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ARTICLE

The Embodiment of Reason in Habermas's Communicative Rationality

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the notion of reason in Jürgen Habermas's concept of communicative rationality and proposes that this perspective manifests an "embodied" reason that is inseparable from the structures of lived reality. This deviates from the tendency of modern epistemology to see reason within the context of a disembodied consciousness. For Habermas, reason is not an abstract reality that is disjointed from social structures but is rather embodied in these very structures. In particular, we find this embodiment in discourse and in his use of the concept of a lifeworld, which are essential elements in his concept of a communicative rationality. This view of reason deviates from the tendency to see rationality from a merely strategic, instrumental perspective whose essence is to achieve a specific goal. For Habermas, rationality has, as its natural end or telos, that of understanding. This is manifested in speech within the context of a discursive community. Rationality manifests itself above all in the structures of language and speech. For this reason, it is through communicative dialogue that social structures are reproduced and consolidated. At the same time, reason's very capacity to reflect on itself also manifests its universal, transcendent dimension. This idea is also a manifestation of the broader, postmetaphysical orientation of his thought, which seeks to bridge the gap between theory and praxis, between the abstract and the concrete, the universal and the particular.

KEYWORDS

communicative rationality, universal pragmatics, postmetaphysical thinking, lifeworld, speech acts, embodied reason, theory and praxis

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Introduction

As an intellectual figure, Jürgen Habermas seems to cut across a broad range of disciplines. His works tackle themes not only in philosophy and in the social sciences but also in bioethics and religion. He has been referred to as "the last great rationalist" and is often considered a scholar who transcends the categorical division between "modernity" and "postmodernity." [1] On one hand, his belief in the existence of "reason" itself brings him close to the rationalist orientation adopted by many modern thinkers. On the other hand, his rejection of a univocal way of understanding the concept of "reason" enables him to go beyond modern thought, incorporating insights from different fields of study, such as sociology and

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linguistics. Perhaps one of the most striking characteristics that one encounters upon reading Habermas's works is the interdisciplinary nature of his project. If one were to point out a "common thread" to his works, however, it is the constant dialogue between theoretical reflection and social reality.

In his writings, he often brings philosophical thought into confrontation with the question of social change. In fact, one of the recurrent ideas in the final section of his two-volume work *The Theory of Communicative Action* (TCA) is the need to bridge the gap between philosophy and the empirical sciences, as well as the important role of social theory in precisely bridging such a gap.

On one hand, Habermas criticizes the detached, transcendental approach of a philosophy that is abstracted from empirical reality.[2] He warns of the dangers of a social theory "that claims universality for its basic concepts," which he thinks can easily fall into a "self-referentiality."[3] On the other hand, he is also critical of what he calls "an empiricist abridgment of the rationality problematic" and the positivist tendency to reduce theoretical knowledge to empirical data.[4] This ties neatly with one of the central ideas that he proposes in the first part of the first volume: the important role of a social theory that combines philosophical insight with empirical validation. This integration between the theoretical and the concrete is something that lies at the heart of social science methodology.

Habermas's earlier writings also manifest an attempt to integrate theoretical, philosophical thought with the empirical sciences. In these earlier works, he is critical of a purely positivist-empirical approach in studying social reality.[5] In fact, one of his main critiques of the Western philosophical tradition is the primacy given to the abstract over the concrete, which fosters a disembodied philosophical attitude that is isolated from the historical and cultural realities of modern societies. At the same time, he is also critical of a positivist attitude that fosters the separation of the empirical sciences from their theoretical underpinnings. Such an attitude can easily lead to the other extreme, which is a positivism that is incapable of transcending context-dependent claims. For his part, Habermas underlines the necessity of a dialogue between philosophy and the empirical disciplines that study actual social realities. One of his main projects, called "universal pragmatics," examines the universal conditions for the very possibility of a discourse.[6] This shows in a very concrete way the fusion between theory and praxis that serves as an underlying current in Habermas's thought. Speech, after all, is a pragmatic reality that contains within itself certain universal presuppositions. His reflections on the possibility of human dialogue through "communicative rationality" provide interesting insights that could enrich the way we understand the role of human reason in the social sphere.

In this paper, I seek to describe and analyze Habermas's notion of "reason" as an embodied reality, as it is reflected, in particular, in his two-volume work, *The Theory of Communicative Action*. In this work, Habermas maps out the key pillars of his concept of "communicative rationality," which is at the foundation of many of his other works. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, published in 1981 as a two-

volume work, is considered to be Habermas's "magnum opus," in which he lays down the theoretical foundations of his social theory, and which serves as the basis for his other works on more specific topics like discourse, morality, and democracy. His main project is to propose a framework for developing a social theory that could explain the transition to modernity of societies, as well as the pathologies that result from this transition. As he writes in his own preface to the work, "The theory of communicative action is intended to make possible a conceptualization of the social life context that is tailored to the paradoxes of modernity."[7]

In my analysis, Habermas's concept of communicative rationality is reflective of the embodied, yet at the same time, transcendental, character of reason. This is opposed to the conception of reason as a disembodied consciousness, which is common to the rationalist tradition in philosophy.[8] The central role played by language in his epistemology is a manifestation of this very embodiment. We also find this embodiment in the importance of the concept of lifeworld in rational discourse. We will discuss these two elements in the next sections.

The understanding of reason as "embodied" makes possible a more nuanced approach toward understanding social reality, in which the particularities of socio-cultural phenomena are given as much importance as their universal significance. At the same time, his attempt to create a "universal pragmatics" that seeks to understand the essential conditions of human dialogue is reflective of an openness towards a transcendent dimension within this embodied rationality. Through an embodied conception of reason, Habermas provides an alternative path towards knowledge that goes beyond both the universalizing tendencies of modern thought and the relativist tendencies of postmodernity.

Communicative Rationality

At the heart of Habermas's philosophical project is the attempt to understand the nature of reason. Much of the critical theory tradition (from which he himself comes) has made a critique of the rationalist tradition that is characteristic of modernity. Critical theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer have criticized the exultation of reason that is found in the "Enlightenment project" as paradoxical. According to them, instead of liberating man, rationality has been used in ways that have only created structures of dominion, which we find as much in the phenomenon of national socialism as in that of consumerism in capitalist societies.[9] Habermas agrees with this critique. At the same time, he deviates from a totalizing critique of reason itself and sees the perspective of these critical theorists as having limited the understanding of rationality to a merely utilitarian end.

For him, a blanket critique of rationality brings about its own paradox since one cannot renounce rationality altogether; the very act of criticism itself is an essentially rational process. As Habermas describes the paradox, "the critique of instrumental reason conceptualized as negative dialectics renounces its theoretical claim while operating with the means of theory."[10] While he agrees with Horkheimer

and Adorno that reason has been used to create structures of manipulation, he claims that this specific use of reason does not encapsulate the totality of its essence. The "reason" that is critiqued by his contemporaries, according to him, is merely one side of what reason is. He refers to this as "instrumental reason." Instrumental rationality is characterized by the tendency to see reason as an instrument to arrive at a strategic objective that is external to reason itself. An example would be the act of reasoning that is used to win a game. He then proposes a broader manner of understanding rationality as something that is not merely limited to achieving specific strategic goals, but rather as something that aims, essentially, at understanding. This reason, which has understanding as its *telos,* is embodied in the structures of language. This is what he refers to as "communicative rationality," which is understood as a mode of reason that seeks mutual understanding, and which emerges within a discursive context. This is opposed to a goal-oriented use of reason, which engages in discourse only in order to promote an agenda.

In the third section of TCA Volume 1, Habermas highlights the central role played by language, particularly speech acts, in coordinating action within society. While strategic rationality seeks to utilize means to reach a specific end, communicative rationality seeks to *understand*. However, this does not mean that communicative rationality has no end in itself. Evidently, its end is that of "understanding;" the difference is that this "telos" is something that is inherent within the nature of language itself, whereas in strategic rationality, the end is external to language (for instance, manipulating the behavior and decisions of the other person). Nor does it mean that communicative rationality is passive in comparison to the action-oriented approach of strategic rationality. On the contrary, Habermas posits that the understanding that comes from communicative action results in a "binding and bonding" effect that unites the communicating subjects into a common goal or a shared mode of action. Understanding the statement of another and accepting it as true somehow binds the hearer to change the way he relates to the world.[11]

In this sense, interpersonal communication does not only have epistemological consequences (of, for instance, enriching our knowledge about the world) but also pragmatic ones. This is the reason why, for Habermas, communicative action necessarily leads to action coordination in society. This idea also shows in a very graphic way the unity between theory and praxis in Habermas's thought. It also manifests how reason is inseparable from the lived reality of the acting person, which is another element of its embodiment. What differentiates it from strategic action is that "participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual successes; they pursue their goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action based on common situation definitions."[12] In fact, one could say that this is the essence of what Habermas refers to as "communicative action." It is a coordinated, societal action that comes as a consequence of a common understanding among the different actors, which in turn is arrived at through discourse.

Meaning, Validity, and Truth

In trying to understand the concept of "reason" that underlies Habermas's theory of society, it is important to examine the notion of meaning and validity that he proposes in the context of human discourse. What does it mean for speech to be valid? He posits an *internal connection* between the meaning of a linguistic expression and its validity.[13] In an earlier description of rationality in the first part of his work, Habermas claims that "an expression satisfies the precondition for rationality if and insofar as it embodies fallible knowledge and therewith has a relation to the objective world (that is, a relation to the facts) and is open to objective judgment."[14] Again, here we see an inseparability between "thought" and "world" in assessing validity.

Considering this description of rationality, it is important to note two presuppositions: (1) first, that there is an objective world that is distinct from the inner world of the thinking subject; and (2) second, that there is a relation of correspondence between these two worlds. In this sense, it may be said that Habermas's framework coincides with a correspondence theory of rationality. There is an implicit recognition that knowledge consists in a relation between thought and objective reality.[15] This is opposed to a rationalist tendency to see validity only in terms of theoretical coherence within a given, often closed, system of belief.[16]

Another interesting idea in this description of rationality is the necessity of "openness to objective judgment" as a characteristic of knowledge that can be considered as rational. This highlights the importance of the dimension of justification in safeguarding the validity (and consequently, the rationality) of an utterance. Habermas emphasizes the idea that "knowledge" and "rationality" are two closely related yet distinct concepts. "The rationality of an expression depends on the reliability of the knowledge embodied in it."[17] Although Habermas does not explicitly elaborate on what it means for knowledge to be reliable, this is linked to his notion of justification. Knowledge is reliable to the extent that its presuppositions–the process through which it arrives at its conclusion–are valid. This somehow implies a *procedural* role given to rationality in precisely guaranteeing this dimension of reliability.[18] For Habermas, reason plays its most important part in the *process* of reasoning. He claims that "rationality has less to do with the possession of knowledge than with how speaking and acting subjects *acquire and use knowledge*"[19] (italics, his).

Knowledge may be reliable or unreliable. Interestingly, the idea of knowledge being true is already presupposed (since knowledge that is not true cannot be considered as knowledge at all). To speak of knowledge as rational, however, is not merely a function of its truth (which, again, is already presupposed in the notion of knowledge itself), but of its *justifiability*. To put it another way, the rationality of knowledge depends on its *reliability*; that is, on the extent to which

such knowledge can be justified, explained, and defended. For Habermas, truth claims, to be considered rational, must be open to criticism, and thus open to the possibility of having to be justified. It seems, then, that the role played by rationality in his theory of knowledge is most important in the context of the justification of such knowledge.

Regarding the notion of justification, this aspect highlights the dialogical context in which Habermas situates his theory. Although justification is indeed an element that can be immanent, in the sense that it need not include an interlocutor, in Habermas's theory of communicative reason, the dimension of justification can be understood in its truest sense within the context of a dialogue. To put forward a validity claim within a communicative action context is to be ready to justify and give reasons for such claims. In this sense, the dialogical context itself reinforces the necessary and inherent connection between knowledge and justification. Although the ability to give reasons for one's utterances is certainly something that a person can do on her own, this nevertheless acquires a distinct character when it is subject to external criticism. With this idea, we see a theory of rationality that is inscribed within the structures of interpersonal discourse.

For Habermas, to understand the meaning of an utterance is "to understand the conditions in which it can be valid." This statement somehow presupposes that utterances need to be understood as governed by specific conditions. This means that an utterance cannot be analyzed "in itself;" that is, it is not enough that it contains its own inner coherence. It cannot be analyzed in isolation from the context in which it is uttered and the reasons for which it is uttered. As Habermas points out, "the literal meaning of a sentence cannot be explained at all independently of the standard conditions of its communicative employment."[20] In a way, this idea echoes the "use theory of meaning" proposed by Wittgenstein in his later work.[21] However, Habermas goes beyond Wittgenstein's use theory of meaning by emphasizing not just the employment of language in a particular context, but also its reference to an *other* (a hearer who is the recipient of the utterance). For Habermas, the presence of the *other* in a dialogic context is not merely a passive, accessorial one; rather, it is key in determining and configuring the context of the dialogue, and as a consequence of this, the meaning and validity of an utterance.

Habermas distinguishes among three different types of speech act claims: propositional, normative, and expressive. These claims reflect *what there is* in the world (propositional), *how the world should be* (normative), and *what I think* about the world (expressive). According to him, each of these types of utterances are subject to a different set of criteria for validity. When it comes to propositional claims (which are claims about a particular state of affairs in the world), the criterion for validity is *truth*. A propositional utterance is valid to the extent that it really does reflect the reality that it seeks to describe. For normative claims, on the other hand, the criterion for validity is not so much truth, but *appropriateness*. A normative statement is valid not because it is true, but because it is *right*, given the set of social circumstances and norms in which the statement is said.

For instance, the normative utterance, "Please close the window," is valid under certain conditions that make such a request appropriate (for instance, the subjects of the dialogue are in a class and the noise from the streets is making it difficult to listen to the professor). Finally, when it comes to expressive utterances, these claim to reflect the inner world of the subject who speaks. In this case, the criterion for validity is *authenticity*; that is, the statement is valid to the extent that the utterance really does reflect the speaker's inner world.

These three speech acts claim (as well as the three types of criteria for validity that correspond to them) are always present in speech acts, although there is one validity dimension that often predominates. For instance, in most instances, expressive claims are at the basis of any valid propositional or normative claim. In a valid communicative context, a person who claims a propositional state of affairs also authentically believes in such a claim (otherwise, he would be lying) and makes this claim because he thinks it is appropriate to do so. Thus, even though the propositional statement in itself cannot be considered as expressive or normative, it nevertheless implicitly contains these other two dimensions. The same can be said in circumstances in which the other two validity dimensions predominate. A person who expresses something proper to his inner world (for instance, the statement "I am sad") believes that this proposition is *true*, and that expressing it is *appropriate*. To put it another way, for Habermas, whenever we make statements that we believe to be valid, there is an implicit assumption of all three validity dimensions (propositional, normative, expressive) even though only one of these three dominates the statement. This shows an integral perspective on the notion of validity, which is not limited to a "disembodied" theoretical coherence, but rather is inseparable from the reasoning subject and the context in which the subject moves.

One of the interesting aspects of Habermas's notion of meaning and validity is how the criterion of "truth" is reduced to only one of the different aspects of what makes language valid. There seems to be an equal weight given to the three different criteria of "truth," "appropriateness," and "authenticity." This seems to separate Habermas from other theories of language in which a central role is given to the relationship between language and truth (understood as a judgment about reality). For Habermas, not every utterance is subject to the true/false dichotomy. According to him, "We do not use the term 'rational' solely in connection with expressions that can be true or false, effective or ineffective. The rationality inherent in communicative practice extends over a broad spectrum."[22] Likewise, language cannot be reduced to a mere "mirror" of what is real. The "propositional" aspect does not encompass the entirety of what language is. While Habermas acknowledges the possibility of an overlap among the three types of validity claims, there does not seem to be a hierarchical relationship among them. That is, the three different criteria of truth, rightness, and authenticity are merely distinguished and applied to different types of utterances in which one dimension of validity claim dominates over another.[23]

As pointed out by Fultner, while Habermas recognizes that what makes a proposition true are the facts which it seeks to describe, such facts are not mere objects of the world separated from the subject; rather, "facts" are already linguistically interpreted.[24] Regarding the notion of an "objective world", from the perspective of communicative understanding, "the world gains objectivity only through counting as the same world for a community of speaking and acting subjects."[25] Again, this shows the importance of the intersubjective dimension in Habermas's thought. The perspective of other subjects in constituting the "world of facts" acts as a validating mechanism in ensuring the objectivity of subjective experience. Moreover, it highlights the interdependence between "subject" and "object," not as opposing concepts but as complementary dimensions of the same reality. The world as an "object" can only be understood as such alongside the existence of perceiving subjects. In this way, we see again an "embodied" perspective to reason that is inseparable from the "reasoning subject."

In emphasizing the diversity of the validity criteria for evaluating utterances, we see a plurality of what it means for an utterance to be "reasonable." It shows a multivocal understanding of validity. Meaning is understood from a plurality of perspectives and is conditioned not only by objective facts (i.e., the state of affairs), but by the actual circumstances and the intentionality of the subject uttering the statement. Such a notion of validity shows us that for Habermas, "reason" is not configured merely by some abstract truth that is detached from the contingent, but is configured precisely by the contingent elements in which an utterance takes place.

Lifeworld

After seeing the broad range of Habermas's theory of meaning and validity, it is clear that an important element in the constitution of meaning is the context in which a communication takes place. This, again, is another manifestation of the embodied nature of reason. One of the central concepts in Habermas's work is that of *"Lebenswelt"* (lifeworld), an idea that was originally coined by Husserl.[26] In the second part of the second volume of TCA, he dedicates a considerable section to sketching out what he means by this concept. He describes it as "a reservoir of taken-for-granteds, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation."[27] It is "representative by a culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns."[28] In another passage, he defines it as:

> The intuitively present, in this sense familiar and transparent, and at the same time vast and incalculable web of presuppositions that have to be satisfied if an actual utterance is to be at all meaningful, that is, valid or invalid.[29]

For Habermas, the notion of "world" is not limited to the realm of objective, material reality, but consists of different dimensions that emerge as a result of the subject's interaction with the world, other subjects, and with his very own self. In the first place, there is an objective world which reflects the state of affairs outside

the subject. This is the most common understanding of the concept of "world." However, it is also possible to speak of a subjective world which reflects the inner reality within the subject herself (thoughts, and other personal experiences that form part of the subject's inner world). Finally, it is possible to speak of a "social world," an intersubjective sphere which reflects the subject's relations with other subjects, carving a space and a reality that is neither purely "objective" nor purely "subjective."

One could say that the "lifeworld" is the totality and complex interweaving of these three different worlds. It is a concept that Habermas uses to reflect the complexity of the reality of the social subject. "Lifeworld" reflects the integration of a community of subjects' internal and external reality, as well as their intersections. This shared characteristic of the lifeworld implies that it is not possible to speak of a lifeworld in the context of an isolated thinking subject (in this case, one would only be speaking of the subjective world). Rather, the concept of a "lifeworld" presupposes an idea of the human person that is spatio-temporal and social.

In a certain sense, one can refer to the lifeworld as the "context" in which communication takes place. At the same time, it is a more complex concept than the mere notion of "context" as it is commonly understood in everyday speech. The lifeworld does not only refer to the spatial-temporal circumstances in which communication subjects find themselves, such as culture and language (though it definitely includes this aspect). It also refers to the epistemological background that governs human interactions, embracing all the epistemological assumptions about reality that are taken for granted in dialogue. Habermas calls this the "unproblematic, common, background convictions that are assumed to be guaranteed."[30] This somehow emphasizes how the epistemological background of thinking subjects is not something that is cut off from the spatio-temporal categories that shape the subject, but rather is fully integrated into them. Again, we find in the concept of "lifeworld" another manifestation of an embodied reason.

This concept also seems to imply that all human interaction takes place within an inescapable, "pre-interpreted" context. In fact, the very *possibility* of interacting at all is due to the existence of a shared context of unquestioned assumptions which serve as "a social a priori built into the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding."[31] As Habermas puts it, "Communicative actors are always moving within the horizon of their lifeworld; they cannot step out of it."[32] Habermas asserts that not only does the lifeworld serve as a background for communication, but that there is an "internal connection between structures of lifeworlds and structures of linguistic worldviews."[33]This means that not only the conceptual linguistic categories, but the structure of language itself, is inherently related to the lived conception of reality. In speaking of an "internal connection" instead of a causal one, Habermas seems to imply a mutual interaction between lifeworld and language. While language is derived from a specific social, cultural, and epistemic context, at the same time, such context is reproduced by the communicative structures that emerge from the interaction among different subjects.

While the concept of a "lifeworld" may appear to be an extension of Kantian epistemic categories to social theory (as mentioned earlier, Habermas himself speaks of it as a "social *a priori*"), one of the important differences between Kant and Habermas is that while Kant's *a priori* concepts are fixed into the structure of human thought, Habermas does not seem to view the "social a priori" which comprise the lifeworld as something fixed within social-cultural contexts. On the contrary, the very possibility of reproducing the lifeworld through communicative action implies, on one hand, a dynamism of the lifeworld, and on the other hand, a mutual relationship between the lifeworld and human agency. The dynamic nature of the lifeworld somehow resolves the problem of transcendence in his paradigm. While the existence of a background context for communication is inevitable, this does not mean that communicative actors are conditioned by their context in an absolute sense; on the contrary, by means of communicative dialogue, actors can reflect on and reformulate the background assumptions that govern their speech and action. Habermas himself denies the similarities between his formal-pragmatic approach and classical transcendental philosophy.[34]

To put it in another way, for Habermas, human dialogue is built upon unmediated, preconceived assumptions about the world. However, these assumptions about the world are dynamic; they are in a constant process of reproduction *precisely* through human communication. Communication's orientation toward *praxis,* as we see in his idea of communicative action, means that communicative agents can alter the very conditions of living, and by extension, the very conditions of their lifeworld. Moreover, to reach an understanding with another person through discourse is not just a question of concluding about a given question but rather involves enriching one's dispositions and orientation toward the world. This is precisely why, for Habermas, communicative dialogue brings about a "binding and bonding effect," particularly when it comes to action coordination in society.

Embodied Rationality: Bridging the Gap between the Universal and the Particular

After considering the notions of meaning, validity, truth, and the lifeworld in Habermas's theory of communicative action, we see a notion of reason that is inseparable from the structures of language and the world in which the subject moves. One of how the embodied nature of reason has been described is through the notion of a "postmetaphysical thinking," a concept that Habermas uses as a title in two collections of his essays.[35] Yates describes this postmetaphysical thought as a perspective whose aim is to:

> Integrate empirical resources into philosophy without losing sight of what is unique to philosophy: namely, its ability to step back from the empirical data to reconstruct in a systematic way underlying universal truths about us, our societies, and our place in the world.[36]

This approach presupposes a notion of an embodied reason; that is, a reason which is integrated in the structures of lived reality. Yates describes this as a "detranscendentalized" reason, putting it in contraposition with the notion of an abstracted, transcendental reason that is supposedly found in traditional metaphysics. Based on Habermas's interpretation of what metaphysics is, reason is given a privileged position that transcends the contingency of the material world. While he does not deny the capacity of rational agents to critically examine their own position (in fact, this is precisely what takes place in discourse), for Habermas, this reflexive capacity does not take place "from outside," so to speak, but *from within* the very parameters in which the reasoning subject is embodied. Cooke describes the "postmetaphysical" characteristics of Habermas's communicative rationality as: (1) defined formally and procedurally, and not substantially, since its primary aim is the process of justification and not the content of knowledge; (2) construed fallibilistically, given that it is subject to external validation; (3) situated historically; (4) derived from everyday practices of communication, i.e., non subject-centered, but rather something that emerges from and is configured within an intersubjective context; and (5) multidimensional, given the diversity of validity criteria for examining propositions.[37]

In describing communicative reason as "postmetaphysical," it is important to point out the nuance added to the concept with the use of the term "post" instead of "anti" in reference to metaphysics. As noted by Hohengarten, while Habermas is critical of the Western metaphysical tradition—primarily because of its totalizing tendency—he does not reject it completely.[38] Habermas argues that "genuinely postmetaphysical thinking can remain critical only if it preserves the idea of reason derived from the tradition while stripping it of its metaphysical trappings."[39] By "metaphysical trappings," Habermas refers to the aim at a universal, totalizing knowledge that he sees as characteristic of Western metaphysics. He believes that the classical philosophical tradition, since Plato, has centered the philosophical debate on the question of "the one and the many," to trace back everything into the concept of the one.[40] In doing so, the history of thought in Western metaphysics has ignored the relevance of the diversity of phenomena, as well as the many nuances that arise in the particularity of human experience.

To avoid the pitfalls of metaphysics, it is important to come to terms with the embodied nature of reason. This means, in the first place, a recognition that reason inheres within a thinking social subject who inhabits a complex intersection of internal and external worlds, i.e., the lifeworld. As a consequence, reason's functioning is embedded and integrated into the spatio-temporal context inhabited by the reasoning subject. This embodied notion of reason bridges the gap between the universal and the particular, filling in the lacuna between the abstracted nature of metaphysics and the contingent nature of the empirical sciences.

In one of his essays, Habermas indicates that "the unity of reason must be conceived in the plurality of its voices."[41] It is interesting how this description of reason creates an inherent connection between thought and utterance. Instead of

speaking of a "plurality of *manifestations*" of reason, Habermas speaks of its *voices*. Again, here, we see the importance of the communicative context as the ground in which reason unfolds itself. In saying that the unity of reason only becomes perceptible in the recognition of the plurality of its voices, Habermas highlights the importance of human language. In human interaction, even among persons of different languages and backgrounds, the *possibility* of mutual understanding (even when such understanding does not necessarily take place) always exists, which, for Habermas, is a sign of the underlying unity of reason. This, again, is reflective of his belief that the structures of rationality are embedded in linguistic structures.

Language and speech are among the clearest manifestations of the embodiment of reason. One could say, in fact, that Habermas's notion of communicative reason, in particular, can only exist within a discursive context. Language is not a mere instrument for communication, but rather "the medium in which understanding takes place."[42] He does not seem to deny the possibility of extra-linguistic thought, but the process of reasoning seems to necessarily involve language, since it implies having to make inferences about aspects of reality whose identity is configured by linguistic categories. In language, we see how reason necessarily adapts itself to socio-historical categories to reflect on these same categories.

In the previously mentioned essay, Habermas proposes a third way that is distinct from the contextualism of postmodern thinkers like Lyotard and Rorty, but at the same time, goes beyond what he believes to be the unitary orientation of traditional metaphysics. According to him, "the metaphysical priority of unity above plurality and the contextualistic priority of plurality over unity are secret accomplices."[43] Thus, he proposes a third, alternative perspective which he describes as "the humanism of those who continue the Kantian tradition by seeking to use the philosophy of language to save a concept of reason that is skeptical and postmetaphysical, yet not defeatist."[44] This is the perspective that is found in his notion of communicative rationality. As Cooke says, "The idea of communicative rationality is meant to provide a postmetaphysical alternative to traditional conceptions of truth and justice that nonetheless avoids value relativism."[45]

In a conception of reason that recognizes both its contextual and transcendent dimensions, its reflexive capacity is understood as something that takes place "from within" the categories of the lifeworld context and not cut off from it. It *does* connote a transcendent subject, albeit not in an absolute sense. Habermas himself refers to this as an "immanent transcendence."[46] For this reason, Yates refers to Habermas's position as a kind of "weak transcendentalism," in the sense that it takes a middle path between, on one hand, an absolute notion of transcendence, and on the other hand, historical contingency. [47]

However, it is important to analyze to what extent Habermas's theory of reason deviates from the classical metaphysical tradition that he is critical of. In the first place, it is important to inquire into the validity of his interpretation of metaphysics. Has traditional metaphysics indeed ignored the embodiment of reason as well as the thinking subject's spatio-temporal dimension? Habermas seems to think of the

"Western metaphysical tradition" as a unitary block of thought that has put forward a unitary notion of reason. While it is, indeed, possible to think of a "tradition," in the sense that philosophers have always built on and reconfigured the ideas of those that preceded them, one can hardly think of their theories as unitary.[48]

As Habermas describes it, within the metaphysical approach, "the explanation for the phenomena that have become objects cannot be sought at the level of the phenomena themselves but only in something that underlies the phenomena-in essences, ideas, forms, or substances, which, like the one and the whole, are themselves of a conceptual nature."[49] On the other hand, a "postmetaphysical" tradition that sees reason as inseparable from the structure of the subject's lived reality makes possible an understanding of the phenomenon *within* the phenomenon; that is, as something that is situated in its historicity. One studies the phenomenon and its principles to understand the phenomenon itself. This, in fact, is what Habermas seeks in his social theory: that of understanding the phenomenon of modernity and its pathologies in actual human communities.

Concluding Reflections

This work has attempted to examine the concept of "reason" that underlies Habermas's notion of communicative rationality. As mentioned earlier, Habermas has been referred to as "the last great rationalist."[50] In Dallmayr's reading, for Habermas, philosophy basically coincides with a theory of rationality.[51]Habermas himself, in the preface to his work, indicates as a motive for these two volumes the fact that "Western societies have been approaching a state in which the heritage of Occidental rationalism is no longer accepted without argument."[52] The importance of the concept of "reason" in his TCA is seen most clearly in the fact that the first volume of this work is dedicated to an analysis of what he calls the "rationality problematic." For Habermas, the evolution of human societies seems to be intrinsically bound to the predominant notion of rationality that pervades these societies. Social institutions are governed by and arise as a consequence of certain rationality structures.

Because of the embedded character of rationality structures in Habermas's thought, this article describes his theory of reason as "embodied," as opposed to the disembodied notion of human consciousness characteristic of a rationalist tradition. As explained in this work, Habermas recognizes the importance of the theoretical orientation in philosophy as found in metaphysics. At the same time, he believes that its unifying and totalizing approach to knowledge has led to a transcendentalism that has lost touch with reality. His postmetaphysical approach is critical of the idea that theory and praxis are mutually exclusive approaches; on the contrary, what is sought in a postmetaphysical approach is to unite the critical and reflexive dimension of theory with a grounding in the empirical.

To speak of a "postmetaphysical reason," in this sense, is to speak of a reason that is embodied in the social and historical structures of a thinking community.

It is a reason that works within and is configured by the categories of the lifeworld. At the same time, it can transcend it, since lifeworld structures are reproduced through communicative dialogue. It is within a discursive context that utterances become subject to validation and in which participants are made to give reasons for their beliefs.

As described earlier, one of the central elements in Habermas's linguistic approach is its emphasis on intersubjectivity. In communicative action, the processes of individuation and socialization go hand in hand.[53] One's process of realization as an individual is intrinsically related to one's integration within the context of a society. As a consequence of this, the constitution of meaning takes place in a communicative context; that is, meaning is constituted intersubjectively.

Dialogue, then, cannot be understood in the mere sense of a debate in which only one among many mutually exclusive positions can prevail. It is not a question of one being right and the other wrong. In a communicative context, one does not enter a dialogue to "win" an argument, but to come to an agreement, which is two different things. For Habermas, understanding (*Verstehen*) is inherently linked to, and in the context of communicative argumentation, *leads to* agreement (*Verständigung*). As he notes in the first volume of his work, "In everyday life, however, no one would enter into moral argumentation if he did not start from the strong presupposition that a grounded consensus could in principle be achieved among those involved."[54] In short, if the assumption is that understanding is not possible, people would not even consider entering into dialogue with those who have an opposing stand on a specific question.

The process of communicative dialogue allows the participants to arrive at a nuanced position regarding the truth of a given situation. Within the context of communicative action, "consensus" is not merely an arbitrary decision that comes as a consequence of what the dialoguing parties decide the truth to be. Rather, it comes as a result of a reasoned argument in which each of the parties is given an equal opportunity to be heard.

In this sense, Habermas's version of a "consensus theory of truth" is not relativist in an absolute sense, since it is governed by the criteria of "reason." The ultimate measure in a communicative dialogue is "the force of the better argument." Participants in a dialogue do not *decide* on a specific point of consensus but *arrive* at it. In a way, Habermas's theory of dialogue is comparable to classical theories in Plato and Augustine, in which reason, or the thought process, is conceived as an inner dialogue of the soul. This internal dialogue does not take place in the form of a debate on mutually exclusive options where one option wins out over all the others; rather, it is a dialectical process in which different positions are constantly being refined.

In the Habermasian paradigm, this notion of reason as an inner dialogue is, in a way, "externalized," i.e., transported to an intersubjective context. Bringing this inner dialogue to the social sphere, Habermas likewise transports the question

of rationality to an intersubjective context. The dialogical process of thought is transformed into a communal act of "thinking together" through communicative discourse. For this reason, language plays a central role in his thought. Rationality structures are embodied in the linguistic structures through which members of a society communicate with each other. Without negating the process of an inner dialogue, Habermas seems to view the inner process of reasoning as simultaneous to the external process of dialogue with others. In fact, calling the latter an "external" process may be misleading, since for Habermas there is a continuity between the dialogical process which takes place in a social context and the internal process in which an individual comes to refine her position on a given question. To arrive at a "consensus" in Habermas's theory can be likened to the outcome of a dialectical process in human thought.

Reasoning, then, is not merely an immanent process in which the individual constitutes reality within the closed sphere of his own consciousness (this is at the heart of his critique of the "philosophy of consciousness" paradigm). While Habermas does not deny the existence of an internal, private dimension of thought (his recognition of the "expressive" dimension of speech acts shows that he recognizes that an inner world that is exclusive to an individual exists), this inner dimension is intricately linked to the reality of the individual as embodied within a society. We make sense of reality and ourselves not as isolated, disembodied minds, but rather as members of a society, and in dialogue with other individuals. Transporting this inner dialogue to the social context also implies that this dialogue (and reason) is governed by spatio-temporal structures in which it is embedded. The totality of these structures is referred to by Habermas as the "lifeworld," as discussed in the second chapter of this licentiate project.

By drawing insights from the metaphysical tradition, sociology, and linguistics, Habermas sheds light on certain aspects of reason that perhaps have not been given sufficient attention by the thinkers who preceded him. Some of these aspects that have been discussed in this study are the intersubjective dimension of reason and language, the broad scope of the notion of "validity," and the complex notion of "world" that intersects between the subjective, intersubjective, and objective. Moreover, Habermas's interdisciplinary method in constructing a social theory also reminds us not only of the unity of the knowledge of the real, but also of the intricate relationship between theory and praxis.

To conclude, the embodied nature of reason in Habermas's theory of communicative action gives a more nuanced appreciation of the complexity of the reasoning process. Moreover, it offers the possibility of a more nuanced understanding of the particularities of lived experience. This perspective on reason is especially important in creating an atmosphere of dialogue. As explained in this article, dialogue is not just an interaction of ideas, but of subjects whose categories of thought take place in a lifeworld. Habermas's embodied reason presents us with a view of rationality that considers the lived reality of the reasoning subjects.

Endnotes

1. Thomas McCarthy, *Introduction to The Theory of Communicative Action.* (Beacon Press, 1984).
2. McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 2*, 401.
3. McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 2*, 402.
4. McCarthy, TCA Vol. 2, 398.
5. cf. Among Habermas's earlier works are *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968), *Legitimation Crisis* (1975), and *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1979).
6. Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Beacon Express, 1979).
7. McCarthy, "Author's Preface," *TCA Vol. 1*, xlii.
8. This idea of a disembodied consciousness can be seen in the philosophy of René Descartes, who conceived of the thinking self (*Cogito*, or *res cogitans*, the thinking thing) as a substance that is distinct from the body (which he refers to as *res extensa*). Cf. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641).
9. Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 2002).
10. McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 1*, 387.
11. In *Communication and the Evolution of Society,* Habermas argues that the aim of understanding is "to bring about an agreement that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another" (p. 3).
12. McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 1*, 286.
13. McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 1*, 277.
14. McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 1*, 9.
15. Further on in his work, the idea of "world" is broadened to include not just external facts, but also subjective and intersubjective realities. This will be discussed further in the next section.
16. Erik Olsson, "Coherentist Theories of Epistemic Justification," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* eds. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Stanford University, 2021), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2023/entries/justep-coherence.
17. McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 1*, 8.
18. cf. Cooke, p. 38, she similarly interprets Habermas's notion of communicative rationality as a procedural notion of reason rather than a substantive one.
19. McCarthy, *TCA Vol.1*, 8.
20. McCarthy, *TCA 1*, 297.
21. In his book *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Wittgenstein proposes that the meaning of a word depends on the way it is used in a particular context. Every context has its own inner logic (Wittgenstein speaks of a "language game") in reference to the objects that exist within it.
22. McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 1*, 10.

23 For instance, one of the striking differences between Habermas and Robert Brandom is that the latter privileges the assertive dimension of language (the propositional dimension, in Habermasian terms) over any other dimension.

24 Barbara Fultner, "Truth" in *The Cambridge Habermas Lexicon* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 446–49.

25 McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 1*, 12–13.

26 In his work *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (1936)*, Husserl conceives of the lifeworld primarily in epistemic terms, as that which is given and self-evident, i.e., a kind of perception of reality shared by different subjects.

27 McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 2*, 124.

28 Ibid.

29 McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 2*, 131.

30 McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 2*, 125.

31 McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 2*, 131.

32 McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 2*, 127.

33 McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 2*, 124.

34 McCarthy, "Author's Preface," *TCA Vol. 1*, xliii.

35 cf. *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Between Metaphysics and the Critique of Reason* (1988), which is a collection of philosophy essays in which the idea of a "postmetaphysical reason" serves as a common thread.

36 Melissa Yates, "Postmetaphysical Thinking" in *Jurgen Habermas: Key Concepts*, ed. Barbara Fultner (Routledge, 2011), 35–53.

37 Maeve Cooke, *Language and Reason in Habermas Pragmatics.* (Boston: MIT Press, 1997), 43.

38 Mark Hohengarten, "Translator's Introduction" in *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (MIT Press, 1992).

39 Ibid.

40 Habermas, "The Unity of Reason and the Diversity of its Voices" in *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (Boston: MIT Press, 1992), 115.

41 Ibid.

42 Cristina Lafont, "Language and the Linguistic Turn" in *The Cambridge Habermas* Lexicon, eds. Amy Allen and Eduardo Mandieta (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 225.

43 Ibid., 116–17.

44 Ibid., 116.

45 Maeve Cooke, "Editor's Introduction," *On the Pragmatics of Communication* (MIT Press, 1998), 6

46 Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 35.

47 Yates, "Postmetaphysical Thinking," 35–53.

48 Even in just looking at Plato and Aristotle, we already see very different approaches to philosophy. While Plato emphasizes the world of ideas, Aristotle's philosophical

method seems to draw significantly from empirical experience. In this sense, it is difficult to speak of a unitary "Western philosophical tradition." However, this debate would have to be the topic of a different paper.

49 Habermas, "The Unity of Reason and the Diversity of Its Voices," 118.

50 McCarthy, "Introduction," *TCA Vol. 1*, viii.

51 Fred Dallmayr, "Habermas and Rationality," *Political Theory* 6, no. 4 (1988): 553–79, http://www.jstor.org/stable/191432.

52 McCarthy, "Author's Preface," *TCA Vol. 1*, xliii.

53 McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 1*, xxii.

54 McCarthy, *TCA Vol. 1*, 19.

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