CHAPTER IV

Habermas’s Communicative Rationality: A Critique of Enlightenment project of Kant
In the present chapter a critical comparison and contrast of the issues of enlightenment rationality of Immanuel Kant along with the communicative action of Jürgen Habermas shall be discussed. In the course of this chapter, I would attempt to not only bring out the similarities and distinctions between Kant and Habermas but also show that Kant’s critical philosophy has influenced Habermas philosophy and the former has got sublated into the latter’s development of philosophy. Thus, it has helped in the growth of philosophical heritages from German idealism of Kant to the critical theory of Habermas.

A point worth mentioning is that Habermas rarely criticized Kant’s philosophy directly; whether it was done consciously to avoid the pitfalls of Kantian philosophy or done unknowingly is a matter of conjecture. The present chapter proposes to examine those issues which were discussed by Kant, but criticized by Habermas in various contexts.

It is interesting to explore the relationships between Habermas’s invocation of German experience and Kantian notions of reason. The
present chapter would examine the agreements and unresolved complexities of Immanuel Kant's philosophy vis-à-vis Habermas's writings. Habermas, like Kant, want comprehensiveness in his account of reason. The implication of this demand of comprehensiveness constitutes the matter of interest of this chapter.

Habermas's official position on Kant is fairly straight forward and in keeping with the systematic structure of the theory of communicative action. According to Habermas, Kant provides the original moment of modernity in self critique, but fatefuly chooses to interpret "reasons from a 'subject centered' rather than 'inter-subjective' or 'communicative' perspective". Habermas acknowledges the contribution of Kant's critical philosophy to the project of modernity, as significant but Kant's misleading emphasis on the principle of subjectivity in his critique of reason forces him unwittingly to affirm many of the negative qualities of modernity.

Habermas’s Critique of the Kantian Vision of Modernity

For Habermas, the critique of modernity points to the deep problems associated with Kantian vision of reason. He sees the reason as “tyrannical and totalizing quality of reason alienated from concrete social practices.”\(^2\) The theory of communicative action recognizes and rectifies the philosophy of ‘subjective reason’ by replacing it with a reason embedded in language and the shared practices of communicative actors. In this way, Habermas claims to be initiating a new interpretation of the philosophical discourse of the enlightenment project. He promises, “a new orientation for the critique of instrumental reason.”\(^3\)

The manner in which Habermas distinguishes himself from Kant, on much of his ‘new orientation’ is not clearly visible in his work. Infact, it is notable that Habermas has not given much importance to Kant, in comparison to other thinker like Hegel, Mead, Freud etc. He believed that Hegel is the first philosopher to develop a clear concept of modernity. In regard to, Kant’s views on reason,

\(^2\) Ibid, p. 315.

\(^3\) Ibid, p. 312.
subjectivity and communication, he pointed out that Kant thought ‘Critique of Pure Reason’ would bring a new orientation to the world of philosophy and the world of politics. And his Copernican revolution’ was in fact a change in point of view one that would provide the “universal voice of reason a secure foundation by inaugurating a lasting and peaceful reign of reason over (the) understanding and the senses.” Habermas argues that the new orientation was called for in light of the antinominal conflict that pitted reason against itself, fragmenting the rational public, and eliminating the possibility of a comprehensive reason and a coherent discourse.

Before the critical revolution, Kant argues, the warring metaphysical schools were unable to share knowledge among them, simply because reason itself lacked a common ground. Further he states, there could neither be any reconciliation of reason, nor any consensus, until reason itself was straightened out. The issues of communication and comprehensiveness were at the heart of convergence between Kant and Habermas.

Habermas's Critique of Enlightenment Project

Habermas criticized Kantian enlightenment project which was emancipated by Kant in December 1783, in his seminal work, “Answer to the Question What is the Enlightenment?” Kant replies “Enlightenment is coming out of the man from his self-imposed immaturity...... Sapere aude; Think boldly, take courage, use your own understanding to; This is therefore motto of the enlightenment.”

The motto of enlightenment as perceived by Immanuel Kant was the crux of the whole enlightenment project. Habermas also had similar view about the enlightenment project as he states, “the concept of enlightenment functions as a bridge between the idea of the scientific progress and the conviction that the science also serves the model perfection of human beings. In the battle against the traditional powers of church and state, enlightenment requires the courage to make use of one’s own reason that is autonomy or maturity (Mundigkint). Moreover, the sublime passion of enlightenment can derive support from the experience that moral-practical prejudices

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5 Ibid.
have in fact been shaken by the critical forces of the sciences."\(^6\) We can observe that similar terms like maturity, courage have been used by Habermas (following the Kantian legacy).

Habermas further criticizes this type of faith in science and the enlightenment project on the whole. Kant says if enlightenment can rely upon human sciences, then its progress in knowledge is secured. This conception is representative of eighteenth century philosophy of history, inspired by the French Revolution. And this blind faith in science creates chasm in the type of thinking which is characteristic of philosophy of history of the eighteenth century (Kant’s). According to Habermas, there are some issues which became problematic and gave impetus to the transformation of the modern age. First presupposition was the linear conception of progress. He states “I am thinking first of the presuppositions that ...... a linear conception of progress on the scientific progress represented by the modern natural sciences.”\(^7\) The second presupposition, according to Habermas was the “universalistic claim of rationality”\(^8\), which is flawed. He states, the of a universal reason was placed in question, first by the historical school and later by cultural anthropology, and it is still a controversial theme today, as

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\(^6\) Ibid. p. 147  
\(^7\) Jürgen Habermas (1984), p. 148  
\(^8\) Ibid.
the rationality debate dealt within the introduction demonstrates. Third presupposition of enlightenment project, which has been criticized by Habermas, was ‘unity of theoretical and practical reason. While criticizing major enlightenment philosophers like Condorcet, Kant and Hegel, he states, “he (Condorcet) is thereby operating with a precritical concept of nature, which reappears in a reflective way in Kant’s writing on history; they both presuppose the unity of theoretical and practical reason …… His theme was first worked through in philosophy from Kant to Hegel”9. Fourth presupposition is more important for the enlightenment project on which the ‘conception of history’ has been developed. According to Habermas, the problem with enlightenment philosophers was that they did not base the progress of civilization on the progress of human mind but counted on empirical efficacy. Instead, they relied on “an automatic efficacy of mind”.10 Habermas frequently refuted the criticism that he delved in philosophy of history. He supports this claim by arguing that in his account of human evolution he does not assert a linear progress towards the fulfillment of a ‘kingdom of ends;’ nor does he conflate theoretical and practical reason, nor does he fall into Eurocentric universalism. Moreover, Habermas makes a firm distinction between the logic and the dynamics of development at both individual and

9 Ibid, p. 150
10 Ibid, p. 151
social levels. This social level enables him both to differentiate the evolutionary levels of individuals from those of the social structure of which they are part, and to separate the logic of evolution from the empirical directions of history.

Habermas criticised enlightenment project as a whole, but one can quantify influence of the basic ideas of enlightenment on him, as he expounds his theory of communicative action. In this context, he states, "Automatism appears in two aspects which stand in an inverse relation to one another...... Thus from the practical perspective, rationalization appears as a communicative practice, carried on with will and consciousness; from the theoretical perspective, it appears as a cognitive process flowing along in a like way."\[11\]

Thus, Habermas criticised enlightenment project by raising concerns about its validity. On the one hand, he accepted Kant’s critical philosophy that concept without percepts are empty and percepts without concepts are blind, and on other hand, Habermas accepted that genuine knowledge is possible with the help of experience and reason. To drive home the point he argues, "Different categories of knowledge can be coordinated with these aspects of..."

\[11\] Ibid.
rationality of action. Both empirical and analytical knowledge enter into the orientations of purposive rational action via technologies and strategies; this knowledge can in principle take the prices form of scientifically corroborated knowledge.”

Habermas’s Critique of Postmodernity:

When Habermas examines various post modernists especially, in the philosophical Discourse of Modernity, his rhetorical mode becomes quite distinctive. Post modernists, according to Habermas have only constructed interesting houses of cards on obvious unarguably untenable foundations. Habermas feels compelled to attack the various post modernists by re-asserting elementary principles of formal logic. In this context Habermas states, “These discourses can and want no account of their own position..... These ‘theories’.... raise validity claims only to renounce them.... There always emerges a symbiosis of incapability, an amalgam that resists “normal” scientific analysis of its care.”

In other words, the post-modernists deny that “we” that is universal is at the basis of any objective moral discourse.

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12 Ibid, p. 174
Inter-subjectivity does not appear to cause any conflict with post modernity. Habermas takes an identical position Kant albeit following different approaches. Kant, in his theory of genius, tried not to refute skepticism but rather to maintain its appeal as a necessary part of the possibility of making sense. Kant divided reason into three realms, namely, the realm of science in *Critique of Pure Reason*, realm of morality in *Critique of Practical Reason* and the realm of aesthetics and sublime in *Critique of Judgment*. In the same manner, Habermas defended ultimate value of modernization in which science, morality and art are separated into autonomous spheres, each with its own internal logic. This division could be clearly seen in his recent work, "Modernity vs. Post Modernity". He opines, "There appear the structures of cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive relationally, each of these under the control of specialists who seem more adept at being logical in these particular ways than other people are. As a result, the distance has grown between the culture of the experts and that of the larger public"\(^{14}\). In short,

Habermas's attempt to criticize modernity fell flat because of his fundamental belief in modernity.

**Problem of Pure Knowledge: Kant and Habermas**

Habermas wants to rescue the 'comprehensive rationality of reason that has not yet shrunk to a set of methodological principles'. Accordingly, the task of *Knowledge and Human Interests* is to outline, and to justify, a more comprehensive epistemology (with tougher standards) that can rehabilitate the claims of reason in human affairs. Similar to the Kantian metaphor, he must restore the authority of the 'judge'. This, Habermas does by means of critical reconstruction of Kant writings and of many other philosophers. All these criticisms are aimed at identifying the errors which would cumulatively lead to the bankruptcy of reason in modern philosophy and science. Habermas begins this debate by challenging the positivistic view of epistemology, which is the source of these epistemological assumptions- a position that is orthodox yet, has influenced most of the theories of science.

Habermas is of the view that knowledge is always reducible to the totality of discovered properties of the object world. The other half is the subject - the actor, the creator, the knower, the inventor, the scientist is the worst pollutant in his own purely objective world or at best, a 'ghost in the machine' of science and something that must be
methodologically controlled and in so far as possible, eliminated. In a nutshell, these assumptions of the positivist science have triggered acrimonious debates over the nature and theory of science in 1970s. Habermas deals with these problems more or less in same manner as Kant.

Like Kant, Habermas accepts that knowledge is necessarily defined both by the object of experience and by *a priori* categories and concepts that the knowing subject brings to every act of thought and perception. Even ‘space’ and ‘time’, the basic notions of such rigorous sciences such as physics, are not supplied by experience alone. Indeed, as Kant argued in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, they make no sense without concepts that are given, *a priori* independent of all experiences. As he states, “sensibility, takes place when an object affects our senses. And it is sensibility that gives rise to intuition to which all thought as a means is directed.”

Kant reconciles with rationalism and empiricism, in order to develop his critical philosophy. He explains this by saying that, though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow

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that, all of them arise from experiences. He gives equal footing to experience and concepts as well. In this regard, he states "intuitions are yielded by sensibility which can be regarded as sensible intuitions and there must be a form in which they can be posited and ordered."\(^{16}\)

Habermas accepts this fact that Kant was the first philosopher who reconciled the claims between rationalism and empiricism, but at the same time Habermas criticizes Kant on the basis that, "the methodological solipsism it entailed, marked the approach to Kant at the end of the eighteenth century no less that of his empiricist and rationalist predecessors in the two preceding centuries, this monological approach preordained certain ways of posing basic problems of thought and action....."\(^{17}\) Habermas further adds, while criticizing Kant’s faith in reason, he criticizes the Cartesian model, he opines "But the history of ideas is full of surprises; and twentieth

\(^{16}\) Ibid, p. 189.

century philosophy bears witness to the continued power of the Cartesian model.”

Kant was of the view that human cognition is *synthetic a priori*, and one gets this kind of knowledge in realm of physics and geometry. As this kind of knowledge is possible through the transcendental unity of apperception which provides the highest unity to the sensible intuition through the categories of understanding, Habermas accepts the fact that, ‘it becomes a paradigm of knowledge in general’ and further added that it follows a method that raises the knowledge of nature above the scholastic debates of philosophers and reduces all previous philosophy to the status of mere opinion/

Habermas begins *knowledge and Human Interests*, with intention to ‘reconstruct’ all the essential philosophical discussions of modern period, aimed at deciding on the single most important question of ‘how reliable knowledge is possible?’ thus, it is from this purpose that Habermas initiates into comprehensive study of epistemology where, he elucidates systematic history of ideas with a practical intention. An important characteristic of his world view was

18 Ibid, p. 148
the fact that it was quite foreign for anyone outside the German tradition. If one goes back to the enlightenment project, the German intellectual tradition of Immanuel Kant, which Habermas inherits, one finds that Kant introduces in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, the following image of the reason - “Reason... must approach nature in order to be taught by it: but not in the character of a pupil who agrees to everything the master likes, but as an appointed judge who compels the witness to assure questions he himself proposes.”19 Thus, Kant gives a very straightforward answer to how reliable knowledge is possible? He further argues that reliable knowledge is only possible when science assumes its proper subordinate place as one of the accomplishments of reason. *Knowledge and Human Interests* is a history of ideas with a practical intention in as so as its aim is to rescue the rationalist heritage.

Habermas is more than willing to honor the achievements of science. He defends science (like Kant did two hundred years before him) against dogmatic metaphysics and in contemporary times against the romantic views of nature and against the attacks of conservatives.

who want to oppose it with blind traditions. His purpose is to insist that science should be done better in a philosophical way with tougher epistemological standards. The focus of his criticism of modernity, and of the modern epistemology that rules over just about every branch of modern learning from natural science to the humanities— is the relationship between science and philosophy. The book *Knowledge and Human Interests* is a critique of modern positivism. It seeks to show how positivism has distorted reason for its own purpose and incorporated it fully into a limited theory and practice of science. The practical intent of his (Habermas) history of ideas is to trace the gradual establishment of positivism and thus, examine the larger concept of reason that it has sought to bury. It is therefore, not an attack on science (like Kant) but an attack rather upon mistaken self-understanding of science that reduces all knowledge to a belief in itself in the same manner as Kant. Habermas calls this attitude as ‘scientism’ and it means ‘science’s belief in itself: that is, the conviction, that “we can no longer understand science as one form of possible knowledge but rather must identify knowledge with
science." Scientism is also the basic orientation prevailing in analytic philosophy until recently in the most influential philosophy of our time as Habermas claims. The claim which he seeks to specify in this argument is, "Science can only be comprehended epistemologically, which means as one category of possible knowledge, as long as knowledge is not equated .... with scientific self-understanding of the actual business of (Scientific) research." In other words, Habermas argues for understanding knowledge rather than being equated with scientific shelf-understanding of scientific research. Thus disagreeing with Kant's view of science is pure knowledge. In effect Habermas argues for the reassertion and revalidation of norms and values in the understanding of knowledge.

A Search for Universal Values: Kant and Habermas

Kant's views on morality can be discussed in the light of his epistemology and ontology. He makes a fundamental distinction between phenomena and noumena. The sphere of epistemology is confined to the sphere of phenomenon. But the sphere of noumena

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21 Ibid.
transcends the validity of scientific knowledge. It constitutes the realm of spiritual and hence, manifests the aspects of idealism in Kant's philosophy. On this basis, Kant draws an unbridgeable gulf between epistemology and morality between the 'is' and 'ought.'

Similarly, Habermas makes distinction between ideas and interests. He is of the view that orders of life can be viewed from two sides, "On the one side, they regulate appropriation of goods that is the satisfaction of material and ideal interests; on the other side they actualize issues and values, and material needs have to be interpreted with the help of ideas."22 Empirically, ideas and interests enter into empirical relation with one another, both in the life orders of society and in the personality structures of its members.

Habermas arrives at his notion of discourse ethics to specify the nature of moral consciousness and its relation to concrete social forms. By demonstrating this, Habermas draws attention on transcendental pragmatics, the psychological theory and evolutionary theory of society. In the context of his writing on discourse ethics, we cannot trace any influence of Kant.

22 Ibid, p. 188.
For Habermas, Kant "chose a narrow concept of morality" focusing only on 'how conflicts of action can be settled on the basis of rationally motivated action?' In his essay 'Morality and Ethical Life: Does Hegel’s Critique of Kant Apply to Discourse Ethics?”, Habermas acknowledges the affinities of discourse ethics with Kant’s moral theory, but also identified three differences between them. Firstly, Habermas claims, the Kantian distinction between intelligible and empirical realms disappears in discourse ethics, which operates instead with conflict between actual discourse and its presuppositions. Secondly, Kant assumes the individual tests his or her own maxims for action, whereas discourse ethics replaces this monological approach with an inter-subjective approach. As Habermas puts, "individual tests the maxim’s of his action in the .... 'loneliness of his soul', and the concomitant assumption that all transcendentally established conciousness will agree last in Kant’s location of the effectiveness of the “moral ought” in autonomy, rather than, in as with discourse ethics, the inter subjectivity discourse." Thirdly, Kant is unable to ground the force of his ‘ought’ whereas discourse ethics

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\(^{24}\) Ibid.
derives its categorical imperative from the universal presupposition of argumentation.

A critical examination of Habermas’s writings suggests that all the above mentioned presuppositions rests on the same point, i.e., the greater plausibility of the transcendental conditions of judgement identified by formal pragmatics. As has been argued earlier, it is not clear whether Habermas’s claims of the universal presuppositions of argumentation are more plausibly grounded than Kant’s hypotheses of reason.

In both the cases, universal claims have a hypothetical status, and are incapable of being grounded with reference to purely empirical evidence. The parallels between moral theories of Habermas and Kant are not significantly undermined by the difference in their transcendental reference points. Further, the limits of morality are traced using a universalization test. Also, the formulation of the principle of morality poses problems for its actualization outside the ”kingdom of ends” or ‘a fully rationalized life world’.

**Reason and Human Interest: A comparison**

Perhaps the most glaring is the way in which Habermas reproduces Kantian logic in his critical theory, and his articulation of
the domains of reason. Like Kant, Habermas's three interests have a peculiar relation to one another and continually challenge their own demarcation.

Further, the convergences between Habermas and Kant's views on different aspects of reason (in Kant) and interests (in Habermas) are striking. Kant examines 'reason' and carefully separates the different aspects of this faculty, namely, theoretical reason, practical reason and the judgement. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, he discusses how knowledge becomes possible, what the different features that are involved in knowledge are and how far mind can know the world of things. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant explains what goodness of an action consists in and what the different duties of man are. In the *Critique of Judgment* he shows how we get the idea of the beautiful and the sublime and what their nature is and how we conceive of things as means to ends.

Similarly, Habermas begins his discussion on reason by developing a 'more comprehensive' conception of reason. This is inspired form of a critique of the positivistic self understanding of science. In this case, Habermas highlighted the central problem
associated with the inadequacy of exclusive instrumental rationality. In view of this problem, he begins to work towards three types of interests.

In knowledge and Human Interests, he elucidates three forms of interests namely, the technical, the practical and the emancipatory interest (in the same manner as Kant divided three kinds of reason) based on non-reducible, quasi transcendental, and cognitive interests respectively. According to Habermas, each of these cognitive interests in itself is rooted in a dimension of human social existence. He states, "The approach to the empirical-analytic sciences incorporates a technical cognitive interests, that of the historical hermeneutic science incorporates a practical one; and the approach of critically oriented sciences incorporates the emancipatory cognitive interest that, as we saw, was at the root of traditional theories."25

Habermas’s Theory of Communicative Action is influenced by Kant’s three types of reason – pure, practical and the judgement. His theory of communicative rationality is besieged by Frankfurt School ideological leanings. In this context he states, “Different categories of

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knowledge can be coordinated with these three aspects of the rationality of action. Both empirical and analytical knowledge enter into the orientations of purposive rational action via techniques and strategies; this knowledge can in principle take the precise form of scientifically corroborated knowledge. On the other hand, moral practical knowledge (as well as aesthetic-expressive knowledge) enters into the orientations of value rational action through competences and motives, this knowledge is rendered precise and improved at two stages of development: first within religious world-views, later within the framework of the autonomous value spheres of law, morality and Art......"^26

Therefore we can say that Harbermas’s theory of knowledge guiding interest attempts to perform similar kinds of task (which Kant’s three types of reason were performing) but in a more radical way by locating science in relation to certain anthropologically deep seated interests of human species as a whole.

The Concept of Rationality: Subjective vs. Inter-subjective Orientation of Reason

The 'subjective' orientation of reason is attributed to Kant and the 'inter subjective' position of the theory of communicative action is essential to Habermas's system. The very affirmation of modernity itself is predicted on this diction: "The critique of subjective idealism is at the same time a critique of modernity, only in this way can the latter secures its concept and assure its own stability."27 Habermas, in his interpretation of Kant, offers the most general outline of what this interpretation might look like. He argues that the principal problem with the subjective version of reason is its unwarranted reliance on the principle of 'speculative self reflection'. The principle analyzes reason devoid of its inherent social embeddedness. In this way Habermas claims that "Kant's rational agent places it (him/her) self at a distance from the world, apply reason in an abstract, disembodied and disengaged fashion. Reason here is pure, and yet it is also paradoxically distorted."28 The net effect of this is the politics of

27 Ibid, p. 201.
28 Ibid, p. 31.
exclusion, the same politics that has been the focal point of post-modern criticism of the enlightenment project. Habermas dubs reason as being "reduced to the subjective faculty of understanding and purposive activity corresponds to the image of an exclusive reason." The departure point of his theoretical work is the thesis that the intersubjective relationship to other persons possess a normative content that the philosophical tradition has not been able to acknowledge.

I. The Recognition of the 'Other': The opposing Party

The recognition of the 'other' – the opposing party – is an essential moment in Kant's vision, a first step in setting reason upon more secure foundations. Kant makes this clear in the section of the first Critique entitled the 'Discipline of Pure Reason.' He argues, "As the opposing party we must always look for, in ourselves. For speculative reason in its transcendental employment is in itself dialectical; the objections which we have to fear lie in ourselves. We must seek them out, just as we would do in the case of claims that, while old never

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29 Ibid, p. 305.
become superannuated, in order that by annulling them we established a more permanent peace. External quiescence is merely specious."\(^{30}\)

The dialectical quality of reason in fact holds its virtue and its vice. Its viciousness lies in the fact that it leads us to necessary illusions about most pressing questions. Its virtue is that it provides the tools with which we can arrive at intersubjective truth – a foundation for collective action.

All the moral, political and epistemological arguments that follow from the Copernican revolution revolve around Kant's fear of relational subjectivism. In the first *Critique* he states, "The touchstone whereby we decide whether our holding a thing to the true is conviction or mere persuasion is therefore, external, namely, the possibility of communicating it and finding it to be valid for all humans."\(^{31}\) By communicating our experience to others, we are able to assure ourselves that our claims are not the "play of my fancy"\(^{32}\) or even as the skeptic would have it, "the blind play of

\(^{30}\) Ibid. pp. 617-18.

\(^{31}\) Ibid. p. 645.

\(^{32}\) Ibid. p. 227.
representations".\textsuperscript{33} The certainty of experience, which the \textit{Critique of Pure Reason} is meant to ensure, is intimately linked to an inter-subjective application of reason. As he says, "What experiences teaches me under certain circumstances, it must always teach me and everybody; and its validity is not limited to the subject or its state at a particular time.... Therefore objective validity and necessary universality (for every body) are equivalent term...."\textsuperscript{34}

\section*{II. Exploration of Inter-subjectivity in Ethical Realm in Kant and Habermas}

The moral philosophy functions in precisely the same fashion. The threat of subjectivity is overcome by demonstrating that if there is to be something we can call morality, it cannot be private, but necessarily carries with it a universal command to all rational individuals. Habermas arrives at his notion of discourse ethics. He does feel the need to go through Kant, but he does so in a perfunctory manner.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{34} Immanuel Kant, \textit{Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be able to present itself as a Science}, trans., Peter G. Lucas, (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1953), pp. 46-47.
For Habermas, Kant chose, “a narrow concept of morality” focusing only on “how conflicts of action can be settled on the basis of rationally motivated action.” The main tool is the categorical imperative, which although has the grammatical form of an imperative, is in fact a principle of justification. Habermas finds certain problems in Kant’s philosophy. Firstly, the unbridgeable gap in the distinction Kant seems to make between the intelligible and phenomenal realms. Secondly, Kant’s supposed assumption that the “individual tests the maxims of his action in ... the loneliness of his soul,” and the concomitant assumption that all transcendentally established consciousness will agree last in Kant’s location of the effectiveness of the “moral “ought” in autonomy, rather than, in as with discourse ethics, the inter subjectivity of discourse “.

Kant’s perspective on reason is inescapably inter-subjective. The search for foundation for communication and communicative action is the most essential objective of the whole critical enterprise,

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36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
the objective that comes to light only after the experience of skepticism. The critical project stretches the vision of communication to the transcendental stone. With inter-subjective reason in mind, Kant argues that all human speech acts are to be directed towards communication in order to avoid any kind of subjective "distortions". Therefore, one can argue, that the telos of language which is the highest principle of Habermas's new orientation of reason is already central in Kant's revolutionary point of view. Inter-subjective communication is the aim of all language, and any use of it to the contrary, represents the deepest violation of our human nature. For this reason, lying, insincerity and rhetorical manipulation are supreme vices for Kant, as they restrict the freedom of speech. He argues in the "Doctrine of Virtue" in *Metaphysics of Morals*, "Communication of one's thoughts to someone through words that yet (intentionally) contain the contrary of what the speaker thinks on a subject is an end that is directly opposed to the natural purposiveness of the speaker's capacity to communicate his thoughts, and is thus, a renunciation by the speaker of his personality, and such a speaker in a mere deceptive appearance of a man, not a man himself..... Man as a moral being cannot use himself as a natural being as a mere means (a speaking machine), as if his natural being were not bound to the inner end (of
The obligation to make sense of our character as human beings – rational human beings language is predicated on a teleological commitment to be comprehensible to others, to strive for comprehensiveness. In fact we are not speaking machines, but communicative agents.

Thus, it is difficult to reconcile Kant’s actual position on reason with Habermas’s interpretation of it. But I would like to drive home the point that an endless parallel exists between Kant and Habermas’s writings. Though it is important to note, Kant’s emphasis on reason and comprehensibility is significant to understanding of Habermas’s position on “other”.

III. Inter-subjective Vision in Kant: The Politics of Comprehensibility

If look back at the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, the implication of the politics of comprehensibility become clear. Habermas in this book argues that the history of the counter enlightenment is in fact the history of romanticism.\(^{39}\) He claims that


one can make sense of radical critique of post modernism by subject centered reason of Kant and others, reason that he holds to be open to such attacks. The question of the ‘other’ which is at the heart of both Kant and Habermas is a vision of inter-subjective reason. This vision is shown clearly in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. The third *Critique* must be understood as Kant’s contribution to the discourse of a “meta critique of pure reason.” Habermas points out that, “project of a meta critique was designed to account for the problematic assumptions that Kant was forced to make in his refutation of skepticism.” The foremost of these assumption was the “fact of reason” – the fact of our comprehensibility to ourselves and to others, our character as “rational being capable of being persuaded by Kant’s argument.”

The central paradox of the *Critique of Pure Reason* rests on the fact that the systematic exhaustiveness of the critical project was a transformed point of view, one without any association to the systems of the past. Kant’s new orientation was fundamentally original and

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40 The term developed by Hamann, was designed to demonstrate that reason is necessarily embedded in concrete context of social life.


yet, completely comprehensive. But problem is that, how could one (Kant) be original and comprehensive at the same time?

The meta critique provides an insight that comprehensiveness of a system of reason cannot be predicated on comprehensiveness itself, and that a certain amount of incomprehensibility is necessary to make systematic or complete comprehension possible. The “other of reason” understood as that, which stands outside of, or is precluded by, an existing system of reason, is the ground of reason, in that in order to make sense, individuals must be oriented such a way that they can in fact understand each other. The orientation itself cannot come from within the system since the system itself is predicated on it.

IV. Inter-subjectivity in the Critique of Judgment

It is precisely these themes that Kant took up in the Critique of Judgment. The purpose of the third Critique is to demonstrate that in the contemplation of the incomprehensible we in effect, broader our perspective, and change our point of view. Aesthetic judgments, Kant argues, have the effect of taking us from our limited understanding of the world around us, opening us up to think from “the stand point of the other”. Along with ‘thinking for oneself and ‘thinking
consistently’, ‘thinking from the standpoint of other’ the essential moment of critical revolution, the new ‘enlarged’ or ‘broadened’ position of the “universal voice”, lie at the foundation of Critique of Judgment.

He states, “It seems that we usually call someone limited (of a narrow mind as opposed to a broad mind) if his talents are insufficient for a use of any magnitude (above all for intensive use). But we are not talking here of a power of cognition, but about a way of thinking (that involves) putting this power to a purposive use; and this, no matter how slight may be the range and degree of person’s natural endowments, if he overrides the private subjective conditions of judgement, into which so many others are locked, as it were, and reflects on his own judgement from a universal standpoint (which he can determine by transferring himself to the standpoint of others.)”

Kant further argues in his Anthropology that in making an aesthetic judgment we are actually judging the degree to which an incomprehensible point of view can come to make sense to us. Kant argues, “To judge an object by taste is to judge whether freedom in

the play of the imagination harmonizes or clashes with the understanding. All incomprehensible experiences start off clashing with our limited understandings, and narrow points of view. It is only after reflection, we produce new rules for understanding, potentially arriving at harmony. In this way, Kant argues that the judgment of beautiful objects is *a priori* moment in the cognition of the foreign, and depends in turn on *a priori* orientation of the mind. Judgments of beauty concerns the configuration of the cognitive faculties that make communication possible through understanding contained within reflective judgments of taste. There is a tension between the stimulus presented through something that appears incommunicable to us, and the satisfaction that comes from constructing a principle or rule that will make sense of it. The *Critique of Judgement* is a participant in the critical debate, and seeks to understand the relationship between comprehensibility and incomprehensibility that necessarily figures into any system of communication. This tension is most evident in Kant’s theory of genius which is deeply ambivalent.

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A) Kant’s Theory of Genius and Inspiration for Principle of Comprehensibility

The incomprehensibility that is necessary to broaden the mind and take the standpoint of others is, more than any thing, else, but the aesthetic work of the genius. What makes the genius unique is the principle that he or she has complete freedom of incomprehensibility in the creation of works of art. Kant argues that the genius cannot be restricted by rule or limited to the understanding. Indeed the genius is defined by originality, which, for Kant, means that the work cannot be captured within the confines of any systematic understanding.

Then the work of the genius is to transport the understanding in all of its limitation to a position where it can become more comprehensive, it can make a greater sense to many individual. It achieves this through the use of ‘aesthetic ideas.’ Kant argues, “Genius sets the power of intellectual ideas in motion and in effect makes reason think more.” What results from this aesthetic employment is the new perspective, a new vision of a new

45 Kant’s theory of genius is often given short shift in a critical system because Kant himself often disparages genius and works of art in general in favor of beauty.
comprehensible nature: *The imagination* (as a productive cognitive power) is “very mighty when it creates, as it were, another, nature of the material nature actually gives it.”\(^{47}\) In this way the genius is in fact analogues to Kant’s understanding of the lunatic who refuses to acknowledge the restriction that reason places on him. As he himself states, “Such a patient fancies that he comprehends the incomprehensible ..... There is in this type of mental disturbance not merely disorder and departure from the laws which govern reason, but also positive unreason, that is, a different rule, a totally different standpoint to which the soul is transported, so to speak. From such a perspective the soul looks at objects in another every, and.... it finds itself transported to a far away place.”\(^{48}\)

The point is that the genial creativity always transcends the system, and appears as extraordinary. The genius requires the system in order to be genius. The system exits, arguably, because of its overall limits and in turn requires those limits for its actuality.

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\(^{47}\) Ibid.

A number of important consequences follow from Kant’s understanding of genius and its relationship to the problem of the “broadening of mind” that is grounded in his critical vision of reason. Foremost of those is the fact that the incomprehensibility of the genius cannot itself be accounted for. As Kant writes in the Anthropology, “The man of genius cannot explain to himself it’s out burst or how he arrived at a skill which he never tried to learn.” The extraordinary nature of genial work places is the fact that they lie outside the horizon of understanding available to reason as it stands. This is why the genius is incomprehensible and extraordinary necessary for the creation of a system of reason. If the originality of the other, can make sense under the reason of one system, then its transformative effects, its new point of view, can not be established. For this reason, Kant argues, the genius appears as something akin to the fanatic: “originality of the imagination is called genius when it harmonizes with notions, then it is called fanaticism.” But the question that arises is whose notions must the genius harmonize? Are individuals who encounter him or her incomprehensible? This would suggest that the genius is always interpreted as a fanatic. This fundamental paradox – that the appearance of an attempt to communicate depends on one’s point of view. The reason of incomprehensibility and

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comprehensibility – is the same that confronts Habermas in his effort to make sense of extraordinary quality of the counter enlightenment. Clearly, however, there is no resolution to the paradox.

In fact, it must be said, Kant is by no means happy with the settlement of the question of genius and incomprehensibility. The problem with genius for Kant is precisely located in the fact that genius always presents a threat to the established order of reason. We cannot be certain that the genius is sincere in his or her effort to communicate, simply because we have no idea of what communication might look like from that point of view. The presence of genius, of radical incomprehensibility, is like the skeptical threat where both reject the validity of established practices and points of view. In both cases, the fear is that an aesthetic – a legitimate point of view of reason – will be supplanted by something merely private, merely subjective – a personal point of view. Kant’s response to this threat is to place the free incomprehensibility of genius under the restraint of rules of the taste understood as aesthetic tradition. Kant employs taste not as a means of liberalizing our orientation, but of restricting it. Taste, like the power of judgment in general, consists in disciplining
(or training) genius. It severely clips its wings, and makes it civilized or polished; but at the same time, it gives it guidance as to how far and over what it may spread... It introduces clarity and order into wealth of thought, and hence makes it durable, fit for approval that is both lasting and universal, and fit for being followed by others and fit for every advancing culture."\textsuperscript{51}

Kant's inherent and self-conscious conservatism is evident in his well known views on art. He argues that the creative "art (of the genius) stops at some point, because a boundary is set for it which probably has long since been reached and cannot be extended further."\textsuperscript{52} For this reason all new works of art, and new expressions of the tension between the comprehensible and the incomprehensible must be, "composed in a language both scholarly and dead; dead, so that it will not have to undergo the changes that inevitably affect during ones, whereby expression becomes flat, familiar once they enter into circulation only for a short while, scholarly, so that it will


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, p. 309.
have a grammar that is not subject to the whims of fashion, but has its own inalterable rule."\(^{53}\)

In other words, Kant tried to allow for the possibility of genius and to tame it at the same time. His effort to restrict the freedom of the genius to the confines of taste is actually an effort to eliminate the tension between comprehensibility and incomprehensibility that necessarily grounds all systems of reason. The threat of the genius like that of skeptic is a real and necessary threat since these forces us toward increasing liberality, toward increasingly broad points of view. Against the background of increasing threat posed by the genius, Kant takes a conservative view of politics.

However, it is clear that Kant's theory of beauty is a resistance to the requirements of his own theory of comprehensibility. As it has already been observed, the maintenance of the tension between the comprehensible and the incomprehensible was necessary for comprehensibility to be humanly and inter-subjectively available. Kant's views in *Critique of Judgement* are thus, useful for examiners Habermas's account of neo conservatism. Habermas, is confronted

\(^{53}\) Ibid, p. 232.
with the upholders of the possibility of incomprehensibility (for Kant, Schlegel, Herder and others); and such other post modernists. The question is what to do with them? Habermas’s analysis of these interlocutors is defective. For instance, for Habermas, Nietzsche had only romantic aesthetic nostalgia. Nietzshe takes leave of modernity in favour of a stance that abandons the possibility of building a reasoned inter-subjective consensus”\(^54\) In so far as the association of Nietzsche with post modernists appear to make political action impossible or pointless or without standards. This is a gist of the Habermasian critique.

**Finally......**

If one examines Habermas with reference to Kant carefully, one realizes the unity of teleos of their philosophy. Herbamas’s entire philosophy rests on foundation which leads to the aim of consensus through validity claims. On one hand Kant’s goal is to achieve some universal principle for entire humanity to follow. Since Kant maintains that moral laws can be derived neither from sensibility nor

from inclination, but only from reason, they can be regarded as a command to all rational beings under all circumstances, it is for this reason Kant elicits categorical imperatives as a universal principle.

The principle of categorical imperatives possesses universality and necessity. He declares these principles as the maxims of the categorical imperatives and assigns to them an unconditional obedience. As in his first maxim of the categorical imperatives, Kant declares, “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time, will that, it should become a universal law.”

Similarly, Habermas thinks that all our action should be legitimized by consensus of the participants by different validity claims they make. We can see the similarity between Kant and Habermas, when Habermas talks of consensus (in the same manner of Kant’s principle of universality) when he states, that, “to the extent that the continued existence of an action system or an order of life depends on its legitimacy, it rest in fact on consensual validity” (Einverständnessagehung). The consensual character of social action

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consists of the fact that the members of a group recognize the binding force of their norms of action and know about one another, that they feel mutually obliged to observe these norms. Another observation worth mentioning is that the doctrine, consensus of Jürgen Habermas makes a point of departure from the universal principles of Kant when he gives place to agreement, argument and disagreement in his philosophy. Kant did not relate any significance argument and consensus since he regarded humans as rational beings thus postulating an authoritative philosophy.

Habermas asserts the process of reaching to some consensus on the basis of motivation of reason, as he states, “In contrast to representation or cognition, coming to an understanding requires the rider uncoerced, because the expression is meant to be used here as a normative concept. From the perspective of the participants coming to an understanding is not an empirical event that caused de facto agreement; it is a process of mutually convincing one another in which all actions of participants are coordinated on the basis of motivation by reason”.

Therefore, Habermas accepts the role of

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agreement argument and consensus on the one hand and on the other, he gives equal importance to the motivation of reason, thus establishing a point of departure from Kant.

In conclusion I would state that the philosophy of Kant’s critique is most starkly reproduced in the contemporary critical social theory of Habermas. In pursuing the project of the critical validation of reason in theory and practice, Habermas follows Kantianism in finding itself poised between the simultaneous possibility and impossibility of reason’s legislation. In the sphere of ethical philosophy Habermas repeats Kant’s struggles to overcome the gap between real and ideal. The philosophy of Habermas stands between optimism and despair. The hope riding on the evolution of the life world and the contribution of the autonomous public sphere rest on the capacity of legality to realize morality and on the philosopher’s capacity to distinguish between the logic and dynamics of development.