



Universidad Nacional de Catamarca - Facultad de Humanidades
Instituto de Investigación en Teorías del Arte y Estética
Revista Rigel – ISSN 2525-1945.

Science, Rationalization, and Politics in Habermas

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Received: 04/07/2026

Accepted: 16/08/2026

Published: 09/09/2026

Abstract

From *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) to *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), Jürgen Habermas—a leading representative of the second generation of Frankfurt School Critical Theory—has continuously developed his thought and revised his theses. This evolution stems from his critical debates with foundational classic and contemporary texts by major thinkers and philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Marx, Max Weber, and Michel Foucault. From this critical perspective, Habermas sought to demonstrate to his contemporary peers how science could play an ideological role when reduced to a technocratic model of governance. He argued that rationalization is inextricably linked to politics, and that the concept and trajectory of rationalization pertain to the history of humanity as a whole. Examining this conceptual triad—science, rationalization, and politics—with Habermas represents an effort to articulate the underlying connections between these concepts, alongside their philosophical, ethical, and political stakes within critical theory. It explores how these concepts intertwine within Habermasian critical thought to account for the formation of modern societies on the one hand, and how modern societies emerge as a product of universal rationalization on the other. Furthermore, as a subject of debate between Habermas and Max Weber, rationalization grounds the necessity within critical theory for a theory of communicative action—one built upon ethical imperatives that organize discourse and guarantee genuine communication (Habermas / Karl-Otto Apel).

Keywords: Reason, Science, Technology, Rational, Rationality, Rationalization, Politics, Discourse/ Debate, Communicative Action.



Introduction

Undertaking the task of critically managing the concepts of science, rationalization, and politics—in light of the problematization of their meanings, the ambiguity of their relationship, and the overlapping contexts in which they are situated—constitutes an attempt to re-examine the problematic issues they pose and the tensions they provoke in our contemporary era.

Our management of these concepts is not restricted to merely defining their meanings and relationships; rather, it extends to exposing the ambiguous mechanisms of their penetration and their complicity in the tensions brought about by global technological terror under globalization—conceived as the ultimate event of our present time.

On the one hand, this event has spawned a globalized terrorism, while on the other, it has rendered resistance a target of globalization and globalization a target of resistance. This is specifically reflected in the continuous historical revolutionary process we experience today in our reality, with its fluctuations, fractures, accelerating pace at times, and recessions at others across diverse and scattered locations around the globe—establishing the necessity for radical critique and resistant action against all forms of hegemony, control, biopower (power over life), and global surveillance orchestrated under the slogans of science and rationalization.

To examine the various modes of critique directed at science, rationalization, and politics, as well as the stakes of this critique, we have chosen to engage with Habermas. This choice is guided by the distinctiveness of his philosophical-sociological concern, which focused on the economic and social system of modern societies, as well as the possibilities of subjecting the irrationality of the system to the laws of human reason in light of a new understanding of ongoing events and a new practice of rationalization that grounds communicative action ethically and politically.

It is also prompted by the problematic issues raised by his critical philosophical project regarding his critique of philosophy and its utility in an era dominated by science, as well as his critique of the dictatorship of reason:

"...for reason treats things as a dictator treats people: it knows them only to the extent that it can manipulate them." This dictatorship of reason—disguised behind science, rationalization, and modes of legitimation—transforms into a political rationality that bestows a rational character upon irrational systems, restricting individual freedom and regulating both thought and behavior.

It is also prompted by his stance on modernity and the systems of knowledge, politics, and rationalization it produced; by the epistemic shifts undergone by Western political thought under the dominance of technology and instrumental rationality; and by his diagnosis of the crisis of the contemporary world in light of globalization and the will to conquer the world—or what Heidegger

terms "automatic self-centering in the world." This will manifests in "the gigantic" (Le gigantesque), which currently displays itself in various ways through what is known as "Americanism": "Americanism is something European... a still-uncomprehended species of the gigantic and the huge, a gigantic that is still unbound—that is, it has not yet emerged from the completion of the metaphysical essence of modern times." This "Americanization of the world" was followed by wars as well as sectarian, ethnic, and class conflicts.

Against this backdrop, Habermas bets on establishing an emancipatory, communicative rationality that unites science, rationalization, and politics within an horizon opposed to technical rationality—a rationality that subjects reason to the processes of production and the standards of industry aimed at exerting control over humanity by establishing a social and political order that subjects human beings to its domination.

How, then, can we comprehend the concepts of science, rationalization, and politics within Habermas's critical philosophical project? How does the rationality of reason turn into a barbaric irrationality grounded in technical knowledge? How does this rationality become political, aiming to rationalize facts and norms and reproduce them according to the coercive and enslaving constraints of the totalitarian state model that curtails individual uniqueness and freedom? What can critical philosophy achieve in the face of the blockage of emancipatory horizons caused by various forms of rationalization and the dominance of technical rationality over domains of human activity? And what is the path toward establishing an open, normative critical rationality that unites science, rationalization, and politics within an emancipatory horizon where the ethical and the political articulate together as the foundation for an alternative vision of the contemporary world?

To examine the problematic issues raised by this matter and the questions posed by Habermas's critical approach—questions linked to the ambiguity of critique, the meaning of philosophy, the philosopher's stance on theoretical foundation, the sociologist's stance on the scientific explanation of modern social phenomena, and the difficulty of separating Habermas the philosopher (the theorist of communicative ethics and self-knowledge and communicative action) and Habermas the sociologist, the interpreter of what takes place in modern society, we have chosen to structure this intervention according to the following stages:

1. The meaning of philosophy and the function of critique in Habermas's thought.
2. The critique of science and technology.
3. The critique of the trajectory of rationalization and the ethical and political grounding of the rationality of communicative action.

2-The Meaning of Philosophy and the Function of Critique in Habermas:

Habermas represents one of the prominent figures of the Frankfurt School, which became known for Critical Theory. The concern of this school's thinkers centered on Critical Theory, or what is known as social philosophy, whose ultimate goal is "(1) the interpretive reading of the fate of human beings as individuals in society. Above all, this philosophy must address phenomena that can only be understood in relation to the social life of human beings, as well as the state, law, economy, and religion—in short, it focuses on the general material and spiritual conditions of human culture as a whole." (1)

In his introduction to *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas emphasizes that what is central to Critical Theory is "(2) its relationship with a radical critique of reason—a relationship established from Hegel to Nietzsche and sustained through the influence of Foucault and Derrida." (2)

Habermas starts from a central question repeated in multiple places throughout his works, focusing on the investigation into the utility of philosophy and its relevance in the present era. (3) According to Habermas, the task of thought is to critique philosophy and diagnose its crisis in an age dominated by technical rationality—which is perhaps what constitutes the common ground among the philosophers of the Critical School:

"It is a matter of critiquing philosophy, and as such, it does not intend to sacrifice it," (4) as Adorno and Horkheimer put it.

Habermas's critique of philosophy serves as a diagnosis of the crisis of reason—which has turned into a tool for rationalizing the irrational—and a diagnosis of the crisis of philosophy itself in an era dominated by science, technology, and the logic of control. The goal of critique is to radicalize the role of philosophy, stemming from Habermas's Kantian conviction that the function of philosophy is critique (though not in the strictly Kantian sense), his Hegelian conviction that philosophy is the child of its time, and his Marxist conviction that philosophy is praxis and an engagement in everyday practice. Therefore, it is imperative to transition from the critique of reason to the critique of reality—that is, to root critique in praxis in order to guide practice toward the horizon of emancipation.

According to Habermas, all philosophical attempts aimed at critiquing reason have marginalized daily life: "Approaches based on the critique of reason did not envision any methodological place for everyday practice... Marx went so far as to define everyday practice as the site where the rational content of philosophy ought to be integrated into the lifestyles of a liberated society." (5)

The critique of reason is thus a critique of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), which has become excessively rationalized in modern societies to the point of reifying human relationships and emptying them of their aesthetic and ethical meanings. This rationalization leads to a critique of a reason that has

transformed into an instrument and turned the human world into a world of things: "Instrumental reason has reified everything surrounding it, including itself." (6) This perhaps justifies Habermas's critique of philosophies of subjectivity and his opposing emphasis on the tight link between philosophical thought and the variables of historical reality.

Habermas not only defends philosophy, but also calls for radicalizing its presence in the era of transformations that the contemporary world has experienced—or, in Heideggerian terms, the "Age of World Pictures" (7)—that is, the era of various manifestations of modernity that make making the question "What is called thinking?" in its Heideggerian formulation the nucleus of tension in philosophy, and the question "What is the use of philosophy?" in its Habermasian formulation an urgent contemporary inquiry.

According to Habermas, the need for a critical philosophy is a need to expose the reality of alliances between reason and power, as well as between technical rationality and politics. These alliances bet on politically and socially controlling the individual by monitoring their thought, integrating them into the collective, and conditioning their behavior through propaganda mechanisms and mass media. Technical modernity has led to the condemnation and dissolution of the individual, leaving them no possibility of identifying their own unique identity within consensus, agreement, and intersubjective interaction.

The task of critical philosophy lies in reconsidering technical rationality toward establishing a critical—and consequently emancipatory—rationality from a philosophical-sociological perspective. This approach enables the development of critical philosophy through the findings of the social sciences and activates the philosophical content of those sciences; that is, establishing a social philosophy with critical dimensions aimed at critiquing the outcomes of reason by relying on reason itself, and reconsidering the question of identity in light of the fundamental transformations brought about by technical modernity.

Habermas's philosophical project is built on the assertion that philosophy must be social or it cannot be at all, (8) underscoring the tight conjunction between theory and practice, (9) as well as the intrinsic link between knowledge and human interests within the framework of a new conception of critical philosophy. (10) Habermas emphasized this close connection in his inaugural address delivered in 1965 at the University of Frankfurt, upon his appointment to the Chair of Philosophy previously held by Max Horkheimer.

Habermas emphasizes the close coupling between critique and politics, arguing that the future of philosophical thought is a matter that directly pertains to political practice. (11) In its critical procedures, philosophy must integrate the social sciences and the political horizon; critique, as an

action with strategic dimensions, is where the epistemic intersects with the ideological and the political. The stake of critique is thus the formulation of a rational critical theory for the modern era.

According to Habermas, the need for a critical philosophy is a need to expose the reality of alliances between reason and power, as well as between technical rationality and politics. These alliances bet on politically and socially controlling the individual by monitoring their thought, integrating them into the collective, and conditioning their behavior through propaganda mechanisms and mass media. Technical modernity has led to the condemnation and dissolution of the individual, leaving them no possibility of recognizing their own unique identity within consensus, agreement, and intersubjective interaction. The individual is not isolated from the collective; rather, the fulfillment of the individual constitutes the fulfillment of society, and the dissolution of the individual is a condemnation of society. As Marx posits, when the working human being is alienated from themselves under the capitalist mode of production, they become alienated from their fellow human beings. That is, individual alienation is simultaneously a collective alienation and a reification of social relations, which are transformed into relations between commodities and objects. Within this Marxist framework lies Habermas's critical orientation toward science and technology.

3- The Critique of Science and Technology:

In his book *Technology and Science as "Ideology"*, (12) Habermas denies the existence of any neutrality, innocence, or purity in science. In the context of technical rationality, science is immanently traversed by political calculations that must be brought to light. This task requires a critique of positivism, scientistic currents, and technicism, as all of these represent various expressions of the ideology that constitutes technical modernity.

Habermas declares his project: reconstructing the prehistory of modern positivism by rehabilitating philosophical reflection. Positivism attempts to construct itself as a movement upon the ruins of traditional worldviews—particularly metaphysical ones—and upon an ahistorical understanding of science that reduces facts to immediate givens. Therefore, Habermas emphasizes in *Knowledge and Human Interests* the necessity of rehabilitating philosophy and the philosophical question—not only in its metaphysical guise, but also in its epistemological form by reactivating scientific knowledge and reconsidering it as a historical practice (13) A reader of Habermas's book *Knowledge and Human Interests*—in which he examines the concept of interest—will readily observe the strong presence of the German critical heritage, spanning from Kant to Freud and Marx, passing through Hegel and Nietzsche. However, what is notable is that Habermas was pre-occupied with developing this critical tradition so that it might elevate to a theory of society capable of proposing elements for a communicative theory of modernity. This led him to exclude all tendencies that suppress the critical question—chief among them positivism, which posits science as the sole activity producing

meaningful statements. In modern societies, science has transformed into a productive force, thereby suppressing reflection on the ideology of science and technology by repressing questions regarding the immediate and long-term social interests underlying every technical decision. Consequently, the legitimacy of technical domination by existing interests is reinforced, while the ideological contents of science and technology remain in the shadows, unreached by the hand of critique.

the irrationality of the industrial system. Industry and investments are based on the coupling between science and technology in the field of producing diverse technologies that allow for the structured manipulation of freedoms within mass democracies.

Science and technology do not merely integrate into the economic system, but also into the administrative functions of the state; in a sense, the scientific-technical community becomes politicized to the extent that politics itself becomes scientific. Thus, science and technology become the primary productive force under the modern state, revealing attempts to domesticate scientific research and subject it to the logic of calculation and self-interest. This confluence between science and technology is what characterizes the modern era, where a reconciliation between technology and democracy is promised—manifested in the pledge of prosperity and regained freedoms. In reality, however, technology swallows democracy, giving birth to a technicized society (Technicisé) governed by a scientific politics or political rationalization sponsored by the totalitarian technocratic state. It is precisely this confluence that Habermas sought to critique and uncover its inherent dangers.

Habermas departs from Max Weber's thesis, which emphasizes the phenomenon of rationalization as the defining feature of modern societies: "...Thus, a new stage was reached in that rationalization which Max Weber understood as the training and qualification of the bureaucratic rule of the modern state..." (14) The phenomenon of rationalization characterizing the modern state is grounded in the tight coupling between specialized knowledge and political practice.

To clarify this relationship, Habermas outlines in *Technology and Science as "Ideology"* three explanatory models that illustrate the links between rationalization, politics, and public opinion, (15) which he summarizes as follows:

- **The Decisionistic Model:** Refers to decision theory, which supplies political practice with new technologies that aid in generating diverse strategies to rationalize political decisions and choices, given that political decision-making does not occur in isolation from scientific intelligence. Habermas highlights the limitations of this model, as it reinforces the reliance of

the politician on the technical expert and renders political decisions illusory—thereby leading to the emergence of a second model known as the technocratic model.

- **The Technocratic Model:** "In reality, little remains for the politician in the technocratic state except an illusory decisionistic activity," (16) which justifies the transition to the technocratic model that asserts the primacy of scientific analysis and technical planning in political practice. The technocratic state is one built on the dominance of scientific and technical rationality, which is deployed politically to justify

domination and the manipulation of public opinion. This model does not resolve the practical issues related to the daily lives of human beings so much as it complicates them; that is, it denies values, which necessitates a return to the decisionistic model—specifically to the importance of choice and decision-making in addressing practical issues. Consequently, the revival of the decisionistic model highlights the state's failure to address value-laden questions, its inability to control the dangerous consequences arising from technological applications, and its recourse to secrecy, concealment, and the isolation of public opinion. Therefore, the technocratic state strives to achieve a balance between the technical side and the political side—a balance governed by the logic of utility: "It is obvious that a mutual interconnection exists between values arising from utilitarian situations on one hand, and technologies that can be used to satisfy value-directed needs on the other." (17) The prevalence of utilitarian logic is precisely what leads to the pragmatic model.

- **The Pragmatic (or Utilitarian) Model:** Refers to the reciprocal relationship between political decisions and technical guidance. Here, the scientific expert is no longer independent—as in the technocratic model—from the politician who believes they decide autonomously, isolated from the strategies determined by technology: "It seems far more likely that a mutual communication is both possible and necessary, wherein scientific experts advise decision-makers on the one hand, and conversely, politicians commission scientists according to practical needs..." (18)

The pragmatic model dictates the nature of democratic practice within the public sphere. This practice does not take the form of free deliberations and discussions among citizens; rather, it assumes "the form of democratic elections manifested in acclamations and cheering." (19) Elected individuals in the public sphere bestow legitimacy upon themselves: "In any case, those who must make decisions legitimize themselves before the political public, while the decisions themselves must—according to the decisionistic view—remain excluded from public debates." (20) That is, the formation of political will is a result of acclamations and applause, rather than open deliberations and political discussions among a public of free citizens.

Through these models, Habermas reaches a critical conclusion regarding the relationship between rationalization, politics, and public opinion: communication between science and politics must adopt as its fundamental point of reference the interacting citizens in the public domain. It must originate from them and return to them; that is, political decisions and technical applications cannot be enlightened except by returning.

4- Critique of the Trajectory of Rationalization and the Ethical-Political Foundation of Communicative Rationality:

Nietzsche alerted us to the danger of nihilism generated by technical progress when he sounded a resounding alarm concerning the reality of the contemporary world. He also warned us against allowing the ordinary human being—the "Last Man"—from becoming the ultimate goal of life, especially since technology has stripped away humanity's organic components. (21) Heidegger acted similarly when he incited us to be cautious of subjectivity, which can only redouble its power within the universal imperialism of the technically organized human being. (22)

With his Nietzschean spirit—which conceals a inclination toward Heideggerian thought—Foucault asserts that there is no point in playing that boring role of "rational vs. irrational," or analyzing rationalization as the defining feature of modern culture. Thus, instead of analyzing the relationships between rationalization and power and examining the rationalization of society or culture, Foucault proposes another path: "I think the word 'rationalization' is dangerous. What we ought to do is analyze specific rationalities rather than constantly invoking the progress of rationalization in general"—that is, another method for analyzing a new economy of truth and a new economy of power relations Habermas confronts these perspectives and refuses to accept that the horizon is closed or that the future is inherently dark. Consequently, his analysis of modern society moves toward searching for the conditions of possibility that enable understanding and changing this era. This justifies his critique of positions that demonize technical progress, relying instead on Marx's stance, which maintains trust in technology as a sign of the advancement of human reason and its emancipatory horizon. Nevertheless, this confidence did not prevent Marx from critiquing technology by analyzing the dialectical relationship between science and technology and its negative ramifications. Marx underscored this relationship in his letter to Engels regarding the natural sciences, stating: "If, as you say, technology is indeed largely dependent on the state of science, science itself is far more dependent on the state and requirements of technology. If society has a technical need, that serves as a greater stimulus to science than a dozen universities." (25) Progress in the art of capitalist agriculture, for instance, is not merely a progress in plundering the land; rather, every progress in increasing the fertility of the soil is simultaneously a progress toward ruining the lasting sources of that fertility. (26) Marx does not overlook the paradoxes of technology:

it liberates humanity while simultaneously destroying its material and historical existence. The problem, therefore, resides in the directed uses of science and technology according to the requirements of capital.

Habermas's return to Marx is not intended to restore an attitude of uncritical trust, especially since Habermas directed his critique at Marx through the concepts of work and interaction (*Travail et interaction*) in his reading of Hegel's Jena philosophy presented in *Technology and Science as "Ideology"*. While Marx focused exclusively on labor and instrumental productive activity, Habermas prioritized human interaction as a communicative activity. Habermas understands labor as a rational, goal-directed activity divided into instrumental action governed by technical rules, and rational choice organized according to strategies based on analytical knowledge. Conversely, he understands interaction—which Marx neglected—as communicative activity and social interaction realized through symbols and rules that define what one party expects from the behavior of another.

The starting point of Habermas's thought regarding the dominance of technology is the search for a rational solution to the technology that has dominated the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). He proceeds from the reality that advanced capitalist societies, grounded in technology, derive their legitimacy from the advancement of technical rationality—a rationality that has breached all boundaries of geography, nations, religions, beliefs, and ideologies, asserting control over all levels of human existence. In his book *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas inquires: "Why do the sciences ...modern sciences, in their service to technological progress, function to encourage capitalist growth and rational administration rather than promoting self-understanding and the understanding of the world of citizens communicating among themselves? Why, then, are the explosive contents of cultural modernity weakening?" (27)

This is precisely what prompted Habermas to diagnose the transformations wrought by Western modernity across the domains of cultural, moral, and aesthetic values. He did so by critiquing the foundational reason of modernity and the trajectory of rationalization, critiquing science as a index of rationalistic advancement, and tracing the implications of rationalization based on the hypothesis that a close relationship exists between rationalization and the system of knowledge. While the critique of the trajectory of rationalization is intertwined with the critique of reason, a radical critique of reason does not imply, for Habermas, a call to abandon it; reason—which constitutes "the fundamental subject matter of philosophy" (28)—is simultaneously the tool of critique and its object.

If the task of philosophy is to critique reason, it must not degenerate into systematic thought (*pensée systématique*). Instead, it should direct its focus toward critiquing the various forms of the rationalization of knowledge and norms, and toward establishing a critical, positive theory of

rationalization: "What applies to a complex cognitive rational structure such as contemporary science also concerns other forms of objective thought and other manifestations of rationalization—whether cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, or aesthetic-practical rationalization." (29) This implies a critical philosophical openness in modern times toward questions pertaining to truth (science), justice (politics), and taste (aesthetics). (30) The stake of this philosophical openness is the construction of a meaning-producing rationality—a stake achievable only through philosophy understood as a social theory that departs from the problem of rationalization to diagnose the crisis of political practice, the economic system, and social integration.

There is, therefore, a close connection between sociology and the problem of rationalization; any discourse on rationalization is intertwined with sociology as a discipline concerned with the crisis of social integration and capable of helping to clarify the effects of rationalization. Consequently, asserting rationalization requires examining the forms of rationalizing thought, economic, social, or political transformations, morality, as well as shifts at the level of culture and taste.

The theory of rationalization and the theory of society are intimately linked; hence, Habermas sought to reconstruct the problem of rationalization posed by Max Weber (31) toward building the theory of communicative action. He had been preoccupied with the theory of rationalization since his book *Technology and Science as "Ideology"*, proceeding from the premise that Weber was unable to provide a convincing theoretical framework for the process and trajectory of rationalization in modern society. This justifies Habermas's resumption of the concept through his thesis concerning the dual function of scientific-technical progress as a productive force. (32)

Habermas's critique of rationalization was established on the distinction between work and interaction, viewing work as instrumental activity, rational choice, or a coordination between both, (33) alongside distinguishing between teleological/rational activity determined in relation to a goal, strategic activity that considers alternatives and modes of behavior, and communicative activity concerned with interaction through symbols.

While rationalization, in Horkheimer's assessment, is linked to a purpose-less teleology of instrumental rationality or an irrational movement of reason; and in Adorno's view, expresses the end of the individual or the organic interlock between technology and domination; and in Heidegger's view, represents an extension of metaphysics and an expression of the will to total control over beings (*Seiendes*)—rationalization in Weber's view, as evaluated by Habermas, is tied to modernity and domains of validity (*Geltungsbereiche*). (34) That is, it pertains to: the domain of objective facts, the domain of legal norms and legitimacy, and the domain of values and symbolic meaning. Thus, the foundations of Weber's rationalization system—which unique to rational modernity—lie in the differentiation between the objective world, the realm of legitimacy, and the

realm of meaning: the objective world, linked to the mode of rationalization associated with the model of modern science, is concerned with the system of measurable facts and governs the subject-object relationship; the realm of legitimacy, tied to the mode of rationalization associated with modern ethics, is driven by interests rather than determined by facts, governing the domain of legislative norms regarding rights recognized by subjects; and finally, the realm of the symbolic realm/realm of meaning, which corresponds to a form of rationality viewed from the standpoint of aesthetics—that is, what we feel and communicate through language. It is associated with emotions and governs the relationship between experience and language.

Habermas notes that Weber understands modern science as the capacity to rationalize society and provide the possibilities for theoretical and practical control of reality within the process of rationalization: "The concept of teleological/rational activity determined in relation to a goal is the key to the complex concept of rationalization, viewed first and foremost through its practical aspects." (35) Furthermore, Habermas asserts in his book *The Theory of Communicative Action*: "It is possible to reconstruct Weber's project in its entirety by following the trajectory of his theory of rationalization." (36) Rationalization does not merely imply the subordination of rational activity to a goal, nor does it mean that the transformation of domains of communicative activity into subsystems of goal-oriented rational activity occurs solely in relation to an end; what is fundamental is the potential for rationalization inherent in the validity basis of discourse within the speech act. This implies that rationalization can become a condition for communicative action, enabling the analysis of systems of practice across their diversity and extent—not merely through the lens of the cognitive-instrumental dimension, but by integrating practical, moral, aesthetic, and expressional dimensions.

To grasp the various transformations wrought by Western modernity in the spheres of cultural, moral, and artistic values, Habermas sought to trace the different meanings of rationalization, proceeding from the hypothesis that a close relationship exists between rationalization and the system of knowledge: "For rationalization is concerned less with knowledge and the production of knowledges than with the way in which subjects capable of speech and action apply this knowledge." (37)

The application of knowledge according to specific ends and objectives within scientific practices privileges the concept of instrumental rationalization. Conversely, the communicative application of knowledge within the domain of speech acts grants rationalization a positive dimension centered on achieving consensus and communication: "The concept of communicative rationalization contains implications that ultimately refer to the central experience of this peaceful force of argumentative discourse, which fosters agreement and generates consensus." (38)

This positive dimension resides in the rationalization of argumentative discourse, which secures the unity of the objective world and intersubjectivity. Rationalization is thus defined as the speaker's response to the necessary conditions for achieving the speech goal—namely, the act of agreement and consensus. As an application of knowledge, rationalization can be oriented either toward instrumental determination or toward communicative consensus. This necessitates distinguishing, first: between instrumental rationalization in the sense of an agent's intervention in the world efficiently, and communicative rationalization in the sense of intersubjectivity and consensus aiming to achieve communicative action. Second, distinguishing between: the rational actor who follows an existing standard and can justify their action to a critic based on legitimate behavioral expectations; the rational actor in the sense of individuals capable of speech and action; and the rational actor who truthfully expresses an emotion, desire, affective state, or admission of action. (39)

Rationalization, therefore, is linked to various claims to validity (*Geltungsansprüche*), which in turn establish diverse relationships with real-world entities and standards to create varied patterns of communication: "The rationalization inherent in daily communicative practice refers to the practice of argumentation as a reference frame that aids, when necessary, in pursuing communicative action by other means." (40)

5-Rationalization of the Moral-Practical Sphere:

In the moral realm, a person is termed rational if they: "interpret the nature of their needs in light of existing and culturally prevailing values; however, they become even more so if they adopt a reflective stance toward the very normative values that interpret those needs." (41) Moral rationalization manifests through the mutual recognition among subjects of cultural values possessing universal dimensions. This requires distinguishing, following Habermas, between different levels of subject rationalization: the rationalization of a subject acting intelligently and teleologically with respect to a goal; the rationalization of a morally open subject capable of operating practically; and finally, the rationalization of a subject acting with a specific sensitivity and capable of aesthetic evaluation.

Habermas addresses rationalization as a mental procedure determined in relation to language, cognitive-instrumental contexts, and various forms of symbolic transformations. He attributes special significance to language in formulating rationalization regarding discourse, truth, and the process of argumentation, without overlooking the social and cultural dimensions of the political-ethical foundation of communicative rationality.

6-The Political Foundation:

In the first part of his book *Theory and Practice* (42), Habermas raises the problem of distinguishing between the classical and modern understandings of politics. He points out that the Aristotelian tradition considered politics a branch of practical philosophy and emphasized its interconnection with moral ends—meaning that politics is what enables free citizens to achieve the supreme good within the sphere of the polis (city-state). (43) However, the transformations that occurred at the level of the structure of scientific and philosophical knowledge at the end of the eighteenth century led to a shift in the meaning of politics, which became interconnected with the social sciences and philosophies of right.

Habermas stresses that the rupture with the Aristotelian tradition manifested in the transformation of politics into a science (political science) modeled after modern empirical science. In his assessment, this rupture began with Hobbes when he addressed issues concerning substance, form, and governing authority in the mid-seventeenth century, thereby founding politics as social philosophy and effecting a revolution in political thought.

In this context, Habermas revisits Chapter 29 of *Leviathan*, where Hobbes asserts that humanity, distinguished by reason, is the essence of consensus and, as such, is the creator and legislator of its political order. Hobbes thus drew the dividing line between the classical and modern understandings of politics, establishing new foundations for political modernity based on three pillars: (44)

1. A scientifically grounded social philosophy whose goal is to define the conditions under which a civil and political order is deemed acceptable and legitimate.
2. The creation of technical means (technical mechanisms, forms of knowledge, calculation, practical intelligence, organization of production, and rules regulating relationships and arranging the public sphere) that enable the organization of civil society and the establishment of the political entity.
3. The education of individuals and the cultivation of their civic behavior in accordance with their material essence, achieving harmony between the realm of human behavior and the system of natural things. Consequently, politics is liberated from ethics and transformed into a pedagogy aimed at educating the individual in civility and enabling them to live securely within an organized, benevolent, and just consensus.

This framework allows politics to be defined, from this Hobbesian perspective, as social philosophy or as intimately linked to social philosophy: "Politics transformed into a philosophy that studies social events... and for this reason, we consider politics today to be a branch of the social sciences..." (45)

7-Ethical Foundation:

Discussing an ethical foundation for communicative action is inseparable from this social understanding of politics—a context within which Habermas sought to ground communicative reason in discourse ethics (Diskursethik). With Habermas, we encounter an ethics laden with ambiguous semantic meanings resulting from the cognitive accumulations and structural complexities experienced by contemporary societies, which reject every ethics in the name of ethics itself. The domain of ethics is defined as the theoretical effort exerted to articulate the principles regulating our relationship with others, while morality retains its primary historical task: putting these principles into application and practice.

However, ethics has fractured into various "ethics" due to the rifts that have struck the structure of contemporary society. In addition to ethics' engagement with contemporary social upheavals—whether concerning the individual or society—there is a crucial issue for Habermas: the hegemony of scientism over contemporary life, which has sparked intense debate over the dangers of science, the trajectory of rationalization, and the ramifications of technological progress on nature, the environment, and human beings themselves. In the face of these perils, the problem arises: Is it possible to establish a rational ethics in an era of scientific hegemony? Any response to this must reflect upon the relationship between ethics and science—or, in other words, the ethical consequences of technological progress. This generates the following paradox: on one hand, the dominance of the scientific model over most sectors of knowledge and practice, particularly in advanced societies, has spawned a process of rationalization that governs all facets of life; on the other hand, taking natural and mathematical science as the sole benchmark for measuring progress and rationalization has led to the hardening of scientism, causing it to lapse into irrationality and transform into a new religion.

Through his lectures (2001) (46) in France on the occasion of celebrating his book *Truth and Justification* (Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung), Habermas proposes a new approach to understanding the foundations of reason and the human being in general. This approach accounts for an intersubjective rationalization that maintains its connection to the subject, building an ethics that aims to elucidate the conditions of intersubjective understanding. It also demonstrates the form of rational grounding for various moral norms that help answer the question: What does it mean for a human being to be a moral entity? His wager is to bring reason into the public sphere, making it an essential pillar of political, social, and communicative life. By affirming the dialectical relationship between the concept of discourse ethics (Diskursethik) and the theory of communication within the framework of rationalization, Habermas's wager presupposes a conception of the human being as an ethical, communicative entity. This premise stems from the understanding that communication serves as a defining sign of the contemporary era. Insofar as communication is an interactive,

participatory process grounded in the act of conveying meaning and engaging in dialogue, this interactive nature inherently generates a specific ethic of communication. The authentic meaning of ethics, as articulated by Habermas, remains intrinsically linked to communication and the rationalization of intersubjective communicative action—a rationalization intertwined with philosophy, sociology, ethics, and politics.

However, Habermas's wager encounters significant obstacles within the current landscape, arising from the trajectory of rationalization in Western secular societies. These secular societies have experienced tension between a religious mindset that governs behavior on the basis of faith and the forms of scientific rationalization that dominate contemporary Western societies on the basis of knowledge. (47) From within this historical and civilizational conflictual structure, Habermas re-examines the reality of the Western project of Modernity—built upon the trajectory of rationalization—in light of today's intense resurgence of the sacred in the public sphere, the methods of religious penetration into the political realm and public affairs, the heightened sectarian clashes fueled by the return of religious fundamentalisms, and a globalized terrorism and cosmic dread that threaten humanity. (48) This has prompted Habermas to investigate the nature of the religious return to the public sphere and the underlying causes behind the spread of sacred violence in post-secular societies—namely, contemporary neoliberal societies.

Habermas's reflection on the political foundations of the democratic constitutional state poses a problematic equation operating on two main levels: first, skepticism regarding the capacity of the democratic constitutional state to renew its normative conditions of existence relying solely on its internal resources; second, the conviction that this state requires traditional worldviews or religious perspectives—which are, in any case, inherited collective moral views. Regarding post-secular societies, the question arises: What rational views and normative aspirations can the state offer its citizens, whether they are religious believers or non-believers? (49)

Furthermore, Habermas emphasizes that secularization initially assumed a legal meaning, represented by the coercive transfer of property and wealth from the Church to the secular state, before later acquiring a political meaning—namely, the separation of religion from the state and the decoupling of the sacred from the profane. (50) Through this process, religious modes of thought and forms of life were replaced by appropriate, rational alternatives.

According to Habermas, this traditional picture no longer corresponds to a post-secular society that accommodates the continued existence of religious communities within an environment that continuously secularizes itself and rationalizes daily life. From the perspective of the secular liberal state, religious communities can only be considered rational if they voluntarily refrain from imposing their dogmatic truths through violence, abstain from exerting pressure on the moral conscience of

believers, and cease manipulating minds or using human beings for suicidal and terrorist attacks. This liberated stance on the part of believers requires, according to Habermas, a series of principles: (51)

1. Religious consciousness must transcend rationalized cognitive disparities by remaining open to other religions and sects.
2. Acceptance of the authority of science and the process of rationalization, which exclusively maintains the social monopoly over knowledge of the world.
3. Openness to the priorities of the constitutional rule of law grounded in secular ethics.

This liberated posture requires common sense to break with illusions and seek enlightenment through science. However, rationalization must not undermine the frameworks of our everyday knowledge, which intersect with our self-understanding as agents capable of speech and action. Indeed, whenever we understand something new about the world and about ourselves as evolving entities within it, the very content of our self-understanding changes. (52)

Posing this line of thought regarding science, rationalization, and politics in Habermas's work—along with its connection to reflecting on the Western secular question within post-secular societies, both from within and outside their civilizational structure—opens up a new horizon from diverse perspectives. This new horizon enables a re-evaluation of the relationship between science, religion, and philosophy, transcending fanaticism, dogmatism, and all forms of obscurantist thought toward a humanistic, emancipatory future.

8-Conclusion:

In conclusion, Jürgen Habermas's philosophical project does not merely offer a critical review of earlier theories of modernity and rationality; rather, it represents a radical reconstruction of the very concept of "reason." By executing a decisive shift from the philosophy of the subject—historically tied to instrumental control and objectification—to "communicative rationality," Habermas provides a robust conceptual framework capable of addressing the crises of late modernity, hyper-secularization, and technocratic dominance.

The significance of the Habermasian perspective within post-secular societies lies in its ability to chart an interactive horizon that transcends the traditional dichotomy between reason and religion, as well as between technology and human agency. Rather than marginalizing religious discourse or passively submitting to strict technological determinism, Habermas grounds a discourse ethics (Diskursethik) designed to safeguard human dignity, protect the public sphere, and foster a just, democratic society anchored in uncoerced mutual understanding. Ultimately, Habermasian thought

remains an open, emancipatory framework—one that invites contemporary society across diverse cultural contexts to re-evaluate modernity not as a finished dogma, but as an "unfinished project."

List of Footnotes:

1. Horkheimer, M., *La théorie critique hier et aujourd'hui*, in *Théorie et critique (essais)*, translated from German by the translation group of the Collège de Philosophie, Payot, Paris, 1978, p. 67.
2. Habermas, J., *Théorie de l'agir communicationnel*, Paris, Ed. Fayard, 1987, p. 10: "C'est le rapport à une critique radicale de la raison pour laquelle Hegel et Nietzsche constituent les pivots. Sous l'influence de Foucault et de Derrida cette discussion se poursuit aujourd'hui surtout en France."
3. Habermas posed this question in multiple instances: in his book *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, where he opened his essays with the provocative question "What is the use of philosophy?"; in his book *Reconstruction of Historical Materialism (After Marx)*: "Is philosophy merely false consciousness or is it a productive activity?"; in his book *Communication and the Evolution of Society (Ethics and Communication)*, which began with an essay titled "Redefining Philosophy"; and in *Postmetaphysical Thinking*: "To what extent do we acknowledge the modernity of 20th-century philosophy?"
4. Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W., *La dialectique de la raison*, Gallimard, Paris, 1974, Preface: "Il s'agit pour nous d'une critique de la philosophie qui, en tant que telle, ne veut pas sacrifier la philosophie," p. 10.
5. Habermas, J., *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* [Arabic translation by Dr. Fatima Al-Jiyoushi: *Al-Qawl Al-Falsafi lil-Hadatha*, Damascus, Syria, 1999], pp. 518–519.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 522.
7. Heidegger, M., *Technology – Truth – Being* [Arabic translation by Mohammed Sabila & Abdelhadi Miftah: *Al-Tiqniyya – Al-Haqiqa – Al-Wujud*, Arab Cultural Center, 1st ed., 1995], p. 137.
8. Habermas, J., *Après Marx*, translated from German by Jean-René Ladmiral and Marc B. de Launay, Fayard, Paris, 1985, pp. 297–302.
9. Habermas, J., *Theory and Practice (Théorie et pratique)*, 1963.
10. Habermas, J., *Knowledge and Human Interests (Connaissance et intérêt)*, Fayard, Paris, 1968.
11. Habermas, J., *Profils philosophiques et politiques*, translated by F. Dastur, J.-R. Ladmiral, and M. de Launay, Gallimard, Paris, 1974, p. 48.
12. Habermas, J., *Technology and Science as "Ideology"* [Arabic translation: *Al-Tiqniyya wa al-'Ilm ka-Idiyuljiyya*, op. cit., pp. 175].

13. Habermas, J., Knowledge and Human Interests (Connaissance et intérêt), Fayard, Paris, 1968.
14. Habermas, J., Technology and Science as "Ideology" [Arabic translation by Dr. Elias Hajjaj: Al-Tiqniyya wa al-'Ilm ka-Idiyulujjiyya, "Scientized Politics and Public Opinion," Ministry of Culture, Damascus, 1999], p. 137.
15. Ibid., p. 137.
16. Ibid., p. 1.
17. Habermas, J., Technology and Science as "Ideology" [Arabic translation by Dr. Elias Hajjaj: Al-Tiqniyya wa al-'Ilm ka-Idiyulujjiyya, op. cit.], p. 141.
18. Ibid., p. 142.
19. Ibid., p. 143.
20. Ibid.
21. Habermas, J., Technology and Science as "Ideology" [Arabic translation by Dr. Elias Hajjaj: Al-Tiqniyya wa al-'Ilm ka-Idiyulujjiyya, op. cit.], p. 151.
22. Nietzsche warned against excessive praise of modern values and the myth of technological progress, stating: "Beware of this technological progress that has no end other than itself; beware of its infernal movement that stops at no limit. In the future, it will generate docile, enslaved individuals living like machines. Beware of the coming era of nihilism that will inevitably arrive." See Chroud, I., Nietzsche and the Crisis of Modernity, Al-Munazzama Newspaper, Issue 575, April 7, 1999.
23. Heidegger, M., Technology – Truth – Being [Arabic translation by Mohammed Sabila & Abdelhadi Miftah: Al-Tiqniyya – Al-Haqiqa – Al-Wujud, Arab Cultural Center, 1st ed., 1995], p. 176.
24. Dreyfus, H., & Rabinow, P., Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics [Arabic translation by George Abi Saleh, reviewed with commentary by Muta' Safadi: Michel Foucault: Maseera Falsafiyya, Centre for National Development, n.d.], p. 302.
25. Marx, K., & Engels, F., Lettres sur les sciences de la nature, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1973, p. 124.
26. Marx, K., Œuvres: Le Capital, Vol. I, Paris, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1965, p. 998.
27. Habermas, J., Théorie de l'agir communicationnel, Paris, Ed. Fayard, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 361. (See note regarding Fathi Meskini's Arabic translation, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2020).
28. Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 17.
29. Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 17.
30. Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 438.

31. Ferry, J.-M., "Max Weber ou Jürgen Habermas: Administration rationnelle ou politique raisonnable?", *Raison présente*, No. 63, 3rd Quarter, 1982, pp. 57–75.
32. Habermas, J., La technique et la science comme "idéologie", op. cit., pp. 19–20.
33. Habermas, J., La technique et la science comme "idéologie", op. cit., p. 19.
34. Habermas, J., *Théorie de l'agir communicationnel*, Paris, Ed. Fayard, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 149.
35. Ibid., pp. 183–189.
36. Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 159.
37. Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 24.
38. Ibid.
39. Habermas, J., *Théorie de l'agir communicationnel*, Paris, Ed. Fayard, 1987, Vol. 1, pp. 24–30.
40. Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 32.
41. Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 36.
42. Habermas, J., *Théorie et pratique*, Tome 1, Preface and translation by Gérard Raulet, Payot, Paris, 1975.
43. Ibid., p. 71: "C'est la politeia qui permet au citoyen de vivre selon le Bien."
44. Habermas, J., *Théorie et pratique*, Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 73.
45. Ibid., pp. 71–73.
46. In this context, Karl-Otto Apel emphasizes, in his dialogue with Habermas, the necessary elements for establishing a genuine ethics of discussion (Diskursethik): a specific ethics of the good life that evokes Aristotle; the establishment of a substantial ethics (éthique substantielle); the ethical consideration of utilitarianism (utilitarisme) in relation to the economy of the good life, rendering ethics—with all its normative and evaluative inclinations—open to economics and calculation; and a cautious ethical recourse to artificial moral affects (such as empathy, love, and generosity).
47. Habermas, J., *The Future of Human Nature (Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur)*, Arabic translation by Dr. George Katoura, revised by Antoine El-Hashem, Eastern Library (Al-Maktaba Al-Sharqiyya), 1st ed., 2006, p. 123.
48. Habermas, J., & Ratzinger, J., *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion (Dialektik der Säkularisierung: Über Vernunft und Religion)*, Arabic translation and introduction by Hamid Lecheheb, Jadawel for Publishing and Distribution, 1st ed., 2013.
49. Ibid., p. 4.
50. Habermas, J., *The Future of Human Nature (Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur)*, Arabic translation by Dr. George Katoura, revised by Antoine El-Hashem, Eastern Library (Al-Maktaba Al-Sharqiyya), 1st ed., 2006, p. 126.
51. Ibid., pp. 126–127.

52. Ibid., p. 1.