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COMMUNICATION, MODERNITY, AND DEMOCRACY IN HABERMAS AND DEWEY

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> The political culture of the Federal Republic {of Germany} would be in worse condition today if it had not adopted and assimilated ideas from American political culture during the first decades after the war. For the first time, the Federal Republic opened itself without reservation to the West; at that time we adopted the political theory of the Enlightenment, we came to understand the power of a pluralism borne initially by religious sects to shape attitudes, and we came to know the radical democratic spirit of American pragmatism, from Peirce to Mead and Dewey. (Jürgen Habermas 1989a, p. 45).

Alone among Frankfurt School critical theorists, Habermas has critically appropriated pragmatist motifs.[1] Although the Habermas-Dewey connection has been generally neglected, significant similarities as well as important differences appear in their work. Both theorists share, with Aristotle, Mead, Gadamer, and other dialogical thinkers, the view that human beings are primarily speaking and socially interacting creatures. Dewey asserted that society exists "by... and in communication," praising it as "the most wonderful" of all activities "by the side of which transubstantiation pales" (Dewey {1916} 1985, p. 7; {1925} 1988b, pp. 132-3). For Habermas, too, communication is a central life activity and the fulcrum of his critical theory: "The utopian perspective of reconciliation and freedom is ingrained in the conditions of communicative sociation of individuals" (Habermas 1984, p. 398).

Both theorists attack positivism, technocracy, and social domination, pointing to social forces that undermine the democratic potentialities of modern society. They also criticize the modern philosophic tradition, especially the idealist philosophy of consciousness and its subject/object dualism. Both call for a reconstruction of philosophy and social theory, offering intersubjective alternatives based on their theories of communication. In addition, they call for a unification of theory and practice, providing systematic critiques of speculative, quietistic, and conformist thought as well as of conservative ideologies. Following in the footsteps of Dewey, Habermas stresses uncoerced communication with the intent of upholding the progressive aspects of liberal social and political institutions against their critics.

Habermas' polemic against postmodernist arguments about the exhaustion of liberal democracy, rationality, social theory, and the entire Enlightenment tradition have made him, perhaps, today's most widely read interdisciplinary social theorist. The recent, intense debates over modernity and postmodernity and the prospects for democracy have stimulated a Dewey revival as well. In this article, we intend to initiate a much needed critical engagement of Habermas and Dewey that will demonstrate the significance of communication, or symbolic interaction, for critical theory and for the current debate over the availability of social and cultural resources for producing a freer and more just democratic social order.

Habermasian Critical Theory and Communication

Habermas has written that:

> I have for a long time identified myself with that radical democratic mentality which is present in the best American traditions and articulated in American pragmatism. This mentality takes seriously what appears to so-called radical thinkers as so much reformist naivete. Dewey's attempt to make concrete concerns with the daily problems of one's community' expresses both a practice and an attitude. It is a maxim of action about which it is in fact superfluous to philosophize (1985, p. 198).[2]

Yet despite this recognized affinity with Dewey and his detailed analyses of Pierce and Mead, Habermas has never undertaken a systematic interrogation of Dewey's work.

Although he acknowledged Dewey as a critic of technocracy, Habermas (1970, p. 69) contended that Deweyean pragmatism, applied today, overlooks "the structural change in the bourgeois public realm." In Habermas' view, "scientization" and "manipulation" of public opinion have depoliticized the populace and destroyed the critical edge of democratic norms and ideologies. He argued that Dewey assumed an unproblematic relation between scientific practices and public interests and value orientations, implying that communication between science and politics, and between technical policy questions and public opinion is transparent. According to Habermas, the decline of the public sphere has made translation of scientific and technical matters into issues for public discussion and democratic policy formation far more complicated than Dewey indicated.[3] Later, Habermas (1973, p. 272) implied that pragmatism reduces reason to an instrument of "pragmatic control of behavior" in which "interest and inclination are banished from the court of knowledge as subjective factors" (Habermas 1973, p. 262). However, Habermas also suggested that Dewey understood the entwinement of knowing and evaluating and defended a critical concept of Enlightenment rationality (Habermas 1973, p. 272). But from the start, Habermas could accept only selected pieces of pragmatism, which he would weave into his own theory.

Following Dewey's call for a reconstruction of philosophy, Habermas attacks the excessively totalizing, reductive, and idealist strains of modern thought. In defense of the critical and emancipatory moments of Western reason and modernity, which he claims that postmodern polemics sacrifice,[4] Habermas argues that communicative practices contain a normative basis for critical social theory and for democracy. In his view, "communicative action" is aimed ultimately at "reaching an understanding" between linguistic participants; it is pre-eminently a process of social interaction guided by norms facilitating agreement or consensus.

Habermas' theory of communicative action stresses the democratic potentialities of societal differentiation. Distinguishing sharply between "labor" and "interaction," Habermas (1970, pp. 91-4; 1971, pp. 43-63; and 1973, pp. 142-69) argues that social organization and culture have been progressively differentiated into discrete practical and theoretical spheres. In his view, modernity arises from a dual process of differentiation and rationalization in which theoretical, practical, and aesthetic spheres become increasingly determinate and develop semi-autonomously according to their own distinct logics (Habermas 1981; 1984; 1985; 1987a). The consequent, heightened capacities for communication and understanding provide new resources for resolving conflicts in a consensual or democratic manner. However, this evolutionary perspective builds on a more fundamental argument that taken-for-granted norms of free and uncoerced discourse underlie all undistorted speech. Competent speech acts are based on mutual understanding of the difference between true and false statements, which, in turn, presumes that discourse is uncoerced. Communicative action, ultimately, operates in accord with the implicit ideals of freedom and equality of the "ideal speech situation." Here, all participants must have free and equal access to each other, attempt to understand the issues and arguments, yield to the "force of the better argument," and accept the resulting consensus (Habermas 1979, pp. 1-5, 26-34, 56-9).

By arguing that everyday communication provides normative standards for distinguishing distorted from competent or uncoerced communication, Habermas moves toward anchoring critical theory in a pragmatic testing and validating of norms and knowledge claims in concrete situations. Yet his pragmatism is partial and contradictory, because his standard of communicative rationality is based on quasifoundationalist arguments about ideal speech and social evolution. By contrast, Dewey explicitly rejected this type of abstract, normative justification, proposing, instead, that critical standpoints must be derived from concrete norms, values, and sociological possibilities. During his pragmatist turn, Dewey adopted the "radical historicism" of William James, breaking decisively with the Hegelian "historicism" of his youth. Consequently, Dewey rejected progressive or linear conceptions of social and cultural evolution as well as classical foundationalism. Conversely, Habermas rejects radical historicism, and his evolutionary arguments still contain taints of Hegelian-like developmentalism.

In his early work, Habermas grounded his theory in an admittedly "quasi-transcendental" notion of "knowledge-constitutive interests" (Habermas 1971), while he later turned to the ideal speech situation and evolutionary argument in which cognitive, moral, and linguistic "species competencies" emerge in progressive stages. Extending ideas from Kohlberg and Piaget, Habermas (1979) suggested that the "postconventional" stage of moral development generates capacities and standards to resolve disputes about norms and knowledge claims. In addition, Habermas argued that rationalization processes, elaborated (incompletely) by Weber, favor these same developments by increasing cultural capacities for undistorted communication.

In the early 1980s, Habermas ({1981} 1984; 1987a) carried out a sweeping reconstruction of critical theory, arguing that the dominant metaphilosophical perspective of modernity (e.g., articulated by Descartes, Kant, and Hegel) is grounded in a subjectivist "philosophy of consciousness," which employs a "purposive rationality" to guide the selection of efficient means for realizing specified goals, without reflection on the rationality or justness of the goals themselves. The lack of procedures for rationally evaluating the purposes of social action traps modern theory in the obsessive effort to dominate nature and to insure self-preservation. Marx, Weber, and the earlier generation of critical theorists also remain trapped in the philosophy of consciousness; all these modern theorists neglected to distinguish between communicative and instrumental action, failing to elaborate the requirements of "reaching an understanding." In contrast, Habermas rejects the metaphilosophical grounding of truth in subjective intuition or certainty, calling for a "paradigm shift" to a linguistically and _intersubjectively_-centered philosophy of communication.

According to the Habermasian self-other model, the subject aims at communication, mutual understanding, and uncoerced consensus rather than striving to dominate and control. Although Frege and Wittgenstein began the shift to the new model, their approach to language was overly subjective and did not break entirely from the philosophy of consciousness. Even George Herbert Mead did not go far enough, because his communicative theory of the social-self allegedly stopped short of elaborating the conditions under which mutual understanding and consensus are reached. Most important, Habermas believes that breaking with the philosophy of consciousness and elaborating the conditions of communicative action yields a firm normative standpoint to attack coercion, domination, hierarchy, and injustice. Moreover, on sociological grounds, he contends that societal differentiation and rationalization progressively enhance the capacities for communicative action.

Habermas also borrows heavily from Max Weber's arguments about the "iron cage" of bureaucratic domination and the subsequent fragmentation of meaning and decline of freedom. He contends that Lukàcs, Horkheimer, Adorno, and other Western Marxists shared a one-sided perspective that weds rationalization to instrumental domination and that this model is currently shared by postmodernists (e.g., of Foucault, Baudrillard, Deleuze/Guattari) who fuse rationalization to cultural homogenization, seamless domination, and the erasure of individuality (see, Best and Kellner 1991). This highly pessimistic vision supposedly derives from the philosophy of consciousness, which obscures the increased capacities and resources communicative action that are also part of modernity. In opposition to the instrumental rationality of Marx, Weber, and critical theory and to the radical perspectivism and relativism of the postmodernists, Habermas argues that pathologies of the "life-world" can be diagnosed (e.g., blockages to communicative action) and that "cures" can be suggested (e.g., uncoerced discourse about norms). By elaborating the ultimate normative and social basis of modern democracy (i.e., undistorted communication) the theory of communicative action provides a standpoint for social critique and reconstruction.

Although he identifies developmental tendencies favoring the rationalization of communicative action, Habermas fears that the countervailing rationalization of purposive action (i.e., capitalist development and bureaucratization) threaten to foreclose emergent democratic possibilities. Increasingly efficient fiscal and organizational mechanisms "colonize" existing arenas of communicative action and block the development of new ones. However, he also stresses that democratization depends on the maintenance of clearly differentiated and highly rationalized organizational as well as cultural spheres. Thus, by causing dedifferentiation and sharp reductions in systemic rationality, Habermas believes that excessive opposition to purposive rationality and domination undermines democracy. Consequently, he attacks those on the left who he fears push the ethos of participatory democracy too far. Similarly, he attacks postmodernists who treat rationality as a monolithic, totalitarian force (Habermas 1981, 1987b).

Arguing that critical theory can no longer rely on historical norms and values to create a freer and more equal society, Habermas attempts to delineate an Archimedean point from which to attack the threats to rationality, pluralism, and democracy. Habermas (1976, p. 97) contends that "bourgeois consciousness has grown cynical," leaving "no norms for immanent critique to appeal to." Rejecting the historicist reliance of earlier critical theorists on concrete norms and values, he asserts that the theory of communicative action must proceed "reconstructively, that is unhistorically rather than with "concrete ideals immanent in traditional forms of life" (Habermas 1987a, p. 383). But his attempt to secure a quasi-foundationalist basis for critical theory, in the supposed universally taken-for-granted features of symbolic interaction and in the supposed progressive features of cultural evolution, produces a pervasive dualism cutting across his work (e.g., labor vs. interaction, instrumental versus communicative action). This complex maneuver to establish a secure normative standpoint for critique contradicts Dewey's argument that transcendentalism and nihilism can be avoided and democracy advanced only by a decisive antifoundationalist move to radical historicism.

Communicative Democracy and Historicism in Dewey's Thought

Similar to Habermas, Dewey believed that modernity provides yet unfulfilled possibilities for wider communication and stronger democracy. In his view, pluralistic associations, specialized roles, and diverse standpoints constitute an interdependent social web, providing unparalleled resources for individuation, while linking more people than ever before in cooperative activities and common universes of discourse. Although dogmatic moralism and semiconscious customary behavior still abound, social complexity and pluralism give rise to a "reflective" type of morality favoring ethical discussion and evaluation rather than stereotyped judgements and automatic obedience. In the interest of developing more autonomous individualities and uncoerced cooperation, Dewey, like Habermas, sought a method to secure and better utilize the normative resources and communicative potentialities of modernity (Dewey and Tufts {1932} 1985, pp. 165-213, 275-84).

Anticipating Habermas again, Dewey pointed to a dark side of modernity that threatens its emergent communicative capacities and democratic possibilities. Commodification, hyperspecialization, and demagoguery produce mass "bewilderment," manipulation, and silence (Dewey {1929-30} 1988f, pp. 46-7). The "cultivated irrationality" of the public opinion "industry" and media "intrusions," "shocks," and "sensations" result in new forms of cultural fragmentation that reduce political life to a "simulation" of democracy (Dewey {1918} 1988e; {1927} 1988c, pp. 311-18, 348). Moreover, Dewey argued that specialized science in the new "corporate" order puts an end to the Enlightenment's "simple faith" about free institutions rising automatically from scientific progress (Dewey {1939} 1989, p. 102). But despite growing economic insecurities, increasing threats to civil liberties, and mounting totalitarian forces, Dewey's support for the Enlightenment project of extending freedom, justice, and rationality never wavered. In Habermasian fashion, he contended that the potentialities for wider and freer communication still could be activated and channelled into new forms of mutual understanding and uncoerced social bonds (Dewey {1935} 1987a; {1937} 1987b; {1922} 1988h).

However, Dewey argued that language was a "natural bridge" for overcoming "factitious and gratuitous" philosophical dualisms (Dewey {1925} 1988b, p. 133). The unity of theory and practice that Dewey saw in symbolic interaction was the departure point for his stinging attack on modern epistemology. Contrary to Habermas, he held that a single type of "intelligence" (Dewey's substitute for reason) operates in technical as well as communicative affairs; it develops from capacities (inherent in all symbolic interaction) for formulating plans of action, foreseeing possible outcomes, altering courses of events, and adjusting to the consequences. Dewey concurred with his close friend George H. Mead's argument that intelligence arises out of role-taking skills learned with the acquisition of language (Mead {1930} 1967; Dewey {1925} 1988b, pp. 132-61). "Meaning" springs neither from copying external objects nor from intuitions, but, instead, develops from actors using symbols to "point to" possible outcomes of actions (e.g., the uses of different types of "objects") and from their mutual adjustments to the actual "consequences" of communicative acts. Instead of Habermas' sharp division between "labor" and "interaction," Dewey treated technical and communicative activities as continuous, entwined spheres.

By stressing the interdependence of the social and physical environments and the need to consider the consequences of human action for nature as well as the obverse, Dewey initiated a naturalistic break with strict homocentrism. Moreover, he spoke of nature as a source of aesthetic and erotic enjoyment not merely as an object of material manipulation. Critics have argued that the absence of nature constitutes an important deficit of Habermasian theory and that its dualistic rationalism underplays the role of feeling, emotion, expressiveness, and pleasure in social interaction (e.g., Whitebook 1979). Because he stressed the significance of bodily feelings and affect for intelligence and for all cooperative activities, Dewey implies a richer and more multidimensional conception of communication than that of Habermas.

Following James and Mead's Darwinian naturalism, Dewey viewed all knowledge to be a product of the purely historical relationship of organism and environment.[5] Naturalism's ecological emphasis on the "interactive" and "interdependent" relationship between individual organisms and their environments contradicts the self-enclosed ego of the philosophy of consciousness and, consequently, leads directly to communication as the distinctive form of human connectedness and as the core of the social. Contrary to Habermas, Dewey's antidualistic naturalism opposes any effort to set off communication from other forms of understanding. For Dewey, language itself arises from the interaction of organism and environment, and, especially, from the capacity to make "instrumental adjustments" to the consequences of actions. Even science's most advanced experimental procedures have their ultimate roots in this "intelligence" and rudimentary "empirical inquiries," which suffuse the simplest types of symbolic interaction and social action (Dewey {1929-30} 1988f, p. 115).

Dewey claimed that the desire to provide an indubitable "foundation" for instrumental knowledge underlies the dualisms between subject and object, mind and body, reason and emotion, fact and value, art and science, and public and private. All these splits culminate in modernity's central and crippling divide between theory and practice. The "quest for certainty" results in a "spectator theory" of knowledge that deflects the powers of intelligence by turning it to contrived problems that cannot possibly be solved. The spectator metaphor refers to sight as conventionally understood -- the eye copies images gathered from light refracted by an "external" object "totally unaffected" by the process of seeing. By viewing knowledge as a passive reception of impressions rather than as an experimental interaction between theory and practice, spectator theory treats acting, making, and valuing as external to knowing and as the source of distortions inherent in all "appearances." A "feeling of certainty" is produced by the belief that a stable reality lies beyond the instrumental realm of appearances. Because of their existential uncertainty, instability, and dependence on human practices, social phenomena are treated as inferior objects of knowledge or are put completely outside the reach of inquiry. In either case, abdication of intelligent intervention leaves society to existing powers and unmastered forces. Dewey held that spectator theory originated in the distinction between physical and mental labor mirroring the class split between rulers and producers (Dewey {1929} 1988a, pp. 17-20, 26, 33, 156-7; {1925} 1988b, pp. 233-4).

As indicated by the dichotomies between real and ideal speech, labor and interaction, and purposive and communicative action, Habermasian theory is still trapped within dualistic epistemology. Conversely, Dewey's radical historicism requires that social criticism be anchored in determinate historical possibilities -- appeals to shared symbols, felt needs and suffering, and concrete conditions of existing culture and social structure. Like Habermas, he believed that pluralistic features of highly differentiated societies provide opportunities for wider communication. But Dewey anchored his communicative ideal in concrete historical resources. He treated the appearance of Renaissance science and the consequent struggles over reason and authority to be decisive events initiating the rise of a relatively autonomous sphere of discourse opposing the ancien règime. The ideal of experimental knowledge being produced by a "community of workers" who share common standards, take each other into account, and submit willingly to the stronger argument suggested a new vision of community where everything is open to question, discussion, and rearrangement. Moreover, Dewey held that Darwin, Einstein, and Heisenberg and other post-Newtonian thinkers have more recently pointed toward an active, plural, historical, and uncertain "participatory" way of knowing that contradicts spectator theory. Although he was too sanguine about its prospects, Dewey believed that the ideal of "free" and "wider" communication could be broadened, radicalized, and turned critically against its own social context (especially specialized science). His call for the entry of "science" into morals, politics, and other spheres was primarily an appeal for extending uncoerced communication and for a developing a "participator theory" of social life that overcomes the divide between theory and practice and between specialized science and public life (Dewey {1929-30} 1988f, p. 115).

In his later years, Dewey contended that the heritage of Jefferson has left strong cultural and institutional residues in the United States. Arising from precapitalist communities bearing neither the imprint of feudalism nor the market, Jeffersonian ideals required much more than democratic suffrage and representation. Dewey held that they called forth a new form of "radical democracy" based on free interaction and participation. In contrast to the narrow and restricted community of scientific specialists, Jefferson implied a societal wide communication community animated by shared "emotion," "ideas," and "participation" (Dewey {1939} 1989, p. 122). Reconstructed for modern times (e.g. without the racism and sexism of the earlier era), this radical democratic ideal demands that cultural resources for the development of the self be made available to all individuals and hat communication, participation, and experimentation be extended throughout society. Dewey argued that by building on concrete transformations beginning in schools, workplaces, families, gender relations, and other areas of "local" social life, autonomous individualities would arise capable of democratically reconstructing the larger society.

In contrast to Habermas, Dewey believed that resources for democratization still exist "within our institutions and attitudes," providing "possibilities of the present" and means for resisting "encroachments" by capitalism and the state (Dewey {1939} 1989, p. 133; {1937} 1987a, p. 297). He held steadfastly to this position in the face of fascism, Stalinism, and mounting antidemocratic forces at home. Even a casual reading of Dewey's work demonstrates that this radical historicism did not arise from a naive optimism about these unhappy times, but derived, instead, from his view that the search for transhistorical resources leads to the formalistic cul de sac of spectator theory and the dualistic divide between theory and practice.

While Dewey's distinction between participator and spectator theory bears superficial resemblance to Habermas' dichotomy between communicative action and the philosophy of consciousness, the two theorists differ sharply over history and philosophic dualism. Dewey held that symbols are enlivened by their capacity to point to consequences and that democratic struggles ride on concrete possibilities anchored in actual social bonds and living communities of memory. Like other historical inquiries, efforts to locate these resources must contend with ambiguities, unintended consequences, and possibilities of failure. But however thin the prospects, Dewey insisted that ahistorical substitutes for concrete resources cannot conjure up consensus or stem coercion and that their upward gaze easily overlooks real possibilities for change.

Like Weber, Dewey considered theories of evolutionary or moral progress to be pseudohistorical substitutes for classical spectator theory, which still rely on implicit and unfalsifiable claims about transcendent normative principles giving direction to history. The underlying idea of a self-developing, collective subjectivity obscures the historical and instrumental bases of norms. Dewey ({1909} 1983) viewed Darwinian theory as a fundamental break with the old type of evolutionism, and believed that the new concepts of variation, adaptation, and selection opened the social world to genuine historical inquiry. From a Deweyean perspective, Habermas' claims about progressive communicative rationalization still carry on the earlier evolutionary tradition, albeit in a more nuanced and formally fallible manner. The evolutionary arguments contain taints of a drive for transcendent norms and quest for certainty. Dewey contended that such departures from concrete and particular history lead to ethical formalism rather than to real consensus and effective social criticism. Thus, although Habermas begins a shift away from spectator theory, he is stopped short of a complete break by evolutionary arguments and ahistorical claims about the ideal speech situation (see Benhabib 1986, pp. 275-8; 330-1; Roderick 1986; Antonio 1989; Fraser 1989; and Rasmussen 1990).

Furthermore, Habermas (1984, pp. 85-90, 104) operates with a concept of "normatively regulated action" that has roots in the consensus oriented Durkheimian tradition. He even argues that, by providing a bridge to Habermas's own approach to norms and evolution, a Durkheimian extension of Mead's thought would help it escape the philosophy of consciousness. Although he attacked crude Cartesianism, Durkheim defended a spectator theory of representation and truth against pragmatist instrumentalism. Following from this position, Durkheim treated the "constraining" power of agreed upon norms as the animating element in social bonds rather than the mutually adjustive responses of individual organisms. Dewey ({1917} 1985, pp. 59-61) flatly rejected this conventionalist conception of social bonds. By stressing moral constraint from shared values, representations, and norms, Durkheim treated social bonds much more narrowly, homogeneously, and cognitively than Mead and Dewey. Although he embraced the pluralistic and individualized features of modernity, Durkheim argued that binding democratic norms were needed to combat cultural fragmentation that threatened modernity's cultural achievements. Consequently he assumed a collective subjectivity and the philosophy of consciousness. Habermas' failure to elaborate sufficiently the fundamental differences between Durkheim and Mead's concepts of mind, meaning, and social integration prevents him from fully engaging the pragmatist alternative.

Despite his critique of Durkheimian thought and his communicative turn, Habermas' defense of modernity follows more closely in the tracks of Durkheim than of Dewey. The pragmatists and Habermas agree that social order emerges from a combination of coercion and shared meaning and that social criticism should be anchored in an ideal of open communication. But Habermas' separation of instrumental and communicative action, emphasis on normatively regulated interaction, and search for a foundation for critical theory focus his theory too narrowly around rationalist and consensual features of communication. In contrast, Mead and Dewey suggest a broader theory of communication and richer conception of social bonds. Contrary to the constraining powers of custom, Dewey treated modern "reflective morality" as merely providing "standpoints" for cooperative activity (which become customary if they are conventionalized into binding rules) (Dewey and Tufts {1932} 1985, pp. 275-84). By conceiving of meaning to be constituted in the cooperative practices of associated individuals mutually adjusting their acts to common consequences of shared situations and by not splitting the practical and aesthetic spheres from the cognitive, Mead and Dewey imply the possibilities of an entirely nonconventional, uncoerced, and communicative form of social integration.

Although it has yet to be fully fleshed out, the pragmatists' conception of uncoerced social bonds depends on mutual receptivity to the consequences of the beliefs, feelings, emotions, needs, sufferings, and pleasures of the other for the other as well as for the self and on responsiveness to gestures aimed at correcting inevitable misunderstandings. Heightened openness to communication (nonverbal as well as symbolic), appreciative tolerance of differences, mutual sympathy, and sensitivity to interdependencies are the bases of pragmatist radical democracy. Arising from highly refined capacities for taking the attitude of the other (facilitated by shared symbols and conditions of substantive freedom), this communicative ideal promises a richer individuality and broader social cooperation. Dewey provided a starting point for an alternative to aesthetic individualism's equation of all social solidarities with oppression, to the conventionalist and conformist rationalism of consensus theory, and to the dualism of the theory of communicative action. For Dewey, the great divide between theory and practice can be bridged only after a radical historicist break with all forms of essentialism and foundationalism.

Democracy and Social Theory

The main differences between Habermas and Dewey derive from their contrasting philosophical and sociological meta-assumptions, theories of communication, and assessments of the available resources for democracy. Dewey rejects Kant's bifurcations of reason and judgment into different spheres and all other philosophical dualisms, while Habermas believes that this type of differentiation constitutes a progressive heritage of modernity. Furthermore, Dewey develops a more holistic theory stressing the interpenetration between theoretical, practical, and aesthetic judgment and their common instrumental origins. Habermas, by contrast, seeks a foundation for social theory in the taken-for-granted attributes of language and interaction and in evolutionary development of communicative capacities. While they agree on the importance of unrestricted communication free from domination and consider it an essential aspect of democracy, Dewey and Habermas offer sharply different standpoints for social critique.

To avoid formalism, Dewey believed that effective social criticism must appeal to concrete normative resources and that the potentials for democracy reside as concrete historical legacies and possibilities. By contrast, although he averts their pessimism and antirationalism, Habermas's theoretical strategy follows from his agreement with the earlier critical theory argument in Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment ({1947} 1972) that concrete emancipatory norms and values for social criticism are lacking. His cautious and skeptical approach to new social movements replicates their underestimation of democratic movements and of historical capacities for resistance. Rather than discerning actually existing potentials for radical democratization, Habermas defends the progressive aspects of the cultural and political heritage of modernity. Dewey's strong Jeffersonian emphasis on participation, his extremely active and affirmative approach to leading progressive movements of his day, and his ideal of "radical democracy" set a decidedly different tone than the defensive stance of Habermas.

Although both theorists favor gradual, pluralistic, and peaceful (as opposed to revolutionary, utopian, and violent) change, Habermas proposes a weaker conception of democracy and is vaguer about the degree of departure from existing society than Dewey. Because Dewey, like Habermas, privileges communicative processes, he could not provide a detailed mapping of democratic structure in advance. Still, he envisioned democracy as a "radical" project requiring great change in existing social institutions and "struggle on as many fronts as culture has aspects: political, economic, international, educational, scientific and artistic, religious" (Dewey {1937} 1987b, p. 299; {1939} 1989, p. 132). While Dewey ([1939} 1988, pp. 312-314, 320) considered full employment, sweeping social programs, and workers' control as an "essential minimum" for democracy, he called for a much more profound cultural transformation of productivist values to advance substantive freedom and equality and to forge an entirely new relation to nature. Dewey still believed that representative politics and centralized authority had to be preserved and planning significantly extended. But he wanted to enliven and democratize these institutions through a sweeping, participatory "social" and "cultural" transformation that would erode the established boundaries between democratic political life and other domains.[6] In Dewey's view, the limits of democracy are historically conditioned (not absolute) and can only be tested by practical efforts that institute social changes that take risks and have costs.

Habermas, by contrast, puts much stricter limits on democracy. He restricts democracy to "basic political decisions" in which participants have already undergone "discursive will-formation" (i.e., education that enables them to submit to force of better argument), and rules out "so-called direct democracy" (Habermas 1979, p. 186). Habermas also seems skeptical about economic democratization, indicating his strong doubts about whether self-management is even a viable goal (Habermas in Dews 1986, pp. 67-69). Habermas's cautious views about democratization are, at least, partially based on the well-reasoned position that the romantic left and postmodernists contribute to antimodern, authoritarian currents when they are dismissive of the modes of organizational and cultural rationalization upon which democratization itself depends. However, his fears about dedifferentiation seem overdrawn and his lack of discussion of participation suggest an overly restrictive vision of the possibilities of democracy. We see here the political consequences of Habermas's bifurcation of production and communication or instrumental and communicative action. On his model, communicative action is confined to rather delimited domains and the logic of the economy (labor or instrumental action) practically precludes strong democracy.

Indeed, Habermas's notion of democracy is primarily a formal, proceduralist model that focuses on conditions of democratic discussion in specific arenas and says little about more radical democratic experimentation. Contrary to Dewey, who treated democracy as a "fighting faith" that presupposed a belief in the capacities of individuals to struggle for and achieve progessive social transformations, Habermas seems to share the Frankfurt School's pessimistic assessment concerning the diminished potentialities of individuals in contemporary capitalist societies. But Dewey's position is also problematic. Unlike Habermas, he did not adequately confront theorists, like Marx and Weber, who analyzed the social organizational bases of antagonism, conflict, inequality, and coercion. Although he criticized capitalism and big business, Dewey failed to theorize comprehensively enough the systematic thwarting of democratic participation by modern forms of organization and culture. Because of his limited understanding of the complex connections between liberal democracy and the productive power of modern domination, Dewey did not really come to terms with the forces that make nonparticipatory institutions so hard to overcome, even when they are not propped up by brute coercion. And despite his sharp criticism of the absuses of specialized science, Dewey never investigated how domination operates within scientific discourse and practice. Finally, consequent of his strong privileging of communication and cooperation, Dewey did not address the role of confrontational politics nor alternative strategies to cope with truly obdurate problems (e.g., the oppression of people of color during his day) that seem beyond consensual solutions. Habermas also downplays the role of conflict in communicative situations, privileges consensus, and fails to take account of the role of confrontation and direct action in effecting political change. In addition, his work has its own sociological deficit arising from the split between labor and interaction and from the consequent understating of the interplay and connections between the domains of communication and instrumental action. However, his appropriations from Marx and Weber do provide Habermas with a more nuanced approach to domination, more sensitive to the systematic, sociological constraints to democracy.

Dewey and Habermas both defend progressive aspects of modernity and criticize antidemocratic aspects of capitalism, bureaucracy, technological rationality, and scientism. Most important, they both attempt to reconstruct modern thought in order to unify theory and practice, conceptualizing social theory as part of the project of social critique and reconstruction. Their work takes on added importance, today, when struggles for democratization have intensified. But important differences exist between the two perspectives, especially in regard to their approaches to history and their methods of social critique. A long-overdue confrontation between Dewey and Habermas is, thus, important for the very future of critical social theory and for the current social and political struggles aiming at wider and stronger democracy.

In conclusion, we hope that our discussion demonstrates that the resources of pragmatism, interactionism, and critical theory together can be brought to bear on today's burning questions about the prospects and possibilities of modernity and the meaning and fate of democracy and individuality. By engaging these big issues in an interdisciplinary context, interactionists could strengthen common threads that they share with other traditions and counter the narrowly specialized communication that increasingly characterizes professional social science. Mead and Dewey themselves stressed the need for pragmatism to address the most pressing issues of public life and to avoid the parochialism and isolation that derives from ignoring the connections between specialized activities and larger socio-political contexts. By attending more closely to issues of democracy and modernity, symbolic interactionists could provide valuable input into the current interdisciplinary debates that swirl around the topics and, at the same time, return to the roots of their own intellectual enterprise.

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Notes

[1] Habermas told us that he read Quest for Certainty, Reconstruction in Philosophy, Art and Experience, Logic of Inquiry as well as other works by Dewey. He also said that Dewey's progressive philosophy of education, which stressed the importance of science, democracy, and enlightenment, was very significant for his own education and formation of his own world-view (conversation with Kellner in Frankfurt, Germany, October 1990). Habermas cited Dewey for the first time in Logic of the Social Sciences ({1970} 1988), but did not engage his work. Habermas once noted that he began (in the early 1960s) an "intensive involvement with linguistic philosophy and analytical philosophy of science. Encouraged by my friend Apel, I also studied Peirce, as well as Mead and Dewey. From the outset I viewed American pragmatism as the third productive reply to Hegel, after Marx and Kierkegaard" (Habermas in Dews 1986, p. 151). Furthermore, Habermas told us that he first encountered a "living" pragmatism in Lawrence Kohlberg who represented the central motifs of pragmatism: experimental openness to experience, a non-dogmatic approach to theory stressing the need for reconceptualization and revision, and receptivity to critical arguments that might elicit theoretical revision. Finally, he indicated that it was Richard Bernstein who convinced him of the importance of the approach for contemporary philosophy as well as of the closeness of some of his own positions to pragmatism (conversation with Kellner in Frankfurt, Germany, October 1990). Although he systematically engaged Charles Morris (Habermas 1988), Pierce (Habermas 1971), and Mead (Habermas 1987a), Habermas never comprehensively interrogated Dewey's thought. However, his affirmative attitude toward Dewey and the pragmatist tradition contrasts sharply with earlier critical theorists who attacked Dewey for idealism and crude naturalism

(e.g., Marcuse 1939) and for being an apologist for American empiricism and liberalism (e.g., Horkheimer 1947).

[2] Richard Bernstein (1986, p. 91) states: "It is to Habermas's credit that he has been one of the few German philosophers ... to break out of those blinding prejudices which have been a barrier for Continental philosophers to appreciate the vitality, esprit and relevance of what is best in the American pragmatic tradition. It is not just that Habermas has creatively drawn on the work of Pierce and Mead in developing his own understanding of communicative action, discourse, and rationality, but the American pragmatist with whom Habermas shares the deepest affinity is John Dewey." But Bernstein does not elaborate their similarities nor note their differences.

[3] Habermas' critique may not be fair on these points for Dewey was expressly aware of the problems in translating means into ends, facts into values, and theory into practice. In addition, Dewey was prescient about the distortions emergent from capitalist commercialization, specialized science, and mass communications. In the wake of the World War I propaganda machines, Dewey ({1918} 1988e; {1918} 1988g) already was warning about the dangers of a concentrated news media, and later he argued that public discourse was being undermined by "private interests" suppressing, withholding, and misrepresenting information (Dewey {1927} 1988c, p. 347). Habermas' oversight on this matter may unfold from his focusing primarily on Dewey's philosophical works rather than his social and political writings.

[4] See our critique of the postmodern turn in social theory (Antonio-Kellner 1991) and our forthcoming book, Discourses of Modernity, where we shall systematically develop the nature, contributions, and limitations of modern social theory.

[5] Dewey's position must not be confused with reductive naturalism, which contends that identical mechanistic processes and laws govern all phenomenal domains and that only mathematical methods of "hard" science produce genuine knowledge. Dewey viewed phenomena, methods, and knowledge pluralistically, and argued that the social and cultural domains have unique attributes (i.e., their communicative features) that distinguish them from purely physical realities and that require their own distinct methods of inquiry and knowledge. Yet regardless of "the wonders of communication," Dewey did not radically partition the social from

other aspects of reality. Rather, he stressed the interconnection and interdependencies of all domains, including the social. Still, his naturalistic emphasis on the interpenetrating and open nature of all phenomenal spheres does not suggest that they are identical nor does it rule out the need for different modes of understanding.

[6] The elder Dewey's radical, Jeffersonian views had a formative impact on the SDS leadership in its early (Port Huron) days and helped shape their participatory democratic creed; its leaders came in contact with Dewey's ideas directly as well as through the influence of C. Wright Mills (see Miller 1987, pp. 16, 69. 78-79, 148-150, 168-169, 206-211). Although he might not have agreed with the confrontational aspects, the new public spheres forged by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s had a strong Deweyean flavor. By contrast, Habermas criticizes these movements for their antimodern features. Any comparison of the politics of Dewey and Habermas, however, must be highly qualified because of their sharply different historical and cultural contexts. In particular, the German experience with Nazism is a watershed that may make Habermas more cautious about radical change and romantic experimentation.

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Jan. 9, 1991

Dear Dmitri:

Here is the revised version of our Habermas-Dewey article. Bob was here this week and we worked intensively on revising it and now think that we have it together.

Although it looks longer than before, this is because I have a new wordprocessor with standard one-inch margins whereas I had much narrower margins before; previously, my program also put more characters per page, so in word length we are about the same as before; we added much new material, to be sure, but we also cut and condensed a lot as well.

We think that you will be pleased with this version and would like to know what the publishing schedule will be and if we can do a final edit before it is copy-edited and sent to press; also, will you be distributing Habermas' comments before publication? We would of course be interested in how he responds!

Best wishes for a healthy and productive new year,

Bob Antonio and Doug Kellner