

Jürgen Habermas and Postmetaphysical Rationality

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Introduction and Background

Some of the most notable German thinkers have taken turns at different periods in history to proclaim *the end of philosophy*. Karl Marx denounced philosophy for its poverty, for merely trying to explain the world rather than confront the urgency to change it. Martin Heidegger lamented over the degeneration of metaphysics into the forgetfulness of being. In his view metaphysics no longer provided the ground on which to cultivate the very conditions of possibility for raising the question of being. And so he proposed the overcoming of metaphysics. Hans-Georg Gadamer abandoned the search for epistemological absolutes and foundational principles; instead, he introduced a new perspective in regarding the process of understanding and evaluating the truth status of all knowledge. He also advanced the development of a hermeneutic sensibility based on an ontology of finitude of the human condition. Jürgen Habermas for his part asks whether philosophy still has a purpose. In the *Philosophical-Political Profiles* he raises this concern:

...The unsettling question remains whether, after the downfall of systematic philosophy and now even the retreat of philosophy itself, it is still possible to do philosophy, and, if it is, for what purpose philosophy is needed... Why not... philosophy itself fade away in the graveyard of a spirit

that can no longer affirm and realize itself as absolute?
Does philosophy still have a purpose today, and will it
(have) tomorrow?¹

His answer to his own question is a qualified yes because while he acknowledges the continuing relevance of philosophy, nonetheless, Habermas also thinks that philosophy can no longer take precedence among the disciplines because of the more pressing need for a critical social theory that requires the reconstructive sciences more importantly for this task.

Let us look at a brief historical background of Habermas.² He was born in 1929 and grew up in the little town of Gummersbach in Germany and studied at the universities in Göttingen, Zurich, and then in Bonn where he obtained his doctorate in 1954 with a dissertation on Friedrich Schelling. After working as a journalist for some years, he was employed in 1956 as an assistant to Theodore Adorno at the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt. In 1961 he completed his treatise entitled *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* which became an instant bestseller and qualified him for a chair at any German university. This study focused on the political significance of the public sphere in bourgeois society and its development as well as its decline. He then taught at the University of Heidelberg from 1961-1964 after which he transferred to the University of Frankfurt where he succeeded Max Horkheimer as professor of sociology and philosophy.

His publications include a string of highly regarded and widely appreciated works, among them: *Knowledge and Human Interests*, *Legitimation Crises*, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, *The Postnational Constellation*, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, and the voluminous *The Theory of Communicative Action*. His most recent book is *Between Facts and Norms: Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*.

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985), 9.

² Erik Eriksen and Jarle Weigard, *Understanding Habermas: Communicative Action and Deliberative Democracy* (London: Continuum, 2003), 3.

Habermas enjoys a sterling reputation as a philosopher not only because of his major writings but also because of his frequent and incisive comments on the most controversial questions in contemporary times. In the special issue of *Time*, 26 April 2004, Habermas is included among the one hundred most influential people in the world under the category of "Scientists and Thinkers." Of his involvements in numerous current discussions, Stephen Bronner writes: "Habermas has become an exemplary *public* intellectual. He has taken a position on the major issues of the time: calling for more democracy in the educational system, dealing with student protests, confronting those conservatives who considered it time to wash their hands of the Nazi past in the *Historikerstreit*, challenging the postmodernist advocates of relativism and experientialism, championing the contributions of the welfare state, opposing the deployment of nuclear missiles in Germany."³ Habermas also voiced out his defense of the "Operation Desert Storm," his support for the interventions made by the United States in Bosnia, and more recently his unequivocal opposition to the Bush doctrine of preemptive strike and the subsequent invasion of Iraq.

Postmetaphysical Rationality

Habermas has always assumed the role of the philosopher as the guardian of reason. He considers the problem of rationality as the central question in every philosophical discussion. In this regard, while he is somehow critical of modernity and its rationalist ideal, nonetheless, he remains a vigorous upholder of the idea of rationality and modernity. He maintains that modernity is still an unfinished project so that while rejecting the modernist appropriation of rationality in a restrictedly positivist and instrumentalist manner he deplores at the same time those who have little regard for the capacity of human reason to establish valid standards and to tackle the challenging dilemmas in life. He insists that there are enough rational grounds for social hope.

³ Stephen Bronner, *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 283.

Modernity is ironical because, according to Habermas, even as it may have fueled "the attractiveness of the only option that seems to remain open: the brash denial of reason altogether,"⁴ it has in fact also made the rationalization of society viable. Franklin Gamwell explains this viewpoint:

The modern worldview, unlike its predecessors, fully opens to critical reflection the understanding or validity claims that are constitutive of all human practice and, therefore, all social action. In contrast, mythical and medieval worldviews immunized at least some understandings from criticism, so that social order was effected at least in part by unquestionable tradition or authority. The full release of critical reflection permits not only the transformation of inherited institutions or patterns of life but also the specialization and accumulation of knowledge that directs social action in relation to human needs and interests.⁵

At no other period in history has this happened than in modernity, namely, "the creation of common understandings that are critically negotiated"⁶ which makes societal rationalization achievable.

Habermas thinks however that the rationalization of society has been premised on a limited understanding of practical reason, "as if only empirical or scientific validity claims about factual states of affairs can be rationally contested and redeemed."⁷ In his view this has resulted into the increasing domination of modern societies by systems of strategic calculation aimed solely at control over nature and people and the manufacture of material products. This is most evident in the economic order and the bureaucratic state administration. In the political arena, moreover, this has

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 3.

⁵ Franklin I. Gamwell, "Metaphysics and the Rationalization of Society," *Process Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4 (Winter 1994), 219.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 220.

fostered a gross misconception as it abets an understanding of politics in which rationality is concerned with the efficacy of the means towards the pursuit of individual and collective ends with nary a regard for the ends themselves.

The solution of Habermas to this impasse is to replace the modernist understanding of practical reason with his theory of communicative rationality. He explains the distinctive characteristics of this rationality as follows:

Communicative reason... is no longer ascribed to the individual actor or to a macrosubject at the level of the state or the whole of society... What makes communicative reason possible is the linguistic medium through which interactions are woven together and forms of life are structured. This rationality is inscribed in the linguistic *telos* of mutual understanding and forms an ensemble of conditions that both enable and limit. Whoever makes use of a natural language in order to come to an understanding with an addressee about something in the world is required to take a performative attitude and commit herself to certain presuppositions. In seeking to reach an understanding, natural-language users must assume that, among other things, the participants pursue their illocutionary goals without reservations, that they tie their agreement to the intersubjective recognition of criticizable validity claims, and that they are ready to take on the obligations resulting from consensus and relevant for further interaction.⁸

Habermas further maintains that communicative action promotes a decentered worldview. It is not just a single world but three to which individuals relate and these form a system of several equally primordial worlds. Habermas elucidates on this in *The Theory of Communicative Action*:

Participants in communication who are seeking to come to an understanding with one another about something do not take up a relation only to the one objective world... They by no means refer only to things that happen or could

⁸ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 3-4.

happen or could be made to happen in the objective world, but to things in the social and subjective worlds as well.⁹

Habermas clarifies this point again in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. He also alludes to the threefold validity claims of a speech act:

I call interactions communicative when the participants coordinate their plans of action consensually, with the agreement reached at any point being evaluated in terms of the intersubjective recognition of validity claims. In cases where agreement is reached through explicit linguistic processes, the actors make three different claims to validity in their speech acts as they come to an agreement with one another about something. Those claims are claims to truth, claims to rightness, and claims to truthfulness, according to whether the speaker refers to something in the objective world (as the totality of existing states of affairs), to something in the shared social world (as the totality of the legitimately regulated interpersonal relationships of a social group), or to something in his own subjective world (as the totality of experiences to which one has privileged access).¹⁰

These three world concepts, it must be stressed, are formal concepts, meaning to say, they are abstract and devoid of any specific content. Habermas is emphatic about this point because for him validity claims precisely “presuppose a world that is identical for *all possible* observers, or a world intersubjectively shared by *members*.”¹¹

The decentered world view is modernist and differs from the mythical and medieval religious or metaphysical worldviews. The mythical worldviews, according to Habermas, “prevent us

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. I, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 84.

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Nicholsen (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 58.

¹¹ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action I*, 50.

from categorially uncoupling nature and culture, not only through conceptually mixing the objective and social worlds but also through reifying the linguistic worldview;" consequently, "the concept of the world is dogmatically invested with a specific content that is withdrawn from rational discussion and thus from criticism."¹² With regard to religious or metaphysical worldviews, Habermas has this to say:

Although religious-metaphysical worldviews exerted a strong attraction on intellectual strata; although they provoked the hermeneutic efforts of many generations of teachers, theologians, educated persons, preachers, mandarins, bureaucrats, citizens, and the like; although they were reshaped by argumentation, given a dogmatic form, systematized and rationalized in terms of their own motifs, the basic religious and metaphysical concepts lay at a level of undifferentiated validity claims where the rationality potential of speech remains more tightly bound than in the profane practice of everyday life, which had not been worked through intellectually... The basic concepts that carried, as it were, the legitimation load of ideologically effective worldviews were immunized against objections already within the cognitive reach of everyday communication.¹³

In other words, since the religious or metaphysical order is supposed to be prior and fundamental to all other orders, the worldview that it sustains leaves no ample room for rationalization. One reason is that the norms that it prescribes are accepted almost unquestioningly on account of the belief in or the submission to authority that motivates and even compels said acceptance. Another is that the level of 'institutional separation between the sacred and the profane realms of action' is not pronounced enough to allow, and much less encourage, any challenge to the prevailing worldview. The result is that within the religious or metaphysical sphere communication is systematically limited.

¹² Ibid., 51.

¹³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. II, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 189.

This lack of differentiation between realms of action occasions likewise, according to Habermas, the lack of differentiation between spheres of validity claims which in turn impact on the mode of legitimation available in society, given the systematic restriction on the possibilities of communication. The obvious implication for modernity is that if it is to undertake the rationalization of social action then it has to avert the pitfalls of both the mythical and the religious-metaphysical worldviews. This means for Habermas that rationalization in modern society can only be effected through an approach that is postmetaphysical and secularistic.

Universal Pragmatics

Although the *end* of philosophy had been rendered in varying descriptive fashions there seems to be, nonetheless, a general understanding among philosophers about one other meaning of the *end*. They agree that the *end* is not to be understood as though philosophy has become a thing of the past, like a forgotten relic displayed in a dusty corner of a neglected museum. Neither is it to be interpreted as though philosophy has already fulfilled its *telos*, like Odysseus finally reaching the shores of Ithaca after a long and arduous journey. It is rather conceded that the *end* of philosophy signifies the clearing of a path which leads to the possibility of a novel and perhaps more creative way of thinking.

Habermas discovers this new way in the conception of knowledge inspired by the movement known as German idealism. According to this view knowledge is to be at the service of freedom; it is not to remain in the level of speculation but must initiate action towards human emancipation. Philosophy can thus remain true to its classical tradition only by renouncing it; for as Habermas argues: "The insight that the truth of statements is linked in the last analysis to the intention of the good and true life can be preserved today only on the ruins of ontology."¹⁴ This means that a leap must be made from theory to practice.

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 317.

And this is to be propelled forward by the kind of critique which initiates the verification of theories and engenders the enlightenment of practice. Habermas situates this critique within a theory of communicative action which is sustained by the supposedly universal presuppositions of everyday communication. It is to be accomplished by the science of universal pragmatics which is to be a collaborative enterprise between philosophy and the empirical sciences. In this venture philosophy can no longer stake a prominent and exclusive claim in clarifying the foundation of all knowledge. It must also rest content with proposing strong universalistic claims that are at once hypothetical and fallible.

Universal pragmatics was first formulated as a doctrine of dialogue without coercion and later on was presented as a research program aimed at reconstructing the universal validity basis of speech. Habermas considers universal pragmatics an emancipatory science because it makes use of knowledge for the sake of emancipation. It prescribes the ideal speech situation through which it also exposes the manner in which language can serve as a source and perpetrator of unconscious constraints.

The main thesis of universal pragmatics is that language has a pragmatic context. Communication through linguistic utterances is regarded as speech acts. A speech act is the basic unit of a sentence in an utterance. A linguistic utterance has a performative status which is to say that when a speaker says something he is simultaneously doing something. When we communicate we convey a message, perform an action, and establish a relation. We also raise certain validity claims, that is, we claim to be:

1. *Uttering* something understandably;
2. Giving (the hearer) *something* to understand;
3. Making *himself* thereby understandable; and,
4. Coming to an understanding *with another person*.¹⁵

Four types of claims are always present before dialogical participants who wish to reach an understanding:

¹⁵ Ibid., 2.

1. Comprehensibility or intelligibility – that the utterance is understandable;
2. Truth – that its propositional content or existential presupposition is true;
3. Rightness or correctness – that it is a legitimate utterance within the given context; and,
4. Sincerity – that it is spoken truthfully.

Together they constitute the *conditio sine qua non* of every communicative action. In other words such interaction can be pursued only to the degree to which the participants involved in it credibly sustain these four types of validity claims. The goal of communicative action is to attain genuine consensus, defined as “an agreement that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another.”¹⁶

Habermas highlights the first claim of intelligibility as being the only claim that can be fulfilled immanently in language. The sentence needs only to be grammatical and conform to an established system of recognized rules for the use of language. The other three claims, on the other hand, require something more beyond language:

The validity of the propositional content of an utterance depends... on whether the proposition stated represents a fact (or whether the existential presuppositions of a mentioned propositional content hold); the validity of an intention *expressed* depends on whether it corresponds to what is actually intended by the speaker; and the validity of utterance performed depends on whether his action *conforms* to a recognized normative background. Whereas a grammatical sentence fulfills the claim to comprehensibility, a successful utterance must satisfy three additional validity claims: it must count as true for the participants insofar as it represents something in the world, it must count as truthful insofar as it expresses something intended by the speaker; it must count as right insofar as it conforms to socially recognized expectations.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 28.

One important question is how a speaker is able to influence his hearer to enter into an interpersonal relationship with him. According to Habermas there are certain conditions that determine how an utterance "can move a hearer to rely on the speech-act-typical commitments of the speaker;"¹⁸ in other words, how the hearer can be *rationally motivated* to accept the content proposed by the speaker. This acceptance is facilitated by the immanent obligation of each type of speech action to provide for every validity claim made the following: *grounds* (in the case of constatives or claims of comprehensibility or intelligibility), *justifications* (in the case of regulatives or claims of rightness or correctness), or *confirmations* (in the case of avowals or claims of sincerity). The satisfaction of this obligation can be done either immediately – in the context of utterance, or mediately – in discourse or in the succession of consistent actions. Immediately it is satisfied through recourse to experiential certainty (with respect to truth); through indicating a corresponding normative background (with respect to rightness); or through affirmation of what is evident to oneself (with respect to sincerity). On the contrary the mediate satisfaction of this immanent obligation is realized according to the mode of communication engaged in. David Held explicates the process involved in each of these three modes:

In the *cognitive* use of language, if an initial statement is found unconvincing, the truth claim can be tested in a theoretical discourse. In the *interactive* use of language, if the rightness of an utterance is doubted, it can become the subject of a practical discourse. In the *expressive* use of language, if the truthfulness or sincerity of an utterance is questioned, it can be checked against future action.¹⁹

Thus universal pragmatics generates a genuine optimism over the comprehensive possibility to examine every utterance. This is an essential component of the rational motivation behind the illocutionary force of a speech action. Habermas assures us it

¹⁸ Ibid., 62.

¹⁹ David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 338.

is possible to "examine every utterance to see whether it is true or untrue, justified or unjustified, truthful or untruthful, because in a speech, no matter what the emphasis, grammatical sentences are embedded in relations to reality in such a way that in an acceptable speech action segments of external nature, society, and internal nature always come into appearance together."²⁰

There are occasions however when communication is frustrated. This happens when a validity claim is initially challenged or rejected outright. In such a situation there is a need to redeem the claim or else communication cannot continue and this breakdown usually leads to other types of interaction like struggle and conflict. Habermas is firmly convinced that it is always possible to adequately redeem a validity claim and thus reach understanding or consensus. He posits the concept of an *ideal speech situation* which accordingly guarantees the development of a grounded consensus. Held explains how this is to be attained:

The conditions for a grounded consensus is a situation in which there is mutual understanding between participants, equal chances to select and employ speech acts, recognition of the legitimacy of each to participate in the dialogue as 'an autonomous and equal partner' where the resulting consensus is due simply 'to the force of the better argument'. In other words the conditions of the ideal speech situation must ensure equal opportunity for discussion, free from all domination, whether arising from conscious strategic behavior and/or systematically distorted communication (internal and/or external constraints).²¹

Habermas calls the consensus generated by this ideal speech situation as a 'rational consensus' and for him this is the ultimate criterion of the truth of a statement or the correctness of norms. What should be noted here is not that some consensus has been reached but that anywhere and anytime if only we engage in communicative rationality we can arrive at a consensus.

²⁰ Ibid., 68.

²¹ Held, 343-344.

Communicative Interaction

Communicative action stands apart from both instrumental and strategic action by reason of its orientation which is towards reaching understanding. Actors who are oriented-towards-understanding subordinate their individual goals to their desire to reach a common understanding with other actors. They act differently from actors oriented-towards-success who, in contrast, prioritize their individual goals and act only on the basis of their calculation of how optimally they can attain their respective goals. Habermas writes:

Reaching understanding is considered to be a process of reaching agreement among speaking and acting subjects... A communicatively achieved agreement, or one that is mutually presupposed in communicative action... has to be accepted or presupposed as valid by the participants... Processes of reaching understanding aim at an agreement that meets the conditions of rationally motivated assent to the content of an utterance. A communicatively achieved agreement has a rational basis... Agreement can indeed be objectively obtained by force; but what comes to pass manifestly through outside influence or the use of violence cannot count subjectively as agreement. Agreement rests on *convictions*.²²

Habermas asserts an intimate relation between knowledge and rationality. For him the rationality of an utterance is a function of the reliability of the knowledge it contains; as such, the validity claims set forth in communicative action are always criticizable. They are liable to error, open to objective judgment, and dependent on a ground to validate them. For this reason Habermas concludes that utterances are not immediately rational. He writes:

In the context of communicative action, we call someone rational not only if he is able to put forward an assertion and, when criticized, to provide grounds for it by pointing to appropriate evidence, but also if he is following an

²² Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action II*, 286-287.

established norm and is able when criticized, to justify his action by explicating the given situation in the light of legitimate expectations. We even call someone rational if he makes known a desire or an intention, expresses a feeling or a mood, shares a secret, confesses a deed, etc., and is then able to reassure critics in regard to the revealed experience by drawing practical consequences from it and behaving consistently thereafter.²³

It is only when a speaker is able to persuade his hearers that the claims he makes are rational and deserve to be recognized that there arises a rationally motivated consensus which can serve to coordinate future action. Through a rational utterance, therefore, a hearer can be motivated to agree with the content proposed by a speaker. This last point highlights the intrinsically dialogical feature of communication. There is no communication without interactive participants. At the very least a speaker and a hearer are engaged in the communicative process – a speaker and a hearer who are both oriented to mutual reciprocal understanding and are capable of taking an affirmative or negative position when a validity claim is challenged.

Now this mutual understanding that speaker and hearer attempt to establish pertains to conditions in the social reality. This cannot be attained in a situation where both speaker and hearer regard each other as strategic adversaries bent on pushing their private agenda to achieve personal objectives. Habermas stresses that precisely “the goal of coming to an 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.”²⁴ This means that both speaker and hearer must instead consider each other as partners equally intent upon the accomplishment of a common goal.

Communicative action seeks the cooperation of dialogical participants through consensus regarding the rational validity

²³ Ibid, 15.

²⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 3.

of the norms whereby they understand the situation. This consensus is important because it serves to regulate the otherwise conflicting individual interests and to coordinate social action. It also makes possible the rationalization of social action according to the agreed norms, and when said action fails to conform to these norms an outright criticism can be marshaled against it. These twin possibilities underscore the advantage of communicative action for Habermas which he thinks are sorely missing in modern capitalist societies inasmuch as they are dominated by systems of strategic action which are antithetical to communicative action that is in turn essential to rationalizing effective social norms.

Communicative Reason and Social Coordination

Habermas thinks that situating practical reason within a theory of communicative rationality imbues that same reason with a novel status. It becomes heuristic as it assists the reconstruction of the network of discourses that not only helps to shape opinions and to facilitate the attainment of consensus but to also serve as a critical standard to evaluate actual practices in the social arena.

There are two implications that can be drawn from this understanding of reason. The first is that communicative rationality, since it is not didactic, yields knowledge that is theoretically fallible and leads to conclusions that continually remain questionable and criticizable and hence also open to further revision at all times. The second implication is that by way of this procedure competent speakers are able to engage in successful interaction.

The correlative linkage between communicative action and linguistic validity claims denotes the singular capacity of communication to serve as a medium to bind actors in dialogical interaction and to coordinate their action. The binding character of communicative action is embedded in the obligation of the speaker to produce rationally convincing justifications of his claims for the sake of his hearers who in turn are bidden to evaluate the claims presented. The raising of a validity claim affirms, moreover, the mutual commitment of participants in discourse to criteria of

validity that make communication possible. This leads consequently to the establishment of social relationships among them in so far as their mutual commitment enables each communicating actor to see his own perspective side by side with that of another in relation to the objective world that they intersubjectively share. As William Rehg puts it: "The orientation to reaching understanding about validity claims serves as a mechanism for social integration inasmuch as it grounds shared expectations, ways of interpreting situations, and so forth."²⁵

With regard to the power of communication to coordinate social action, Habermas believes that such depends on how the tension between facticity and validity is approached. Time was when this tension did not exist because there was 'a fusion of facticity and validity' like in the "archaic institutions that present themselves with an apparently unassailable claim to authority" or in those kinship societies where "institutions protected by taboos form a site where cognitive and normative expectations merge and harden into an unbroken complex of convictions linked with motives and value orientations."²⁶

The same no longer holds in the current, however, since the previous resources, like traditions and strong institutions with which the tension was bridged in prior times, have lost much of their puissance in the contemporary world characterized by secularism and disenchantment. The high level of social differentiation has resulted besides in the multiplication and diversification of 'functionally specified tasks, social roles, and interest positions.' All these are indications that in the present state of affairs managing the tension between facticity and validity can no longer be done in venues that in the past proved adequate. There is then a need to explore new avenues and to forge new tools to carry out the tasks of social reproduction and integration. Habermas points to communicative action in this regard:

²⁵ William Rehg, "Habermas's Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy: An Overview of the Argument," in *Jürgen Habermas*, vol. II, eds. David Rasmussen and James Swindal (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2002), 298.

²⁶ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 23.

With the concept of communicative action, which brings in mutual understanding as a mechanism of action orientation, the counterfactual presuppositions of actors who orient their action to validity claims also acquire immediate relevance for the construction and preservation of social orders; for these orders *exist* through the recognition of normative validity claims. This means that the tension between facticity and validity built into language and its use turns up again in the dynamics of the integration of communicatively socialized individuals.²⁷

Communicative action then becomes the primary instrument of social integration. Habermas elaborates further:

In such action, actors in the roles of speaker and hearer attempt to negotiate interpretations of the situation at hand and to harmonize their respective plans with one another through the unrestrained pursuit of illocutionary goals... This use of language functions in such a way that the participants either agree on the validity claimed for their speech acts or identify the points of disagreement, which they conjointly take into consideration in the course of further interaction. Every speech act involves the raising of criticizable validity claims aimed at intersubjective recognition. A speech-act offer has a coordinating effect because the speaker by raising a validity claim, concomitantly takes on a sufficient credible guarantee to vindicate the claim with the right kind of reasons should this be necessary.²⁸

And yet, while communicative reason and action provide sufficient venue where the tension between facticity and validity may be satisfactorily negotiated, nonetheless, the inescapable fact remains that every agreement welded communicatively is subject to challenge and therefore remains at best a fragile basis for social integration.

This shortcoming is compounded by another dilemma, namely, the emergence in the modern period of "a predominantly secular

²⁷ Ibid., 17.

²⁸ Ibid., 18.

society in which normative orders must be maintained without social guarantees.”²⁹ Under the present condition, social integration becomes increasingly dependent on the achievements of communicatively engaged actors who must also incessantly contend with the immanent tension between facticity and validity.

Concluding Reflections

Let us conclude the foregoing discussion by highlighting some aspects of universal pragmatics and the communicative rationality that Habermas advocates and harnessing these concepts to analyze some contentious issues in contemporary Philippine society.

1) Every speech act presents a claim which needs to be validated. Habermas contends that without such validation the speech act is a rank failure. This means that it is an empty gesture or vapid speech, devoid of any illocutionary force, and it exposes the brazen absence of commitment on the part of the speaker to perform the action that his speech implies. In other words, a speech act is acceptable only if it is able to fulfill the immanent obligation embedded within it to provide, for every validity claim made, the kind of redemption that corresponds to the mode of the speech action employed. Our focus is on the expressive mode of speech which stakes the claim of sincerity. This particular speech action is also called an avowal and its claim is validated against subsequent action.

This theory of Habermas is especially relevant because we are about to celebrate next Saturday, February 25, the twentieth anniversary of Edsa 1, the peaceful power revolution of 1986 that toppled the ruthless Marcos dictatorship and on Monday, February 20, the fifth anniversary of Edsa 2, the peaceful power revolution of 2001 that ushered the collapse of the corrupt Estrada regime. It is well worth recalling that on 25 February 2001 we were conferred the Nobel Peace Prize Award, the first of its kind given to a nation, by the *Alfred Nobel Foundation* and the Global Non-violence Award, of which the seventy million Filipino population

²⁹ Ibid., 26.

is the first recipient, awarded by the *Center for Global Nonviolence*. During the awarding ceremonies, Pierre Marchand of France, the head of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Foundation,³⁰ gave the following remarks:

The world salutes the Filipinos for their courage in overthrowing two undesirable residents. You have given the gift, in a world that only knows force and violence, of effecting radical change without firing a shot. The legacy of people power is the Filipino people's gift to other peoples of the world.... The world will never be the same again, if the spirit of Edsa prevails beyond the shores of this tiny archipelago. The 15th anniversary of People Power I is significant as it came 18 years after the death of Ninoy Aquino, 30 years after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., 50 years after the death of Mahatma Gandhi, 2000 years after the death of Christ.³¹

The vice president of the Center for Global Nonviolence also revealed that the conferral was actually a joint recognition of the first and the second people power revolutions.

We find this citation highly significant because we believe that an understanding of the first people power revolution can only be accurate if it goes beyond recounting and glorifying those euphoric four days and instead dwells on the subsequent efforts to secure the gains of the revolution. Indeed we maintain that the real people power revolution commenced when the unlamented Marcos fled the country in disgrace, a new government was installed with manifest domestic and foreign support and recognition, and the people trooped back to their homes, empowered by the success of their public outcry against a corrupt and an unscrupulous administration. The real locus of the people power revolution is to be situated in that period which followed. It began

³⁰ The Nobel Foundation is composed of peace advocates such as the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, the Dalai Lama of Tibet, Carlos Felipe Ximenes Belo and Jose Ramos-Horta of East Timor, Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union, Henry Kissinger of the United States, and Adolfo Perez Esquivel of Argentina.

³¹ *The Philippine Star* (February 26, 2001), 2.

to unravel with the new government struggling to find its bearing and endeavoring to institutionalize the reforms demanded by the people at Edsa, to ensure no more repetition of what for many years was the unchallenged abuse of power, by and for the personal aggrandizement, in Guinness book proportions, of the occupant of the highest office in the land. At the first people power revolution people shouted – *Tama na! Sobra na! Palitan na!* – which was an unequivocal repudiation of the rapacity of the Marcos regime and its bastardization of our legitimate political institutions and processes.

It bears asking, however, whether that revolution achieved some measure of success at all. For a time after Edsa 1 people were hopeful and confident that indeed a new politics has dawned and a government, sensitive not only to the needs of the people but to their moral sensibilities as well, was at last obtained. The annual celebration of the people power revolution, marked in subsequent years by the erection of the Shrine to Our Lady of Edsa and the People Power Monument, revisited and rhapsodized the courage and the virtue of the Filipino people and even insinuated at the political maturity of their democracy. It must be acknowledged that a new constitution was written to replace the one drafted by a convention dictated upon by Marcos and ratified in a deceitful referendum. Elections were held to reconstitute the rubber stamp Congress. The magistrates of the Supreme Court, who were co-opted and suborned to seal with constitutional legitimacy the declaration of martial law and who openly ingratiated themselves with Marcos and his fastidious and profligate wife, were replaced with men and women of unquestionable legal acumen and moral probity. But as the years passed, the enthusiasm that attended the earlier commemorations of the revolution waned; in fact, people began to question the authenticity of that revolution as corruption in government once more reared its ugly head and the legislature as well as the national and local government units were again swamped with traditional politicians bent to enrich and entrench themselves in power, unmindful of and unconcerned about the national interest and the welfare of the people. For a time therefore it appeared as though Edsa 1 was a farce, the supposed maturity of our democracy a temporary aberration, and the outpouring of people at Edsa

twenty years ago showed nothing more than our penchant for merriment and that, having nothing better to do, we just found an outlet for our pent-up emotions and built-up energies. The most resounding argument for this persuasion is no other than the overwhelming results of the election that installed the presidency of Joseph Estrada. It was the most lopsided electoral contest against Estrada in terms of intellectual preparation and moral qualification for the presidency. Some of the other contenders were not outstanding, it is true, but there were a few who would have certainly made a better president. Estrada, by no stretch of the imagination and ethical logic, could have constituted the lesser of evils. And yet in a landslide victory he garnered the majority of the votes. Then followed, one after another, the shameless display of shameful thoughtlessness, beginning with his brash remark about allowing the Marcos remains to be interred at the *Libingan ng mga Bayani*. And while playing with the fate of the nation through sheer incompetence, he surreptitiously fiddled with the contributions of employees from both the private and public sectors. He also dipped his itchy hands into the dirty money bags of gambling and illegal drug lords. And though vowing with all braggadocio during his inauguration that he will not favor his relatives and friends, one scandal after another involving them, and millions of money besides, racked his administration.

The first people power revolution may be read as the public and collective expression by our people of their resolve to finally renounce malfeasance in government. It took an onerously long time to materialize but, nonetheless, it did come about and with such flourish at which the whole world marveled. In the parlance of Habermas, this public avowal falls under the expressive mode of communication, which consists in the disclosure of the speaker's subjectivity and belongs to the arena of intentions.

If we now analyze Edsa 1 in isolation, it may be concluded, against the backdrop of Habermasian theory, that it was indeed a sham revolution. The return to the old and discredited ways in government, the slide back to graft and corruption, the resurrection of wanton and wicked politicians, and the recurrence of lethargy and unconcern among our people seemed to belie whatever noble character and political maturity Edsa 1 was alleged to have bespoken about us as a nation. Habermas argues

that the truthfulness and sincerity of such public avowal have to be measured against what is manifested by future action.³²

Without Edsa 2, whatever condemnation we have made of evil governance in Edsa 1 would lack real conviction. Edsa 2 is to be considered then as the redemption of the speech action put forth by the Filipino people at Edsa 1. If Edsa 2 did not follow, there is nothing to claim after Edsa 1. The full story of the people power revolution that catapulted this nation to world renown and repaired its badly damaged international image is not complete without the twin people power revolutions placed at the opposite ends of one single historical continuum. For without the occurrence of Edsa 2 we could not examine the utterance made by the people at Edsa 1, much less adjudge such utterance in terms of its truthfulness.

2) The advent of postmetaphysical rationality forces modern society to rely on secularistic forms of legitimation. It also transfers the task of social integration into the medium of positive law. Habermas believes that this also opens a greater space for the rationalization of society because modern law must fulfill the twofold requirements of facticity and validity – the *facticity* of the legal institution “found in the threat of sanctions that are legally defined and can be enforced through court action” and the *validity* of the legal provisions “measured against the discursive redeemability of their normative validity claim... according to whether they have come about through a rational legislative process.”³³ These two elements are distinct in the sense that the ‘legitimacy of a statute’ is not coincident with its ‘de facto implementation.’ The factual assent to the law by a subject does not necessarily entail his recognition of its legitimacy.

After the installation of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo following the flight of Estrada from Malacañang Palace, a number of quarters expressed their misgivings over what they claimed was the trivialization of the real essence of people power. Amando Doronila noted that Edsa 2 was received “with ambivalence by the

³² Held, 338.

³³ Habermas, *Between Fact and Norms*, 30.

liberally oriented Western media" who, although they "generally welcomed the change in government," nonetheless, "expressed worries over People Power being institutionalized as a method of changing rulers."³⁴ This is what Philip Bowring of the *International Herald Tribune* wrote: "The ousting of Joseph Estrada has provided the Philippines with a more competent president in Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, but it has left the notion of constitutional democracy in tatters."³⁵

Echoing his view were two other veteran observers of Philippine affairs: Anthony Spaeth – "More likely... People Power has become its own institution, and one that seems monopolized by a certain clique. I spent many days in crowds like the ones on Edsa last week. They were the nicest mobs I have ever been in – they gave mobs a good name. People Power has become an acceptable term for a troubling phenomenon: one that used to be known as mob rule,"³⁶ and, Sandra Burton – "They had mechanisms to legally change their head of state. The option they chose, popular uprising, while rousing and probably justified, could portend a troubling future for democracy."³⁷

Local political commentators voiced parallel sentiments. Leandro Coronel warned about the dangers that could wreck the moorings of our democratic society:

On January 23, 2001, in the aftermath of Edsa 2... Macapagal suddenly was President. Edsa 2 was almost too easy to be true... If it's that easy to change presidents, then it can happen again... But the rights guaranteed by the democratic process must be exercised within the boundaries of a constitution, the Constitution. Edsa 2 was extra-constitutional, outside the Constitution. And being so, it continually poses a threat to the orderly, ordinary conduct of the republic's

³⁴ Amando Doronila, "Edsa II Worries Western Media," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (29 January 2001), 15.

³⁵ Philip Bowring, "Filipino Democracy Needs Stronger Institutions," *International Herald Tribune* (22 January 2001).

³⁶ Anthony Spaeth, "Oops, We Did It Again," *Time* (29 January 2001), 22.

³⁷ Sandra Burton, "People Power Redux," *Time* (29 January 2001), 19.

everyday affairs... a danger because it can happen again and again."³⁸

The most virulent criticism came as expected from the supporters of the impeached president who unabashedly branded Edsa 2 as plain and simple mob rule and dismissed it as no more than the blatant grab of the mandate given to Estrada by more than ten million people. As Cecilio Arillo grumbled:

Edsa People Power 2... irrevocably damaged the democratic institutions that the 1986 Edsa 1 tried to restore after 20 years of dictatorial rule... Think of the time in the future when presidents or other duly elected or constituted officials are removed by a noisy minority through rallies and street protests and the withdrawal of support of some generals, through the use of the resources of the rich and the dictatorial power of the church on its members, especially the Catholic Schools!³⁹

Not everyone advanced a negative assessment of the second people power revolution however. Political writers like Alice Villadolid dissented from the view that it was a mockery of democratic institutions. She wrote instead: "The successful rerun of People Power gave flesh to the democratic nature of the Philippine Constitution, the first principle of which is that 'Sovereignty resides in the people and all government authority emanates from them.'"⁴⁰ Another political analyst, Manuel Quezon III, sought to recuperate a positive rendition of Edsa 2 as he scoffed at those who belittled it as mob rule:

That Estrada did not resign; that he hoped his mobs would fight for him; that his mansion has not been attacked are all proof, to my mind, that there was no mob rule, but in effect, a determined effort to resist its exciting possibili-

³⁸ Leandro V. Coronel, "The Dangers of Edsa Democracy," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (14 May 2001), A9.

³⁹ Cecilio T. Arillo, *Power Grab! The Story Behind the Edsa People Power 2 Conspiracy* (Las Piñas: CTA Research and Publishing, Inc., 2001), 47.

⁴⁰ Alice C. Villadolid, "Salus Populi in Philippine," *Philippine Graphics* (26 February 2001), 21.

ties. Neither a risky line was crossed, as Jim Mann of *Time* put it, nor was it a case of Oops, we did it again, as Anthony Spaeth expressed it... Filipinos showed a devotion to the rule of law... in expressing their refusal to let a poisoned process continue... Filipinos knew they were fighting for a constitutional government, and not just against a corrupt leader but in defence of a hard-won democratic way of life.⁴¹

The main argument of the Estrada camp was to uphold the rule of law. The meat of their contention centered on what constitutes legitimacy. The point is well taken. At the same time, however, it must be stated that, as Habermas argues, in modern society that also claims to be democratic the legal medium is the product of consensus made possible by communicative rationality. This consensus is never permanent and the legitimacy it confers upon the legal medium is always revisable. To maintain the rule of law as an argument, therefore, as though the law is clothed with irreversible validity and inviolable facticity, is to forget the source of both the facticity and the validity of postmetaphysical law.

In this connection, therefore, it does not seem correct to invoke the will of the electorate as the sole medium to validate the continuing legitimacy of a regime. The recourse to action, as radical as a revolution, is always justifiable in the context of a democratic space. For democracy is also a process, as Coronel rightly puts it: "It's the free interplay of responsible citizens and a responsive government. It's the intercourse of ideas and actions in a free and tolerant environment. It's the assurance of the rights of all citizens."⁴² When this process is subverted by corrupt and craven politicians then democracy is seriously endangered. The emergence of people power has offered a viable option on how to arrest the total disintegration of society.

One of the framers of our present constitution, the eminent Jesuit legal expert, Joaquin Bernas, locates this option within the very substance of the constitution. He explains:

⁴¹ Manuel L. Quezon III, "What Makes for People Power?" *Philippine Free Press* (9 March 2002), 6.

⁴² Coronel, *ibid.*

... Although the people are sovereign, in the exercise of that very sovereignty they have decided to canalize their power through channels that they have laid out in the Constitution... But they have also reserved for themselves a limited number of instances when they themselves will directly exercise their sovereignty according to strictly prearranged rules... The one rare instance of a successful extraconstitutional action taken by the people was the Edsa event, which won worldwide recognition of "people power"... a popular action whose legitimacy could not be confirmed through the counting of votes... The Edsa event and its exaltation of "people power" influenced the drafters of the new Constitution to call the Philippines not just a "republican state" but also a "democratic" state... to memorialize Edsa as an instance of popular direct action. By so doing, however, the Constitution highlighted an aspect of constitutionalism that hitherto had been merely implicit, namely that the people may take direct action extraconstitutionally.⁴³

There is no argument against the mandate of the people in the case of Estrada. He was literally swept to power via the overwhelming 40 percent of the votes. This is what his supporters loudly proclaimed in the ensuing informal public debates after his overthrow. What they deliberately suppressed however was the truth that, as Doronila defines it, "electoral mandates are not static" and "they melt down under the heat of corruption, incompetence, and bad government."⁴⁴ The appeal therefore to the rule of law argument, according to political scientist Natalia Morales, hangs on the shaky premise that "since Estrada won by over 10 million votes in 1998... this gives him the right to finish his six-year term."⁴⁵

Political legitimacy is never just a function of numbers. The assumption of power, even though effected by a landslide victory

⁴³ Joaquin Bernas, S.J., "People Power: To What Extent?" *Today* (28 July 1996), 7.

⁴⁴ Doronila, "Edsa II Worries Western Media," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (31 January 2001), 9.

⁴⁵ Natalia M.L.M. Morales, "People Power: An Unwieldy Measure of Legitimacy?" *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (16 May 2001), A9.

at the polls, is not a guarantee of legitimacy. Sadly for Estrada and his brood of conniving advisers, this truth escaped their wits entirely or they simply ignored it. Numbers, as Morales stressed, must be grounded on "social approbation of moral values expected to underlie the national leadership."⁴⁶

The people power revolutions surfaced vital lessons in, among others, the correct understanding of power. In addition to what have already been mentioned above, we may include these valuable insights of political observer Dean Jorge Bocobo on the implications that Edsa 2 in particular has on the meaning of electoral mandate:

Overall, the individual right of suffrage, as a tool for social salvation strikes me as overrated. At best, it is a sword that cuts both ways, as the lacerations of our recent history prove. At worst, suffrage has been taken advantage of by the masters of politics, as a means of securing not only the citizens' consent to be governed, but their acquiescence to be robbed and plundered. Suffrage has been distorted to mean our right to suffer.⁴⁷

The people power revolutions shattered this chicanery. As Bocobo continued: "It will be a long time before any politician can hide behind the ballot box, as Estrada did, whenever their corruption and wrongdoing become manifest to a critical mass of citizenry."⁴⁸ People no longer tolerate wrongdoing in government. This should forewarn politicians that their conduct in office as well as in their persons would come under extreme scrutiny from now on. Being elected into office is not to be construed only as being invested with authority. There is another element just as essential in the equation. It is also to be placed in a position of responsibility where the numbers that brought a person to office must be matched by his creditable performance and likewise by his commitment to the values and norms of the society.

⁴⁶ Morales, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Dean Jorge Bocobo, "Suffrage Is Not the Right to Suffer," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (14 May 2001), A9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

There is then no basis for the hysterical conclusion that Edsa 2 had irretrievably damaged the stability of our democratic institutions, processes and structures. These institutions, processes and structures are not to be considered impregnable and immutable fixtures of society.

Habermas is a firm advocate of a critical social theory which stresses the emancipatory role of philosophy in society. He therefore enjoins philosophers to initiate or promote efforts towards building more humane societies by advocating a rigorous analysis of the complex relationships between espoused ideals and social structures. This is an imperative for too often the set of conditions which must exist for the ideal to become a fully social reality are ignored or considered too difficult a task and dismissed as not worth the enterprise. And then, sadly, the existing realities are grossly legitimated into a dominant ideology that presents itself as the most desirable option so much so that it shuns critique and hides its own pathologies.

We cannot better our human societies without visions that take us beyond our present condition for otherwise we will tend to accept our present condition as inevitable. James Rurak warns us: "Without utopian thinking, the given social order may be unduly elevated to the status of the natural order, and so be regarded as unalterable."⁴⁹ Towards the avoidance of this eventuality does Habermas expect the philosopher to address his project of thinking and action. There is always a chasm that separates rhetoric from action in the pursuit of a goal. Against the background of his critical social theory Habermas is convinced that philosophy as emancipation can satisfactorily bridge these two poles. □

⁴⁹ James Rurak, "The Imaginative Power of Utopias: A Hermeneutic for its Recovery," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. VIII, no. 2 (Summer 1981), 186.