

## **Philosophical Foundations of Habermas' Critique of Particularistic Liberalism**

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### **Abstract**

Jürgen Habermas has emerged as a sharp, and occasionally harsh, critic of the Bush administration's policies since the Iraq war. Habermas has developed this critique in several of his short pieces and interviews, some of which are available in fine collections in both English and other languages. However, the occasional and journalistic character of Habermas' political interventions often hides the theoretical basis of his critique. In this paper, I argue that Habermas' critique of the Bush administration's foreign policy emanates from, and is founded upon, his conception of modernity, and specifically his views about the relationship between "particularity" and "generality." The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate how Habermas' critique can actually be read as a critique of particularism, which Habermas sees operating behind American (and British) foreign policy, and which, in his view, compromises the key achievements of modernity (especially in its Kantian version.)

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The Bush administration has laid the 220-year-old Kantian project of *juridifying* international relations *ad acta* with empty moralistic phrases.<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

I shall begin this paper by briefly outlining Jürgen Habermas' conception of modernity in terms of his conception of particularity and generality and the internal relationship between them. I shall then go on to briefly discuss the dialectic between universalism and particularism in Habermas' work. I will apply this framework to my reading of Habermas' critique of the Bush Administration' policy in Iraq, as well as to his critique of Kant's proposals for a world republic. I shall present Habermas' own counter proposal

as an attempt to go beyond both one-sided particularism and one-sided universalism. In the conclusion, I will highlight certain possible blind spots in Habermas' analysis, and raise several questions for further exploration. Throughout the paper, however, my main concern remains to systematically highlight how a specific conception of particularity and generality, and the internal relationship between them, lies behind Habermas' critique of what he calls the "ethnocentric liberalism" of the Bush administration, and also to show how this conception informs his critique of the Kantian notion of a world republic. It will also be my aim throughout the paper to show how Habermas' theoretical concerns inform his political analysis, as well as to demonstrate how a theoretically informed reading of his political analysis can, in turn, enrich our understanding of his theoretical position itself.

### **The Philosophical Background of the Critique**

Habermas' conception of generality and its relation to particularity is part and parcel of his conception of modernity. The modern outlook came into being through a historical process that involved societies, traditions and individual consciousnesses going through what Habermas calls "decentration."<sup>2</sup> Stephen White offers an effective definition of the meaning of decentration as a conceptual separation between the cognitive-technical, the moral, and the aesthetic dimensions, as well as a reflective attitude toward these dimensions. The evolutionary importance of this change (in the sense of an advance in rationality) is that it allows for self-critique and an awareness of alternative interpretations of the world in all three dimensions.<sup>3</sup>

The process of decentration involves differentiations that create new conceptual distinctions and facilitate the emergence of new concepts. This results in an increased ability of traditions, cultures and individuals to detach themselves from their particular contexts. Habermas describes the process of modernization as a process of decentration

which results in the creation of new concepts, institutions and expressions of consciousness that are not bogged down (unlike in traditional and medieval societies) within their own particularistic contexts.<sup>4</sup> This has resulted in the ability of modern societies to transcend particularities and organize their institutions in general (i.e. all-inclusive) terms.

For these reasons, Habermas understands the process of modernization to be one of increased generalization, and he regards this as representing an advance in rationality. Moreover, Habermas does not only equate rationality with generality, he also connects an *advance* in rationality to an *increase* in generality: for example, he differentiates between ethical and moral perspectives *solely* on the basis of their range of generality.<sup>5</sup> Both ethical and moral claims are context-transcending and unconditional; but moral claims are differentiated from ethical claims in that they are not only unconditional but also absolute,<sup>6</sup> where the difference between unconditionality and absoluteness is determined by the respective range of their generality. So, for instance, ethical claims are tied to a particular understanding of “our” own community and lifeworld, and although, compared to egoistic claims, ethical claims are still general claims, their generality is circumscribed by the limits of “our” own community. As Habermas puts it: “Ethical questions by no means call for a complete break with the egocentric perspective”<sup>7</sup> (it should be noted that by “egocentric perspective” Habermas means “particularistic perspective.”) A complete break with particularity is achieved only at the level of moral claims, because they refer to everyone, everywhere; and they demand allegiance of everyone, everywhere<sup>8</sup> (the so called “double sense” of universality.)<sup>9</sup> Only a “will that is guided by moral insight, and hence is *completely* rational, can be called autonomous,”<sup>10</sup> because it completely breaks with particularity. Rationality depends on a break with the particular and the concrete. Moral claims are completely rational claims because they reach the highest stage of generalization, and in this they match the structure of communicative action and argumentation.<sup>11</sup>

Habermas here retains the idealist vision that rationality is not to be found in the particular, but requires the complete transcendence of particularity. However, where Habermas differs from his idealist predecessors is that he rejects the idea that this conception of generality needs to be tied to a notion of a transcendent ontological realm (such as Plato's world of forms or Kant's pure intelligible realm.)<sup>12</sup> Habermas insists that generality must emerge from within *this* world, but he does so without positing the existence of any ontological realm *beyond* this world.

The theoretical move he makes here is to marry the philosophy of language to the philosophy of action through Austin's notion of the speech act. In performing speech acts we do not merely say something, we also perform an action at the same time. These actions are known as "speech actions." Language, as well as being related to particularity, is also tied to generality: Habermas refers to this as "half transcendence."<sup>13</sup> Action, on the other hand, is tied to particularity. Both language and action are things of this world, and thus they are related to each other from *within* to start with. And in speech actions, language and action – and hence generality and particularity – are intertwined. A dialectical relationship between particularity and generality is thus established, but without presupposing the Hegelian absolute. Language points beyond particularities, while action-imperatives pull it back to the earth.<sup>14</sup>

Generally speaking, there are two types of particularities: a) closed particularities that do not allow for the emergence of generality, and hence are exclusive (e.g. Al-Qaeda and the Islamic Republic of Iran);<sup>15</sup> and b) open particularities, which admit generality (i.e. they are inclusive.)<sup>16</sup> Different particularities are hierarchically situated according to their ability to create a space for the emergence of generality. All cultures and societies have potential for such generality, but to what extent they actualize this potential is a historical and empirical question. All cultures and societies are potentially equal, but the West has

established superiority over others simply because it has been more successful in actualizing this potential.<sup>17</sup> In Habermasian jargon, the West has “decentred” itself more than any other society; this decentration is expressed in the West’s commitment to human rights, constitutionalism and democracy.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, here, Habermas gives a privileged position to America and her allies, and this partisanship is evident throughout his political writings. The morally privileged status of America and her allies also dictates Habermas’ judgment of her and her enemies.<sup>19</sup> Thus Habermas, despite his criticism of America, claims that America can *only* be criticized internally, a claim which can only be justified if one grants America a privileged moral position vis-à-vis her enemies.<sup>20</sup> Particularities open to generality have a unique moral status; however, as particularities they remain under suspicion (more on this below.)

### **Habermas and the Dialectic Between Universalism and Particularism**

Habermas believes that Western civilization has a universal core, which Habermas describes in his pragmatic theory of communication, and traces its development in the history of the West in his theory of social evolution.<sup>21</sup> In one of his recent rebuttals to his critics, he reminds them that:

I would never have tackled a formal pragmatic reconstruction of the rational potential of speech if I had not harboured the expectation that I would in this way be able to obtain a concept of communicative rationality from the normative content of the universal and unavoidable presuppositions of the non-circumventable practice of the everyday process of reaching understanding. It is not a matter of this or that preference, of “our” or “their” notions of rational life; rather, what is at issue here is the reconstruction of a voice of reason, a voice that we have no choice but to allow to speak in everyday communicative practices – whether we want to or not. Perhaps I have deviously obtained through definitions what I claim to have found through reconstructions – this, at any rate, is the claim on which criticism should focus.<sup>22</sup>

The universal core that Habermas attributes to the West is not based on the particular experiences that Western societies have gone through, but on the linguistic character of our being in the world. As beings bound by the use of language<sup>23</sup> we are all *equal* heirs to the potential inherent in language use. This potential is described by Habermas in terms of his theory of communicative action. Habermas takes “the type of action aimed at reaching understanding to be fundamental,”<sup>24</sup> and he understands this fundamental type of action in linguistic terms: language is the only means through which we reach understanding with each other.<sup>25</sup> Language is thus the primary mode of action coordination among humans and is also the primary mode of their socialization. Since we are all linguistic beings, the history of different human societies must therefore reflect this shared potential of language use, and all human societies are necessarily able to realize this potential to a certain extent.

Habermas then provides a quasi-Marxist account of why different human societies have failed to realize the potential inherent in language use. His theory is a sort of a revised version of the false consciousness thesis;<sup>26</sup> as he explains in an interview:

Marx established in what sense the category of labour is a universal concept applicable to all societies. He shows that only to the extent that the capitalist mode of production has become established are the objective conditions fulfilled that allow him, Marx, access to an understanding of the universal character of this category ‘labour’. With regard to ... a theory of communication, one must use the same method to clarify *how the development of late capitalism has objectively fulfilled conditions that allow us to recognize universals in the structures of linguistic communication*, providing criteria for a critique which can no longer be based on the philosophy of history.<sup>27</sup>

The potential for rationality inherent in linguistic communication is unleashed only when certain objective conditions are fulfilled, and Habermas believes that capitalism fulfils those conditions through the process of decentration and rationalization.<sup>28</sup> The rationalization and decentration of a lifeworld result in the uncoupling of facticity and

validity.<sup>29</sup> According to Habermas, in traditional societies, facticity and validity are so intertwined that the latter collapses into the former. It is for this reason that traditional societies are stuck to the particular; no distance from the particular is possible, since validity is what makes transcendence from the particular and the imagining of alternatives possible.<sup>30</sup> In modern societies, the loosening of the grip of the authorities that hold sway in traditional societies (e.g. religion, family, community etc) establishes a clear distinction, and permanent tension,<sup>31</sup> between facticity and validity, in such a manner that no facticity is deemed to be beyond criticism and transcendence. In a modern society, the process of decentration initially results in establishing a clear distinction between facticity and validity, and then in further differentiation within the notion of validity itself.<sup>32</sup> These distinctions provide a space for self-reflection and the generation of alternatives that is lacking in traditional societies.

Thus, while the rationality potential inherent in language use is universal and is to be found in all societies to an equal degree (and must be defended as such,) the realization of the objective conditions necessary for the release of this universal rationality potential is specific to the society concerned. The release of the rationality potential requires that particular lifeworlds are transformed in a specific way (i.e. they become rationalized, in the Habermasian sense.) Without this specific transformation, the rationality potential inherent in language use cannot be unleashed. Thus, according to Habermas, lifeworlds throughout the globe need to be transformed in the specific manner described in his theory of social evolution (briefly summarized above.) This has exposed Habermas to the charge of Eurocentrism, a charge levelled on two points. First, Habermas' claim that his formal pragmatics is universal is viewed with suspicion. In fact, his formal pragmatics is seen as an underhanded attempt to import peculiarly European ideas (i.e. European ideologies of the Enlightenment and of modernity) into the analysis of linguistic communication. Second, Habermas' theory of social evolution, and particularly his view that particular lifeworlds need to be transformed in such a manner that they are

rationalized and decentred, is also seen by some as Eurocentric.<sup>33</sup> Habermas has responded to these objections by pointing out that the lifeworld transformation that he advocates is not specific to European societies (even though it first occurred in European societies), because it is a necessary precondition for unleashing what he sees as a universal and a shared heritage of human beings – as such, the required elements of lifeworld transformation must be considered universal.

At this point, Habermas is careful to separate the universal need for transformation in a particular lifeworld, in the specific sense he advocates, from the particular details of *how* that transformation *actually* occurs. According to Habermas, the transformation that must occur is universal in the sense that it consists of establishing general patterns that are necessary to unleash the universality potential inherent in language use. However, both the materials for, and the mode of, this transformation must be provided by each particular lifeworld, as determined by its own history, and cannot be imported from any other lifeworld, including American and European lifeworlds. Habermas is thus able to criticize the American policy on Iraq on both these counts. First, he accuses America of violating the principle of equality that emanates from the belief in the universality of the rationality potential that is equally inherent in all human societies. And second, he criticizes America for its efforts to impose on others its own particular and specific experiences through which it realized the objective conditions necessary for unleashing the universality potential inherent in linguistic communication. Thus, on the one hand he criticizes her for violating the rights of universality, whilst on the other hand he blames her for denying the rights of particularity.

I now wish to examine Habermas' view of American policy in more depth.

### **Habermas' Critique of America**

As pointed out earlier, Habermas believes that generality emerges from within

particularity, and so he rejects abstractionist notions of generality that are totally detached from particularity. At the same time, he gives preference to those particularities that are most suitable for facilitating the emergence of generality. However, Habermas' distrust of particularism in itself also includes a distrust of even those particularities that have given rise to generalities. America is one such important particularity. Habermas' critique of America is based on his belief that America systematically confuses its own particular status with its general status (i.e. its status as a bearer of general claims.) The confusion is complex, and needs careful conceptual articulation.

To begin with, America, as a particularity, is a morally privileged particularity because it has gone through the process of decentration. However, this does not give America any right to try to impose its own particular experiences on others. America should try to promote its universal claims, but without confusing them with claims derived from her own particularity. American generality is manifested in its constitution, as well as its commitment to democracy and human rights. America's particularity is manifested in its norms and values, and in the historical process (and route) by which it has reached its current stage of development.<sup>34</sup> The issue is not that American norms and values are particularistic; indeed, they are general norms and values. However, they are norms and values derived from a particularity.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Habermas doesn't accuse America of simple particularism (of the type of which he accuses America's enemies, like Al-Qaeda or the Islamic Republic of Iran), but of a particularity centred universalism, or what he calls "universalized ethnocentrism."<sup>36</sup>

In this context, Habermas has two specific criticisms of the Bush administration's foreign policy:

I) He rejects the American project to impose democracy on Iraq (and the Middle East), because he believes that a generality (in this case, constitutional democracy) must emerge

from within a particularity (in this case, Iraq), i.e. from within Iraqi culture; from within its own history:

When thousands of Shiites in Nasiriya demonstrate against both Saddam and the American occupation, they express the fact that non-Western cultures must appropriate the universalistic content of human rights with their own resources and in their own interpretations, one that establishes a convincing connection to local experiences and interests.<sup>37</sup>

The toppling of the monument to Saddam Hussein represented the urge in Iraqis for freedom, democracy, and human rights. On the other hand, the fierce resistance to Americans in their country represents Iraqi resistance to what Habermas calls “liberal nationalism,” which tries to impose its own particularity on others. Resistance is thus not directed against the universal as such; it is directed against a particularity, which is at most only one representative of the universal.

II) Habermas rejects America’s claim to be able to determine the true interests of Iraq and the Middle East. This second criticism of America is itself twofold: a) America gives priority to her own particularistic (national) interests over the interests of the system as a whole (i.e. to general interests),<sup>38</sup> and b) even if America were intent on giving priority to general interests over her own particular interests, it would not be possible for her to *know* what the true interests of all might be (Let’s call this an “epistemological impossibility.”)<sup>39</sup> For Habermas, no particularity – not even a particularity open to generality, and embodying general norms and values – can decide what is the general interest or the interests of all (i.e. of everyone, everywhere.) The actors themselves must decide what the general interest is, and this must be done within communicative action or discourse, being the only medium in which particularity is suspended from within, and

generality is attained without compromising the interests of anyone. General interest is to be decided by the actors themselves, within the dialogical mode, where everyone is *compelled* to take into account the interests of others and relativize his or her own interests accordingly. At the institutional level, the same can be achieved by adhering to the procedures that ensure that powerful particularities do not impose their own agendas on less powerful particularities. Hence Habermas' persistent insistence on the central role of the UN and other international institutions in managing the relations between states and people, even though he concedes that these institutions are in dire need of reform.<sup>40</sup>

### **Habermas' Critique of Kant**

When Habermas turns to outlining his Kantian alternative to American liberal nationalism, the philosophical basis of his evaluation remains the same as in his critique of America. Although he allies himself with Kant, he also criticizes him for his residual particularistic biases. Thus, he criticizes Kant's idea of a world republic on the grounds that Kant did not develop the notion of a world republic "in sufficiently abstract terms" (i.e. general terms.)<sup>41</sup> In other words, Kant does not sufficiently differentiate the conception of cosmopolitan conditions from the concretistic notion of a world republic.<sup>42</sup> Kant ignores the fact that a world republic would require a concrete lifeworld in order to function properly, and that such a lifeworld does not exist; moreover, it would seem to be a conceptual "impossibility."<sup>43</sup> Lifeworlds, no matter how much decentration they might have gone through, are inherently particular,<sup>44</sup> and so a global lifeworld would never be substantial enough to support and sustain the workings of a universal state. The production and reproduction of legitimacy requires a very thick conception of a lifeworld based on shared values, history, memories, language etc.<sup>45</sup> Habermas' critique of the Kantian notion of a world republic shows his appreciation of the role of particularities in sustaining and organizing human life. True to his conception of universalism, he claims that all human beings are brothers and sisters;<sup>46</sup> however, he also knows that there cannot

ever be a universal lifeworld shared by everyone, i.e. a lifeworld thick enough to sustain a world republic.<sup>47</sup>

Habermas thus considers a middle way, a compromise between the ethnocentric universalism of the Bush administration and the concretistic universalism of Kant. Habermas proposes something that he calls a “postnational constellation,”<sup>48</sup> a form of social organization whereby the nation state does not lose its relevance, but through which it nonetheless opens up towards the other. Habermas is not in favour of the withering away of the nation state entirely, because he recognizes the supreme significance of particularities in organizing and sustaining human life.<sup>49</sup> However, as mentioned above, Habermas is also against closed particularities. The notions of closedness and openness are of course relative, and are to be understood historically,<sup>50</sup> but having acknowledged this proviso, openness is important for two reasons. First, it is the basis of autonomy, a key notion which underpins modernity. Second, it supports the development of the state: with the evolution of capitalism and the advent of globalization, the state risks lapsing into irrelevance if it does not open itself up to the other. However, this opening up (or generalization) must be based on a respect for particularities, i.e. it should emerge from within – as always, Habermas stresses the need for a dialectic between generality and particularity.

In this respect, Habermas proposes a two-tiered system that again shows his sensitivity to the fact that generality must emerge from within, and to the fact that it should always be supported by corresponding particularities. Instead of Kant’s idea of a world republic, then, Habermas proposes a two-tiered system: a) the emergence of regional regimes, akin to the European Union; and b) the constitutionalization of the UN and international law in general. I will briefly elaborate on these two tiers below, although only to the extent that they are relevant to my argument in this paper.

a) The first tier of Habermas' proposed system involves the formation of new regional regimes. His argument is that globalization is the phenomenon which makes reliance on the old state-centric system untenable.<sup>51</sup> Thus, there is a need to expand beyond the state-centric system. This going beyond, however, cannot be accomplished on the level of a world republic, as there are insufficient grounds for its creation and sustenance. A more realistic scenario is the emergence of various regional bodies, in the style of the European Union, which would be able to perform various functions that the old-style state has increasingly been unable to perform adequately.<sup>52</sup> The idea of the creation of various regional regimes<sup>53</sup> is realistic, because at the regional level it is possible to develop lifeworlds which are thick enough to sustain such regimes. For example, Habermas has consistently argued for the creation of a more federal Europe, and for a European constitution. A federal Europe is a possibility because a thick enough conception of a European lifeworld is a possibility. In this regard, Habermas calls for the people of Europe to build "a new European dimension onto their national identities."<sup>54</sup> Without the development of such a shared European identity, the dream of a federal Europe, armed with a constitution and able to conduct a common foreign and defence policy, would be a chimera without any solid basis in reality.<sup>55</sup> Europe requires not just a functional but also a normative integration of citizens<sup>56</sup> that could make the pursuit of common goals possible in the first place.<sup>57</sup>

Habermas also anticipates a specific objection: that a Federal European Union without a shared culture and a shared identity seems like wishful thinking. Habermas' reply here is twofold. First, national identities are themselves constructs, and so a Federal Europe would not be unique in this – it would in fact be only slightly more abstract than the abstraction which is national identity. Second, we do need a common European consciousness in order to build a Federal Europe. A European constitution would be one of the vehicles for creating such a consciousness; political movements and political campaigns would be another.

However, the ingredients of such a construction must be based on the reality of a shared European history, and a shared ethos developed during that history, which would differentiate member states from non-members. In other words, the construction of a European identity (or any other identity for that matter) cannot be a construction *ex nihilo*: the basis for its construction must be already there in reality. As Habermas puts it: “increasing trust is not only a result but also a presupposition of a shared process of political opinion and will formation.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the process of generalization and abstraction can only take place in a concrete context. Thus, an “egalitarian commitment to universalistic principles of constitutional democracy also developed” on the basis of “ethnically extended particularism,”<sup>59</sup> and “Citizens do not internalize constitutional norms in an abstract form, but concretely, in the context of their respective national histories.”<sup>60</sup> This is another way of saying that generality must emerge from within particularities, which also implies that particularities themselves must have the potential to be the breeding ground for generalities. Habermas thinks that a European federation can emerge from within the historical reality of Europe, because European people share enough (both positively and negatively)<sup>61</sup> in terms of history, culture, and experience that can provide the grounds for a new European identity formation.

b) The second tier of Habermas’ alternative to Kant’s idea of a world republic is the constitutionalization of the UN charter and of international law. However, Habermas contends that the role of the UN must be limited to two central key areas: protecting human rights and peacekeeping.<sup>62</sup> Habermas sees these roles as “reactive” in character, in that they are based on the “feeling of indignation over the violation of human rights, i.e. over repression and injuries to human rights committed by states.”<sup>63</sup> Habermas thinks that there is enough existing “negative consensus”<sup>64</sup> among the world public to provide sufficient legitimating support for these functions. Habermas envisages global social movements as vehicles for the promotion and dissemination of such solidarity on a

permanent basis. Again, Habermas rejects the idea of a world republic on the grounds that there is insufficient basis for this in the lifeworld.<sup>65</sup> However, he also rejects the claim that one should stick to the old paradigm of internationalism, whereby the UN is seen entirely in terms of the state-centric paradigm. Here again, Habermas' argument is that there are in existence sufficient grounds for developing a role for the UN which goes beyond the state-centric paradigm. However, despite Habermas' strong advocacy for more robust regional bodies, as well as a more robust UN role in managing world politics, Habermas does not envisage the end of the state and its function in a global world. The state will continue to play a central role in our life, especially in the area of the monopoly of violence, as well as providing robust justification for, and defence of, the modern way of life. Such a role cannot be delegated to other institutions, simply because no other institution possesses the background consensus that informs the life and reality of the state.<sup>66</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have sought to make explicit the philosophical basis of Habermas' critique of the Bush administration's foreign policy in terms of his views on Modernity, and specifically in terms of his views on the relation between generality and particularity. I agree with Max Pensky that there is no straightforward relationship between Habermas' theoretical writings and his political writings, but I also agree with him that there is a dialectical relation between these writings.<sup>67</sup> I hope that this exercise, in making explicit the theoretical basis of Habermas' critique of the current American administration and its conduct of the Iraq war, will have been fruitful in providing a deeper understanding of Habermas' deeper political analysis of the situation, as well as shedding light upon his theoretical position. I will illustrate this latter point briefly, by way of a conclusion.

By making explicit the theoretical basis of Habermas' critique, we are now able to examine some of the issues in Habermas' thought in greater depth, and in a new light.

One such issue is the abstractionist bias of Habermas' thinking. Concentrating on the theme of the relation between particularity and generality can help us to see the complexity and nuances of Habermas' position, with the result that we recognize that Habermas can neither be simply dubbed either as a particularist or an abstractionist. His position is based on realizing the importance of both, and the dialectical relation between them. Thus, those critics who accuse Habermas of Eurocentrism miss the point: as we have seen, Habermas emphasizes the idea that generality must emerge from within. In the case of Iraq, he stresses the importance of providing a justification for the democratic process from within Iraqi history, rather than by imposing it from without, and he criticizes the United States for ignoring this fundamental idea.

However, the relation between particularity and generality in Habermas' works also reveals, at a deeper level, certain basic blind spots in his position. To continue with the example of Iraq, Habermas criticizes the position that, in his view, ignores the particular, but he also criticizes the position that he thinks is particularistic, i.e. which lacks any room for the emergence of generality. He thinks that generality should emerge from within the particular – in this case, from within Iraqi history. However, one thing that Habermas does not consider is the possibility that Iraqi history might not have resources for the emergence of the type of generality that Habermas has in mind. This is, at the very least, a possibility, and the fact that Habermas does not consider it diminishes the critical dimension of his thinking to a certain extent.

Furthermore, by concentrating on the issue of particularity and generality, we can also highlight essential gaps in Habermas' position on the emergence of modernity. If modernity is seen as merely a space to facilitate the emergence of generality and the consequent opportunity for self-reflection, we can legitimately raise the question about the *kinds* of generalities that Habermas envisages. In Habermas' thinking, is it not possible that different types of particularities might lead to different kinds of generalities?

Why is it necessary for every generality to be modelled on a vision of modernity? Why should self-reflection and critical analysis necessarily be of the type advocated by modern thinkers, from Kant to Habermas? Concentrating on the issue of particularity and generality opens up space for these sorts of questions and issues, which are not only important for our understanding of Habermas but also for interpreting our present and future.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Habermas, J. *The Divided West*, ed. & trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 103; italics in the original (hereafter TDW).

<sup>2</sup> See Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vols. I & II, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 48ff, and chapter 1 of vol. 1, passim (hereafter TCA I & TCA II respectively).

<sup>3</sup> White, S.K. "Habermas' Communicative Ethics and the development of moral consciousness." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 10 (1984): 25-48; 31.

<sup>4</sup> "What irritates us members of a modern lifeworld is that in a mythical interpreted world we cannot, or cannot with sufficient precision, make certain differentiations that are fundamental to our understanding of the world. From Durkheim to Lévi Strauss, anthropologists have repeatedly

pointed out the peculiar *confusion between nature and culture*. We can understand this phenomenon to begin with as a mixing of two object domains, physical nature and the sociocultural environment. Myths do not permit a clear, basic, conceptual differentiation between things and person, between objects that can be manipulated and agents – subjects capable of speaking and acting to whom we attribute linguistic utterances” (TCA I: 48; italics in the original).

<sup>5</sup> Habermas, J. *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*; trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993): 1-17 (hereafter JA).

<sup>6</sup> JA: 5.

<sup>7</sup> JA: 6.

<sup>8</sup> Habermas, J. *The Postnational Constellation*, ed. & trans. Max Pensky (Oxford: Polity, 2000): 108 (hereafter TPNC).

<sup>9</sup> Cooke, M. *Language and Reason: A Study of Habermas's Pragmatics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994): 64.

<sup>10</sup> JA: 10; emphasis added. Only “the autonomous will is completely internal to reason” (JA: 13).

<sup>11</sup> TPNC: 108.

<sup>12</sup> Of course, some would object to this interpretation of Kant. However, adjudicating among different readings of Kant is not my task here. It suffices for my purpose that my reading corresponds to Habermas’. On conflicting readings of Kant on this point, see the works of Henry E. Allison and Paul Guyer, among others. For Habermas’ take on Kant, see Jürgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, ed. & trans. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> TCA II: 125.

<sup>14</sup> For details, see Ali M Rizvi, *Habermas’ Conception of “Transcendence from Within”: An Interpretation* (unpublished PhD Dissertation: La Trobe University, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> TDW: 11.

<sup>16</sup> Habermas differentiates between a majority culture and a generality culture. A majority culture is one that makes its decisions according to the will of the majority, but is not necessarily a general culture because a majority culture can lack openness to the other. This difference goes back to Rousseau’s distinction between the majority will and the general will. For details on this point, see Alessandro Ferraro, *Justice and Judgment* (London: Sage, 1999): 156-163.

<sup>17</sup> In the context of the UN, Habermas explains this duality between equality in principle and inequality in practice well: “there exists a gradation in legitimacy between liberal, semi-

authoritarian, and even despotic member states, in spite of the formal equality enjoyed by all members” (TDW: 107).

<sup>18</sup> As Pauline Johnson writes, Habermas “points out that the figure of the citizen, the bearer of republican liberty rights, allowed the nation-state to forge a more universal mode of integration that transcended particularistic regional ties to village, family, locality and dynasty” (Pauline Johnson, “Globalizing Democracy: Reflections on Habermas’s Radicalism,” *European Journal of Social Theory*, 11 (1) [2008]: 71-86; 73).

<sup>19</sup> Thus the key distinction between the Kosovo war (which Habermas supported) and the Iraq war (which he opposed) seems to be that in the former, America and her allies were united, whereas in the latter they were divided. What made the former morally acceptable was (in part) the “undisputed democratic and rule of law character of all members of the acting military coalition.” However, “today normative dissent has divided the West against itself” (TDW: 29). It is also his belief in the moral superiority of the West that leads Habermas to assert that criticism of the West must be derived from its own history and its own standards, and not from outside, thus practically rejecting the legitimacy of any external criticism of the West: “justified criticism of the West derives its standards from the West’s own 200-year-old discourse of self-criticism” (TDW: 111).

<sup>20</sup> TDW: 185, 111 and passim. Habermas’ assertion is that America can only be criticized internally, and it follows from this that America shouldn’t be criticized externally (any such criticism of America would be attributed either to unthinking fundamentalism or to the kinds of unacceptable anti-Americanism characteristic of certain left-wing circles in the West.) If this is Habermas’ position then I think it can only be sustained through the corresponding belief in the moral superiority of America.

<sup>21</sup> Habermas defines universality in terms of generality. Universality is the highest range of generality, and every universal is general, but not vice versa.

<sup>22</sup> Habermas, J. *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, ed. Maeve Cooke (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998): 207 (hereafter OPC).

<sup>23</sup> Habermas differentiates between language and language use in this context (OPC: 26).

<sup>24</sup> OPC: 21.

<sup>25</sup> This point is sharply borne out in Habermas’ critique of intentionalist theories in general, and Searle’s intentionalism in particular (OPC: 257-275).

<sup>26</sup> TCA II: 332-373.

<sup>27</sup> Dews, P. (ed). *Autonomy and Solidarity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edn. (London: Verso, 1992): 100; emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> However, as a true disciple of Hegel, Habermas considers the realization of these objective conditions in dialectical terms. This allows him to concede an ambiguity inherent in any such realization. Habermas explains this ambiguity through his conception of the colonization of lifeworld. Thus, Habermas realizes the ambivalent character of late capitalism in terms of the release of the rationality potential inherent in linguistic use (see TCA II: 153-197).

<sup>29</sup> Habermas claims that in traditional societies, facticity and validity are fused in such a manner that it is not possible to transcend the facticity. The rationalisation of the lifeworld essentially means an uncoupling of facticity and validity in such a way that facticity becomes, in principle, transcendable.

<sup>30</sup> A clear differentiation between facticity and validity is indispensable in order for particularism to be transcended. The notion of validity itself depends on idealization and generalization (see JA: 55ff; BFN: 1-41).

<sup>31</sup> The “tension” within a lifeworld between facticity and validity or “ideality” is one of Habermas’ favourite expressions. It means that, after the rationalisation of a lifeworld, facticity and “ideality” are neither fused into each other completely, nor separated from each other completely (BFN: 20, 35 and passim).

<sup>32</sup> Through the emergence of the distinction between theoretical and practical validity claims, for example.

<sup>33</sup> See Owen, D. S. “Habermas’s Developmental Logic Thesis: Universal or Eurocentric?” *Philosophy Today*, 24, Supplement (1998): 104-111.

<sup>34</sup> Habermas is not very clear about what particular values America tries to impose on others. Did America try to impose its own type of presidential system in Iraq, for example?

<sup>35</sup> In other words, the generality of norms and values does not transcend American particularity.

<sup>36</sup> TDW: 103.

<sup>37</sup> TDW: 35, also see 53. Habermas doesn’t elaborate anywhere (as far as I know) on how Iraqis (for example) “would appropriate the universal content of human rights with their own resources.” Habermas’ natural instinct is to bet on social movements to do the “dirty” work (see Farid Abdel-Nour, “Farewell to Justification: Habermas, Human Rights, and Universalist Morality.” *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 30 (1) (2004): 73-96). However, what Habermas might have in mind here can be gleaned from Rawls’ concrete proposal on how to “civilize” Islam. Drawing upon the work of Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im, Rawls argues that Muslims can today appropriate the “universal content of human rights” in the context of their own tradition *if* they reject the Medina period of the prophetic teachings and concentrate solely on the Mecca period (implying that the former are not compatible with human rights discourse, whereas the latter are). See John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples: With "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999): 151, n46.

<sup>38</sup> If we were to focus on the economy, we might say that America cares about its own accumulation at the expense of accumulation in general.

<sup>39</sup> “From its self-imposed isolation, even the good hegemon, having appointed itself as the trustee of general interests, cannot *know* whether what it claims to do in the interest of others is, in fact, *equally* good for all” (TDW: 35; emphasis in the original. See also 184-185). Compare this with the Hayekian notion of the epistemological impossibility of socialism and his related notion of the impossibility of knowing markets and their mechanism (see John Gray, "F. A. Hayek and the Rebirth of Classical Liberalism." *Literature of Liberty*, 5 (4) (Winter 1982): 19-101). For a recent comparison of Habermas and Hayek, see David L. Prychitko and Virgil Henry Storr, “Communicative Action and the Radical Constitution: The Habermasian Challenge to Hayek, Mises and their Descendents.” *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 31 (2) (2007): 255-274.

<sup>40</sup> TDW: 173-175.

<sup>41</sup> TDW: 127. Habermas talks of “an overhasty concretization of the general idea of a “cosmopolitan condition” or a constitution for the international community” (123) on Kant’s part; see also TDW: 118.

<sup>42</sup> TDW: 129.

<sup>43</sup> A world republic is a conceptual impossibility, because the concept of world republic must be based on the principle of “complete inclusion” such that no one can be excluded from it. Democracy on the other hand, despite all its openness, cannot be established without some sort of exclusion: “Any political community that wants to understand itself as a democracy must at least distinguish between members and non-members” (TPNC: 107).

<sup>44</sup> “The spatial and temporal horizons of a lifeworld . . . no matter how broadly they extend, always form a whole that is both intuitively present but always withdrawn to an unproblematic background; a whole which is closed in the sense that it contains every possible interaction from the perspective of lifeworld participants” (TPNC: 82).

<sup>45</sup> TPNC: 107-109.

<sup>46</sup> Dews, *Autonomy and Solidarity*: 270.

<sup>47</sup> “With the framework of a common culture, negotiation partners also have recourse to common value orientations and a shared conception of justice, which makes an understanding beyond instrumental-rational agreements possible. But on the international level the “thick” communicative embeddedness is missing” (TPNC: 109).

<sup>48</sup> TPNC, *passim*.

<sup>49</sup> In the context of the European Union, Habermas writes, “It is neither possible nor desirable to level out the national identities of member nations, nor melt them down in a “Nation of Europe.”” (TPCN: 99).

<sup>50</sup> Habermas conceives of the relationship between openness and closedness, inclusivity and exclusivity, as a dialectical relationship. He seems to concede the possibility of pure particularity, as in the case of traditional societies and modern regressive movements like Al-Qaeda; however, he doesn't entertain the possibility of pure inclusivity. At the moral level one can achieve pure inclusivity, but such a level is that of pure abstraction and needs to be married to particularity of the ethical to gain any concrete status. Every openness, to be concrete, requires an ultimate (even if temporary) closure. Thus the real difference between "particularistic" particularities and non-particularistic particularities is that in the former the closure is absolute and permanent, while in the latter it is temporary and always moving, although there is no situation in which the need for closure can be permanently transcended (see PNC: 107-11).

<sup>51</sup> TPNC: 69-80.

<sup>52</sup> Habermas sees these regional bodies as performing the functions of a world domestic policy without a world government (TPNC: 104). These functions would include "political coordination in the areas of the economy, the environment, transportation, health, etc . . ." (TDW: 108). These regional bodies would also serve as "an international negotiating system that could place limits on the "race to the bottom" – cost-cutting deregulatory race that reduces the capacities for social-political action and damages social standards – would need to enact and enforce redistributive regulations." (TDW: 109); also see TDW: 136ff.

<sup>53</sup> TPNC: 70. Elsewhere, Habermas speaks of "continental regimes on the model of the European Union" (TDW: 109).

<sup>54</sup> TDW: 42.

<sup>55</sup> TDW: 44, TPNC: 99-100.

<sup>56</sup> Habermas also contrasts functional integration with social integration (see TPNC: 82).

<sup>57</sup> TDW: 68.

<sup>58</sup> TDW: 81.

<sup>59</sup> TDW: 77.

<sup>60</sup> TDW: 78. "From a normative point of view, the fact that the democratic process must always be embedded in a common political culture doesn't imply the exclusivist project of realizing national particularity, but rather has the inclusive meaning of a practice of self-legislation that includes all citizens equally" (TPNC: 73).

<sup>61</sup> See TDW: 43-48.

<sup>62</sup> "... maintaining peace and enforcing human rights globally . . ." (TDW: 108).

<sup>63</sup> TPNC: 108.

<sup>64</sup> TDW: 109-110.

<sup>65</sup> TPNC: 109.

<sup>66</sup> TPNC: 99.

<sup>67</sup> Pensky, M. *Introduction to TPNC*: ix-x.

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