

JURGEN HABERMAS AND THE CRITICAL THEORY OF THE SOCIETY

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Abstract

Jurgen Habermas philosophical thought has influenced the critical discussions not only in Europe but also in United State of America. Based on the lessons of his teachers Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer about the critical theory of society he carries it adapting to the problems of the society, so called the postmodern society, especially after the Cold War.

Habermas was attracted by the opinion on critical theory of the society of Frankfurt School but he has the courage to propose a vision of man and world that goes beyond the usual limits of the academy. His philosophy on contemporary society takes the critical form of the society and the civilization.

According to him the alienation from which suffer the people who are producers and consumers in a capitalist society is due not only to the political-economic characteristic features of capitalism but also the techniques used. From the perspective of Habermas these techniques should not be seen as a kind of destiny which we can not be avoided being deprived of our rights.

The solution of these problems is the culture because in this society it has an important place. Jurgen Habermas talks about that culture, which should not only be a nonsense knowledge. The culture should contribute to deepen the critical thinking, to contribute on the maturation of knowledge, the transformation of the society and her authentic progress.

Keywords: philosophical thought, contemporary society, critical thinking, critical theory, culture.

Introduction

It is immeasurable the impact and effect of critical discussion that Habermas's thinking oriented to philosophical and sociological sense has encouraged both in Europe and in America too. In general terms we can say that referring to arguments that support critical theory of society (his teachers, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse) he develops his opinion adjusting it to the problems of society, that society which today is called as postmodern, term that began to be used mainly after the Cold War. The impact, which had two french teachers of Habermas, Horkheimer and Adorno, was very divisive for his philosophical thought. For Habermas was stimulating the fact that Horkheimer and Adorno, spoke for the present, for the problems of the present without being locked inside sterile philosophical and historical frameworks purely academic and slimmer. Habermas' vision appears of a considerable importance and such will remain not only in the political but also epistemological and critical plan. It is worth mentioning the fact that previously they had an ongoing fascination on the opinion of the young Habermas (when Habermas' thoughts were preferred), the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, lived the courage to propose a vision of man and the world beyond the ordinary limits of the Academy. But what it is shaped in the reflections of Habermas is 'a critical of society and civilization, which is connected with the *entfremdung* and the special characteristics of the political-economic order of capitalism and by all techniques used in general. In this paper we will see that according to Habermas how the technical and economic rationality are the solution for a health and non pathological society, the society transformed by the structures that brings to a democratic society.

1. Habermas intellectual education

Jürgen Habermas was born in 1929 in Düsseldorf, Germany. He studied philosophy and sociology immediately approaching to the philosophical thought of his main teachers of the Frankfurt School. (Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse)¹

He started his academic career at a very young age, yet he did not celebrate his thirties when he became an assistant professor and then professor at the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt, who represented the institutional structure where teachers and students of the School of Frankfurt developed their research work. His academic career was always in progress because in 1961 he was transferred to the University of Heidelberg and three years later at the University of Frankfurt. After having a short period in 1971, at the Max Planck Institute of Monako - Baviera, he came back to Frankfurt University as a professor until 1983.

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It is not easy to make a full presentation of Habermas thought in a few lines. One element that I would highlight is the year of birth, 1929. His university formation relates to the period immediately after the fall of the National Socialist regime. As Petrucciani notes "the end of dictatorship allowed Habermas to approach with cultural experiences that until that period were prohibited, among which were the works of Marx and Engels (...)"². But in fact it is not just about access with intellectual experiences which up to that moment had been denied. Habermas, in 1945, like all youth of his generation, after the capitulation of Germany in World War II, passed an intellectual and psychological trauma of Norimberg process, with the discovery of terror in concentration camps³. Moreover, although Habermas came close with the philosophy of the Frankfurt School, he showed a natural tendency to intellectual freedom and especially the impact of styles and ways of thinking. For example, Martin Heidegger despite his controversial past with the national socialist regime sparked interest to Habermas, who often accepted this fact⁴.

Systematic internal coherence and depth of thought that attracted so much not only him but also other European youth in that period, as Habermas himself noticed in his reflections that in 1953 his work *Introduction to the metaphysical* (actually belongs to 1935) Heidegger does not hesitate to declare that the national socialist movement had the truth and its inner greatness "⁵

Habermas was very sensitive to the lessons of Marx and Engels and critical developments coming from French teachers and that revival of desirous admission of Nazism without any reversing or self-criticism seemed unacceptable. In this way, what Petrucciani determines as "a political disappointment" to the author of *Being and Time*, the deepening of Marx's dialectic of society is developed above all with a view to deepening the foundations of philosophical idealism of 1800. (we should not forget that Habermas' thesis was on Schelling)⁶. After that, he meets with Karl Löwith, in particular comes his work *From Hegel to Nietzsche* and later more significant works for the 1900 Marxism of the philosopher and Hungarian critic György Lukács *History and thoroughness of classes*⁷.

So through Lukács, in the same year 1953, he has a book which will consider later as one of the bases of its formation, ie the work itself by Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*⁸.

¹ Bedeschi, G., (2005) *Introduzione alla Scuola di Francoforte*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, Edited by Donaggio, E., (2005), *La Scuola di Francoforte. La storia e i testi*, Torino, Einaudi.

² Petrucciani, S., (2000) *Introduzione ad Habermas*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, p. 3.

³ Nolte, E., (2008), *La guerra civile europea (1917-1945). Nazionalsocialismo e bolscevismo*, Milano, Rizzoli,

⁴ Habermas, J., (2000), *Profili politico-filosofici*, Milano, Guerini.

⁵ Heidegger, M. (2007), *Introduzione alla metafisica*, Mursia, p. 101.

⁶ Ingram, D., (2010) Habermas. *Introduction and analysis*, New York, Cornell University Press, p. 4.

⁷ Caputo, F., (2003), *Scienza pedagogica comunicativa: Jürgen Habermas*, Cosenza, Pellegrini, p. 40 ss.

⁸ Horkheimer, M., - Adorno, T., (2010) *Dialettica dell'Illuminismo*, Torino, Einaudi.

We can say that the impact, which had two french teachers of Habermas, Horkheimer and Adorno, was very divisive. In an autobiographical memory in an interview at the early 80s Habermas said that "Horkheimer and Adorno did not write historical texts for Aristotle, Kant or Hegel but they elaborated a theory of dialectical development of society at the time"⁹. So for Habermas was stimulating the fact that Horkheimer and Adorno, spoke for the present, for the problems of the present without being locked inside sterile philosophical and historical frameworks purely academic and slimmer.

Meanwhile, as he pointed the sudden love for Heidegger, then turned into a bitter disappointment, so that in the beginning characterizes an intellectual philosophical and sociological interest to Habermas, is that of a constant openness to critical stimuli of different origin, never collected in a dogmatic way within premeditated thematic horizons. In fact this is constant and characteristic description of Habermas' personality, which will also be found in the works of his later maturity.

There is more emphasis by the translator of one of the most known philosophical works of Habermas, *Ethics of discourse*, which on one hand the tradition that leads to Marx and Hegel is to be considered the most important starting point of habermasian opinion¹⁰. However, doubts have been rejected by some orthodox Marxists, who very often have refused to consider Habermas as one of them, and in some cases have expressed their very hostile opinion¹¹.

In fact, as we will see ongoing traditional antithesis of Marx-Weber, which is a communist and liberal antithesis, is selected by Habermas in a broader political philosophical vision. Habermas' vision appears of a considerable importance and such will remain not only in the political but also epistemological and critical plan. The scholar Gian Enrico Rusconi has noted that the great work of Habermas *Theory of communicative action* (original version 1981) is characterized precisely because it is "much more than continuing with other concepts of critical theory or cases of Western Marxism. It is the opening in the conceptual universe of analytic philosophy and of Anglo-Saxon language; it is a comparison with the elements of the regular theory. It is a revision of Durkheim, Weber, Mead, Parsons not as an academic action but as a reappropriation from within the essential steps of intelligence of modern concept"¹².

So we can say, that the philosophers of different schools, from Heidegger to Anglo-Saxon analytical orientation, as well as sociologists, methodology and whose critical purposes go beyond the methods and goals of the Frankfurt School, contribute to make the opinion more diversified and intellectual formation of this great scholar of 900s.

However it should be noted once again that in a 1983 autobiography, Habermas said that "Marx and the tradition that regarding to the period of Marx and Hegel has been and is the most important point, full of valuable lessons, according to my opinion¹³." This is an element that should be compared in a very detailed way.

Although in the complex diversity of the critical and intellectual references that make up the constellation of the thought of Habermas, Hegelian-Marxist tradition, is the foundation of his entire discussion. So we have to concentrate to this tradition as it follows the distinctive signature of Habermas in the critical theory of society.

⁹ Cfr. J. Habermas, (1981) *Kleine politische Schriften*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, p. 511.

¹⁰ Agazzi, E., (1985), *Introduzione a J. Habermas, Etica del discorso*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1985, p. 5.

¹¹ Ritsert, J., - Rolshausen, C., (1971), *Der Konservatismus kritischen der Theorie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main.

¹² G. E. Rusconi, G.E., (1986), *Introduzione a J. Habermas, teoria dell'agire comunicativo*. Vol. I: *razionalità nell'azione e razionalizzazione sociale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 9.

¹³ Habermas, J., (1983), *Dialettica della razionalizzazione*, Milano, Unicopli, p. 3. Agazzi, E., *Introduzione a J. Habermas, Etica del discorso*, cit., p. 5.

2. According to Hegel and Marks

It is worth mentioning the fact that previously they had an ongoing fascination on the opinion of the young Habermas (when Habermas' thoughts were preferred), the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, lived the courage to propose a vision of man and the world beyond the ordinary limits of the Academy.

So, it was not simply that these authors would develop lectures and methods to form students (a very commendable thing), but to use different ways to deepen critical consciousness (critical thinking) of the society and thus to contribute to the transformation and its internal revolution¹⁴. Alongside, according to Petrucciani, (around the middle of the 50s) would be wrong to call Habermas a new scholar of Marxism lectures." No one should think that through these readings it is defined a quick approach of Habermas to the arteries of critical Marxism, which in various ways Lukacs, Adorno or Horkheimer belonged to it¹⁵. In his first studies, some researchers starting from Rusconi to Petrucciani and Agazzi etc- have observed that what it is shaped in the reflections of Habermas is 'a critical of society and civilization' (we will see later that in the *History and Criticism of Public Opinion* precisely these cases will take shape and will deepen further. Not only the traditional Marxist thinkers provide incentives for their reflections, but also those who are oriented towards liberalism. Criticism of the young Marx on the alienation of man is created from the young Habermas with a series of spuntosh coming from Heidegger's critical reflections about western civilization¹⁶. Critique of contemporary society, to Habermas has no apocalyptic color. For example there is not a major difference in the attitude of Herbert Marcuse in the well known work *The One-Dimensional Man* known by Habermas stance towards the author Adorno (from *Minima Moralia* to the *Negative Dialectic*, which in some ways is his spiritual testament)¹⁷. Criticism of society and contemporary civilization finds to Habermas a different reformist character, according to Petrucciani¹⁸. In the end the myth of progress has certainly brought distortions. However should avoid any approach that aims to oppose totalitarian liberal-democratic civilization or bourgeois, another civilization (as would do with methodology and critical orientations completely different Lukacs or Adorno and Horkheimer's from Frankfurt). Correction, therefore distortion of the present can be adjusted only through a critical oriented improvement, beyond any destructive tonality.

According to Habermas judgment, as also results in a 1955 article in *Marks Perspective*¹⁹, one of the main thoughts of Trevir was that *Entfremdung*, could not only be defined by the special characteristics of the political-economic order of capitalism but also by all techniques used in general, it is worth mentioning that producers and consumer of capitalist society suffer from alienation.

An insufficient point, so Marx's reflection on technique would not be more profound, (in which (techniques) can definitely find a strong echo by heideggeriane to Habermas influences). However between Habermas, who is not named yet a genuine Marxist and Marxist Heidegger already started distances.

The technique is like a fortune from which we can not escape, according to Heidegger. But this is not seen by Habermas in the same way. According to Habermas, we should avoid thinking that technical-scientific rationality nowadays does not colonize (according to an expression that is used systematically in school final exams) and some areas of thinking and behavior in humans by invading and depriving their rights²⁰.

According to the study *Dialectic of Reasoning* (initiator of many topics) is a whole-work independently oriented and profiled. In particular, *Entfremdung* (ie alienation of man and citizen) once again faced with fundamental lesson of Marx, however, without the latter precludes the industrial economic and technical progress.

¹⁴ Wiggershaus, R., (1992), *La Scuola di Francoforte*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, p. 552 ss.

¹⁵ Petrucciani, S., *Introduzione ad Habermas*, cit., p. 5.

¹⁶ Wiggershaus, R., *La Scuola di Francoforte*, cit., p. 555 ss.

¹⁷ Bedeschi, G., *Introduzione alla Scuola di Francoforte*, cit.

¹⁸ Petrucciani, S., *Introduzione ad Habermas*, cit., p. 6.

¹⁹ Habermas, J., (1955), *Marx in Perspektiven*, in "Merkur", IX, p. 1180 ss.

²⁰ Petrucciani, S., *Introduzione ad Habermas*, cit., p. 7.

Above all, what threatens to overcome is any assumptions of technical growth perspective, which would trigger according to Habermas's under a a transfer of human in favor of banal and repressive economic forces. It really gets a paradigmatic value of reflection of Petrucciani about the attitude of the young Habermas which should be outlined, will remain unchanged until the age of later maturity.

Technical and economic rationality, -this is and will be the point of view of Habermas. Technical and economic rationality has its own rules and is legitimate in its field. However it also tends to pretend a rational monopoly and to spread in an imperialist way killing other forms of rationality and generate social pathology.

Therefore are necessary limited structures if we want a society developed in harmony, balanced and non-pathological²¹.

A sharp and qualitative movement, reflection of Habermas, will do in 1956, when it will start as a researcher at the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt in 1956 close to which was the Frankfurt School, -as mentioned earlier. It was the first one who taught me that they can not refer to Marx only from a historical perspective²².

This part brought many elements. First, we are still facing rejection of the academic decorative concept of culture. So culture should not only be a useless knowledge. It should contribute to reinforce critical thinking, coincides with the maturity of consciousness and thus contributes to the transformation and true progress of society.

3.Expansion of intellectual habermasian horizon

Daily Facing with Theodor Adorni is an obvious case of progress and intellectual maturity to Habermas-in. Above all, as indicated previously, Adorno finds a new Marks to Habermas. A Marks not read rigorously and not viewed as dogma anymore, isolated from any contribution of any other culture, but rather with an extensive use of dialect from which springs marksizm thought (ie Hegel and left Hegelian) critical development of neomarksizm, human and social sciences, in the first place Sigmund Freud and Max Weber.

Habermas's is interested only in the stricto sensu thought. We have discussed about his confronting with Martin Heidegger, before entering the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt. Heideggeriane thoughts (not under lock with existential key but rather hermetic) will attract the attention of Habermas's, which in the 50s will show a special interest for the thoughts of an author as Gadamar²³.

This complexity of motives leads to the first gathering of essays (from 1961-1962) which will come together in the volume *Theorie un Praxis*²⁴. In this period, among others habermasian philosophical horizon recognizes a significant expansion of horizon. Two key concepts are theory and practice, summarized in the title of the opera. It is the living spirit of the Hegel-Marxism what shines in this opera.

Critical theory of society, discipline that uses tools to make them available to philosophy, economics and human sciences; emphasizes internal disputes of the world of nowadays, should nevertheless be linked to practice, face to transform these disputes and to detect opportunities of progress and advancement²⁵.

²¹ Habermas, J., *Dialettica della razionalizzazione*, Cfr. S. Petrucciani, *Introduzione ad Habermas*, cit., p. 9.

²² Interview with A. Widmann, you can see it in italian in J. Habermas, *Dialettica della razionalizzazione*, cit., p. 221 ss.

²³ Cunico, G., (1984) *Dall'ontologia alla critica. La prima svolta nel pensiero di Habermas*, Casale Monferrato, Marietti.

²⁴ Habermas, J., (1963), *Theorie und Praxis*, Berlin, Luchterhand, 1963. A. (edited by), Gajan, A., (1973) *Prassi politica e teoria critica della società*, Bologna, Il Mulino.

²⁵ Sica, G., (1982) *Habermas e il metodo della sociologia critica*, Pisa, ETS.

Precisely this is the problem that Habermas tends to show, by comparing it with the problem that was before Marx's and that it successfully had reviewed the Frankfurt School. How to make the transition from theory to practice? How can it happen that needed areas of science abstract concepts to highlight the disagreements of the real world and to form with these concepts, with these theories the transformation of a reality that seems clear?

We find the answer to these complex questions, which become once again with a antidogmatic and open content, with a dialogue with intellectual and philosophical tendency for the time. In a way, after gathering in his trunk the research's of Marxism, another important element of the criticism comes from the philosophy of science.

So besides human sciences, besides psychoanalysis and hermeneutics, sociology of Max Weber, and epistemology comes to help on the critical theory of society's project. Alongside it is an confrontation of epistemology and critical theory of society that during that period had a critical moment of high importance, the meeting-clash of Theodor Adorno and Karl Popper in the case of the Congress of the German Society Sociology that was held in Tübingen in October 1961²⁶.

It is known that Popper defended the idea of "open society" founded on individual rights of liberal-democratics, after which Adorno claimed to still see the hidden hand of the capital, with considerable injustice and inhuman²⁷.

We can say that Habermas will lead his discussion at a point which already Adorno, in Popper's critical discussion, had given importance to the need to overcome downgrade "tout Court" of social science, which Popper meant, his unilateral exaltation for sharp criticism of depth sciences on formalized language like mathematics, calling into question the ingrained dichotomy of evolutionary sciences on the one hand and irrational decisions about values on the other hand, observed Petrucciani; if the scientific method is characterized by the attitude of criticism and rational discussion, then we can not know why the guiding principle may not be as scientific-empirical examination of the practical-social issues. But if it was like this, it appears that the critical rational method of science is isolated from practical issues that see people and their values in conflict, but rather offers the possibility to visualize a model of human cohabitation, which will inspire "rational dialogue not forced on communicator people"²⁸.

Petrucciani's passage referred above is with a great interest and deserves to be above all an analytical comment. Popper's position on Habermas seems unsustainable, according to which, besides setting simple and factual natural sciences, with the freedom and neutral impartiality of them, would be a series of decisions, values and choices orientated to policy and labeling. Scientific knowledge, in some ways, is not converted to a complexity of concepts separated from the practical reality, furthermore scientific knowledge operates and transforms itself only thanks to a series of demands and incentives from practical reality. We are thus in the presence of a "materialist philosophy, mundane" and simultaneously in the presence of a "philosophication or scientification of the world", which Habermas has held since his youth, from the lessons of Marx and recently from Adorno, too²⁹. The methodology of scientific discussion should be extended to the public debate about political issues - as always Petrucciani observes the thoughts of Habermas³⁰.

If critical theory of society has failed, or did not give the desired fruits, it is precisely for this reason, according to Habermas. Furthermore positioning of Popper is always seen as contradictory, -always according to Habermas. On the one hand, this position is declared in favor of "open society", proposing a formula that will find in one of the most outstanding operas of Austrian epistemology "*Open Society and its Enemies*"³¹.

²⁶ Borghini, A., (2000), *Karl Popper. Politica e società*, Milano, Franco Angeli, as well as the general debate conducted in a sociological key from Giddens, A., (1995) *Politics, sociology and social theory. Encounters with classical and contemporary social thought*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, p. 177 ss.

²⁷ Borghini, A., *Karl Popper. Politica e società*, cit., p. 123 ss.

²⁸ Petrucciani, S., (1978), *Introduzione a Habermas*, cit., p. 23. Cfr. Habermas, J., *Teoria e prassi nella società tecnologica*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, p. 417

²⁹ Ivi, p. 17 ss.

³⁰ Ivi, pp. 23-24.

³¹ Popper, K., (2004), *La società aperta e i suoi nemici*, Roma, Armando, 2 voll.

On the other hand he himself indicates an impairment on its liberal-democratic and anti authoritarian standing. What value does it have, -opposes Habermas, - such an attitude once they pretend that the horizon of politics, ethics, human values is not followed by reason (rationality) and should simply be left to the arbitrary preferences of the subject? What should be done, says Habermas, is the implementation of a wide rational model where the scientific of social critic itself and any rational discussion that is found to free people should be declared³².

This is why Habermas approves that between theory and practice should be sustainable principle of unity (which is not simple identification but mostly about organic relation), however, by repeating the narrow scope of these two moments. For more in the opinion of Habermas lives the spirit of Marxist and Frankfurt tradition. On the one hand it makes no sense to talk for a simple theory. On the other hand, to speak of a simple and clear sentence, which does not know or does not need to adopt tools to criticism, science, philosophy to light lecture, means to reduction an action that really should be considered as irrational.

Here's the challenge that Habermas puts for himself and philosophical-scientific panorama of its time. To prepare the topic for a theory which is not simply without interest, requires interior, but rather requires illumination, lighting of the way of ethical-political practice. Namely, conversely, at the same time, to clarify the ethical-political practice and to avoid the creation of wrong ideas. Giving a final answer to Popper, according to Habermas, practice should not be seen as a irrational human activity by need because it is deprived of very stringed formal knowledge criteria, so math-science. Conversely, moving from an extended rational ideal, who refuses to identify the outmoded reasoning = logo mathematician is likely to bring principles and tools that allow communication and practical action.

So we can say that between 50 and 60, still young the philosopher and sociologist Habermas clearly found the idea of a programmatic speculative development, which in the years to come would pursue systematically and vigorously.

4. The political reflection of Habermas

It is understandable, that a critical theory of society, based on the union of theory and practice, must first result - (if we refer to bourgeois society) – with capitalism, liberal democracy. And here we find an additional element of distinction and diversity of the Habermas towards the Marxist tradition and to the Frankfurt School.

It has been mentioned, that according to Marx whole tradition of individual rights as natural rights, represents a radical impairment and even sarcastic indicator³³. Means of traditional republicanism, according to the main author, would be not justifiable if there would be cast as an dialectic-historical conception, Republican Democracy of the 80s, in view of the privatization of the means of production of the capital, according to Marxism, would be useful to be extended and to decrease natural socio-economic disagreements. In this way would represent an intermediate stage of the necessity for intimate self-dissolution, this intimate self-dissolution, through the dictatorship of the proletariat, would have brought "classless society"³⁴.

This objection to liberal democracy, negatively defined as "bourgeois", is inherited from the Marxist tradition. For an author as critic and philosopher with Hungarian origin, Lucacs, especially thanks to the early access that he had with the Bolshevik revolution, the democratic-liberal tradition loses popularity, or orthodox Marxist optics is reduced at the initial moment, in classless communist society.

This objection to liberal democracy, considered as the mode where the guarantee of respect for human rights is formal. This means that the universality of this guarantee does not prevent to be suspected for the most wellknown masterminds of the School of Frankfurt³⁵.

³² Habermas, J., *Teoria e prassi*, cit., in particolare p. 147 ss.

³³ Bedeschi, G., (1984), *Introduzione a Marx*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1984.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 131 ss.

³⁵ Galeazzi, U., (2000), *La teoria critica della Scuola di Francoforte. Diagnosi della società contemporanea e dialogo critico con il pensiero moderno*, Napoli, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane.

In Adorno, Horkheimer, perhaps more to Marcuse, rekindle the thesis under which the deification of freedom (which have deep roots in Western societies) is simply a facade which hides the domination of capital and the logic of consumerism and materialism that facade itself has inside it³⁶.

Now, the independence of judgment of Habermas to this tradition, since the years before, is admirable. Not to forget the critical lessons (revenue from Marks), which reinforce all the theories of the Frankfurt School. Habermas is careful in devaluating liberal democracy as a regime where individual rights are protected, in the sense that behind this movement are the products of bourgeois capital. Of course all this lies, and are many dangers and difficulties that threaten freedom of liberal democracy. However, behind the tradition of rights (which is part of the tradition of enlightenment) has a series of criticism, at least towards the Marxist tradition, and not directed against the liberal tradition of freedom of bourgeois democracy. As mentioned above, for his antidogmatic attitude and pro open dialogue Habermas has appeared far from the Marxist tradition, so his constant complaints against Marx's has been understood from some orthodox Marxists as the fruit of a clear and simple misunderstanding³⁷. As will be seen later, his main operas will be established, by *The Critical History of Public Opinion to The Theory of Verbal Communication*. While critical theory of society should not aim at an abstract and unfounded model of revolution, but rather should aim at a process of transformation of the structures of democratic society. Democratic society, precisely because it is always established and spread, reveals to the eyes of Habermas profound ethical-political reasons, which are not likely to be avoided.

It is about a conviction that crosses the mind of Habermas since his youth. When he was only 30 years old in 1958 one of his first works was an essay dedicated to the concept of democracy, with a symbolic title *On the Concept of Political Participation*. Essay for which, not coincidentally, one of the most famous and prominent persons of the Frankfurt School, Horkheimer, will not stay without expressing his opinion³⁸.

The idea of "political participation", held in the traditional form and manner, is a critical description about contemporary democracy, after which is very concerning. According to Habermas, is not enough to say that democracy is quickly run in mechanisms of delegation and representation. On the contrary, to have true democracy is essential to assume that participation of citizens in public affairs, directly or indirectly³⁹.

Fundamental assumption is that liberal democracy should be restored itself, to retake a sense that it had in its beginning, or to revert real sovereignty of the people.

It should be said that Habermas was eager to restore small communities to which democracy is violated (proposing the social model of Rousseau). It would be an unforgivable historical naivety, since Habermas understands better than anyone the untouched of complex modern states and nations.

However, the problem of building, the resurrection of people (people taking part) in public affairs is back once again, as a prerequisite of democracy. According to Habermas, in the bourgeois world participation has the form of public opinion.

In the bourgeois world civil society is distinguished by the state and is characterized by Hegel as 'system of needs' or mutual spread of trading and manufacturing activities. This means that for Habermas, attempts to reconstruct the meaning of today democracy (along with limits) will be realized only through the reconstruction of a historical-genetic essence, through this outcome (in Europe) public opinion is firmly established, in democratic processes. For this reason, in 1962 Habermas reviews the thesis powered by the title *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*⁴⁰. Of course it is about the biggest philosophical-scientific and historygraphic purchases of Jurgen Habermas.

³⁶ Herbert, M., (1999), *L'uomo a una dimensione. L'ideologia della società industriale avanzata*, Torino, Einaudi.

³⁷ Wiggershaus, R., *La Scuola di Francoforte*, cit., in particolare p. 560 ss.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 561 ss.

³⁹ Petrucciani, S., *Introduzione a Habermas*, cit., p. 31

⁴⁰ Habermas, J., (2010), *Storia e critica dell'opinione pubblica*, Milano, Mondadori.

Conclusion

About the critical theory of the society we find many elements of distinction and diversity of the Habermas towards the Marxist tradition and to the Frankfurt School. Is necessary a process of transformation of the structures of democratic society. Democratic society, precisely because it is always established and spread, reveals to the eyes of Habermas profound ethical-political reasons, which are not likely to be avoided. The idea of "political participation", held in the traditional form and manner, is a critical description about contemporary democracy, after which is very concerning. According to Habermas, is not enough to say that democracy is quickly run in mechanisms of delegation and representation.

On the contrary, to have true democracy is essential to assume that participation of citizens in public affairs, directly or indirectly. For Habermas, attempts to reconstruct the meaning of today democracy (along with limits) will be realized only through the reconstruction of a historical-genetic essence, by which the public opinion is firmly established, in democratic processes.

Biography of author

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