and tools used for various technical and economic purposes. This is the instrumental action, which should be replaced by the communicative action. The rationality last one takes place in relationships with the others. Exactly the social actors using communicative rationality, develop the relationships with the others, try to understand the others and to create a mutual relationship. Is it possible today? This topic will be presented in this paper.

The Concepts of Communicative Action and Instrumental Action

Jurgen Habermas, student of Adornos and last inheritor of the Frankfurt School, but also its critical, aims to develop the theory of social action starting from analytic philosophy of linguistics. Habermas develops the *Theory of Communicative Action* by abandoning the study on the individual as a solitary entity and auto-sufficient in favor of interaction. The basis of this theory is communication and action, so speaking and acting. In his two volumes "*Theory of communicative Action*," he tries to discuss three important elements, such as: 1. Processing the theory of communicative rationality; 2. Connection between "system" and "world of life"; 3. Theory of modernity, which explains the pathologies of today society.

According to him, western culture has available four types of action: the teleological - strategic action, acting according to norms, the dramatic action and communicative action. The latter refers to the interaction of two or more individuals or actors as Habermas calls able to act and communicate by creating an interpersonal relationship¹. He argues this fact, based on the concept of the world of life. When we act possess a situation, which is only a fragment, a part of the world of life which is limited by a certain theme. In this way we act in a certain moment, which enters the world of our lives and according to us it is objective. But the world and *the world of life*, according to Habermas, differ from each other just by the interests of the participants in

¹Habermas, J., 1986, *Teoria dell'agire comunicativo*, vol.I, Il Mulino, Bologna, p.156

communication, in a certain linguistic situation, which at the same time is action situation and linguistic situation. Communication for Habermas is a way to operate by transmitting not only actions but a way of communicative acting. Who behaves in a communicative way is not only an actor but is speaker the listener and creates a relationship with the other actors.

While the teleological-strategic action presupposes a world which is "objective world".¹ Each individual has a goal to achieve something. In modern society individuals communicate and act with each other and use different means to achieve their goals. So, Habermas deals with the concept of "reason", which the individual should use to avoid violence and other dangerous forms. In this way, individuals can debate and conflict in a consensual way through communication². Focusing on the development of individual and society Habermas differentiates two forms of action and two respective forms of rationalism, oriented towards the goal and towards understanding. Human needs to communicate differently in a world that was changing, in a modern world, which Habermas shares under 3 dimensions: society-to react rationally according to the purpose; Culture-differentiation of various cultural fields; personality - the development of individual from reforms.

The Modern World and the World of Life

Habermas concept of the modern world did not owe to emancipation of the West but the power of human development. However, in the 70s Habermas focused on the problems of the so-called "consensual theory of the truth" and the disperse connection with ethical- political norms. It served as a "critical meter" for a truly critical theory of society, of that modern society, where every norm becomes mandatory without passing from the institutional mechanisms of the democratic state, thereby creating violent reactions even for institutions themselves.³ For this reason the theory of communicative action is critical to society, which is not drawn from the cultural cognitive potential it possesses; being aware by utopian risk of confusing more developed communicative infrastructures of a possible form of life with the historical articulation of a mature life⁴.

Habermas says that life is guided by an instrumental reason. Rationality where the today society is based does not give any satisfaction because people are just instruments in it, tools used for technical and economic purposes. When society is organized to ensure the maximum of economic and technical development, without considering what is the best human development, of course is organized according to a reason but its rationality is an instrumental

¹Habermas, J., 1986, *Teoria dell'agire comunicativo*, vol.I,Il Mulino, Bologna, p.159

²Pagano, M., 2010, *Lezioni su Habermas*, Corso di Filosofia delle scienze sociali del Prof. Sergio Caruso.

³Belardinelli, S., 1996, *Il Progetto Incompiuto, Agire Comunicativo e Complessita Sociale*, FrancoAngeli, p.47

⁴*Ivi*, p.49

administrative rationality. In this society behavior commensurate his values is called instrumental action. Instrumental action is part of the system, the economic administrative apparatus that forms our living together. This system tends to prevent the realization of another form of rationality, more free and emancipated, that Habermas calls the communicative action. What kind of rationality is communicative action?

Rationality of communicative action is not that of isolated subject, of conscience, but it develops relationships with others. It refers to the language, which is not only a set of names that have a meaning but is a question addressed to someone seeking a mutual agreement. The concept of communicative rationality derived from linguistics, should be extended and applied to social relations. So, it is a subjective rationality and moral action in society is an action addressed to understanding. Instrumental or strategic rationality under which I act and use the other to achieve my goals, should be replaced by communicative rationality according to which I do not use the others, I listen and speak to them seeking understanding.

The world of life, a term used by Habermas, which originates in Husserl's philosophy, shows an individual or social status, defined by the norms and values, an integrated social and cultural status. The system operates inside the world of life and colonizes it. Social reports of world of life are placed through the power of money and the media. These social relations return to consumer and bureaucratic reports, man becomes a tool to be used and not to be understood. This system implements strategic action inside the world of life .

To Habermas, the main conflict of the time that we live is a conflict of classes but the conflict derived from the process of colonization that the system practises on the world of life by the time it will replace communicative action towards an understanding with another type of action based on consumption, money, power and success.

So, the emancipation process will be guided by the movements fighting to protect the world of life , public space, in order to preserve the autonomy from colonization.

The Rational Society

Why today's society does not seem entirely rational? Why reason and reality do not coincide? What pushes Habermas to focus on the linguistic dimension is the survey of limit that characterizes instrumental rationality. The actions of individuals are guided by deliberate and specific goals and objectives and the interest to achieve targets specifies the knowledge to be acquired to carry them out. We see that the writings of Marx that the interest of individuals to dominate nature brings the necessity of benefiting for technical possession¹. Habermas says that the limit of this approach lies in not

¹De Angelis, G., 2012, *Verso una società razionale: il pensiero di Jürgen Habermas*, Luiss University Press, Roma .

understanding that strategic action is mediated by social relations, which generate tension, conflicts, dominance and submission reports. We thus need to understand how individuals interact with each other and in what way can reach a freely and rationally agreement. Just at this moment language is one of the elements for which Habermas begins to reflect. Through language and actions that it carries people interact with each other.

Certainly language can be a dominant and manipulative form to achieve a predetermined goal but its use will not allow overcoming the instrumental logic, the limit of which is the decline in social antagonism. But actually what Habermas brings is the use of language that has the aim of free and rational understanding among the subjects, who are involved in a discussion. To realize the latter arises the necessity through universal pragmatics, to study and know the universal conditions and rules that allow language to express the reality and rationality and to build a fair, communication that paves the way to mutual understanding. We thus need to understand what are the rules for the development of a free discussion, in which a free, rational and universal consensus is reached. Rules as justice, truth and sincerity, which any rational individual can not oppose.¹

However, according to Habermas, modernity, is a rationality process, which does not produce a rational society. This paradox depends on the dominance of instrumental rationality from communicative rationality. The strategic action already possesses the economic sphere and the public sphere where the first is back in an area of actions with the goal for material gain and the second taking place in a political conflict ground is disappearing as a free sphere in which citizens can interact, discuss collectively and evaluate the best argument. The difference between the rational action and the communicative action is based on the separation that Habermas makes between social systems (economic apparatus, public institutions) and the world of life (family, local relations).² In the first dominates the strategic action, in the second communicative action. Habermas in his social theory is based on the concept of Marx on alienation: Modern society is an alienated society, materialized as social systems, built on the deliberate action, as money or power can be, break away from the world of life, gain autonomy and resist it. Social systems tend to ravage the world of life because they oblige with field practices critical use of reason and free discussion without allowing in this way authentic human interaction.³

So modernity has not led to a rational society as dominated by an instrumental rationality, having in center strategic action, which did not allow disclosure of communicative rationality. Capitalist rationality has privileged a technical economic rationality, which instead of being in the service of society, separates from it, becomes autonomous and dominates social relations by not allowing an innocent interaction between individuals. Modernism according to

¹*Ibidem*

²De Angelis, G., 2012, *Verso una società razionale: il pensiero di Jürgen Habermas*, Luiss University Press, Roma, Review by Jacopo Branchesi.

³Izzo, A., 2005, *Storia del pensiero sociologico, III. I contemporanei*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

Habermas, is not a complete process: it should be analyzed the enlightenment project of rational society characterized by free discussion, critical reason and free and impartial discussion.

If we talk about an ideal communication respecting formal norms of discussion then we will have a democratic community characterized by equality of the people communicating. Respecting to these standards will allow the emergence of a rational knowledge that materializes in making rational decisions about which can be reached consensus of all participants, regardless of ethnic and religious differences that exist in the world. Habermas emphasizes that the democratic ideal is that of a democracy participants, based on the procedural aspects and deliberative processes.

In primitive societies we have the language but we don't distinguish the different validity claim and could not exploit the full potential of it.¹ While today the language becomes an instrument of empowerment, criticism of the constitution of the society as a peculiarity of the humans. So my question is: Do we have the opportunities and tools to use the communicative acting as Habermas explains? I can say with the transformation of the society, its structure, political systems and social actors, is very difficult to find a communicative action between the individuals that constitute what we call modern society. Many people require at any cost money and power, and in this way we can talk about a weaving between communicative action and strategic action.

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