

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.



Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

RELIGION, MYTH, AND RATIONALITY
SOME OF HABERMAS' VIEWS ON RELIGION

Jean Paré, I.M.C.

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Philosophy

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
for the degree of Master of Arts
at Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 1997

© Jean Paré, 1997



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-39940-0

ABSTRACT

JEAN PARE I.M.C.

RELIGION, MYTH, AND RATIONALITY:

SOME OF HABERMAS' VIEWS ON RELIGION

The topic of this thesis is Jürgen Habermas' views on religion, especially in his two volumes The Theory of Communicative Action.

The introduction presents the sociological and the philosophical contexts in which Habermas' views may be understood. Part I is a reading of the main sections of The Theory of Communicative Action where different aspects of the human religious experience are considered by the German philosopher, and similar reading and comments of some extracts of a Conference held at Chicago in October 1988 on the contribution of Habermas' philosophy for theology. Part II proposes critiques and comments of Habermas' assumptions on religion and a renewed framework (lifeworld) into which the religious description finds a better place and role among the other human experiences.

The main hypotheses of this thesis are the following:

- Habermas' thesis on communicative action is not influenced by his views on religion,
- but his understanding of religion acts upon his theory of modernity.

Therefore, we will concentrate on the way Habermas' views on religion influence his thesis of modernity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Some works of Habermas (and abbreviations)	IV
Introduction	1
Part One: Habermas' views on Religion	20
<u>The Theory of Communicative Action</u>	20
The Chicago Conference	68
Part Two: Critical Views	104
A Selected Bibliography	143

Some Works of Habermas (and abbreviations)

Autonomy and Solidarity, ed. Peter Dew, London, Verso, 1986

Communication and the Evolution of Society, Cambridge, Polity, 1991 (First edition in 1976) (= CS)

Knowledge and Human Interests, Cambridge, Polity, 1986 (First edition in 1968)

On the Logic of Social Sciences, Cambridge, Polity, 1990 (First edition in 1971)

The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1987 (First German edition in 1985)

The Theory of Communicative Action, vol 1, London, Heinemann, 1984, and vol 2, Cambridge, Polity, 1987 (First edition in 1981) (= TCA1 and TCA2)

Theory and Practice, Cambridge, Polity, 1986 (First edition in 1963)

INTRODUCTION

What is the problem?

As a theologian, I approach Jürgen Habermas with a specific background. Not only does this German philosopher propose an understanding of the evolution of modern societies as a rationalization that implies a rejection of metaphysics and of religious traditions, but he also proposes a description of the human condition where the religious experience is absent. How could a theologian understand these challenges? I do not want to place my critique on a theological plain, because Habermas could simply answer that this is not his own realm of research, but I intend to remain on the philosophical level.

The objective

Habermas considers himself more as a sociologist than a philosopher, and therefore he presents his studies as more scientific than philosophical. I will underline how Habermas' scientific views always suppose not only a worldview, but also a global understanding of life, history, and the cosmos that includes a claim about the religious experience of humankind. I will propose that any human

knowledge always supposes such a philosophical and theological background, and consequently that there are no scientific hypotheses without such theoretical background, at least implicitly. This also means that there is no science without religion (an atheist or agnostic attitude is still a religious one).

Habermas' conception of societies is connected to his interpretation of modernity, to what sociologists call the modern societies. Because many sociologists propose a vision of modernity where religions (and secularization) play a central role, we will have to propose our views through this same lens to suggest how we understand the new role of religion in contemporary societies: this is especially connected with the interpretation of the loss of freedom and meaning that is diagnosed to be occurring in the modern societies.

Jürgen Habermas has published hundreds of sociological studies and around 25 books on philosophical topics. The examination of all this material would have been possible for a doctorate in philosophy, but for a M.A. degree it was necessary to limit the field of my research.

Development of the thesis

This introduction finishes by proposing two different backgrounds for understanding Habermas' research: namely, the

global scientific background and the sociological one. Then, a very fast overview of Habermas' research completes the context in which to understand the more detailed readings that follow. First, I analyze some sections of The Theory of Communicative Action in order to better understand Jürgen Habermas' conception of religion, especially when he discusses Durkheim's and Weber's sociologies. But this has to be complemented with a look at the conference held in Chicago in 1988 where theologians discussed Habermas' views and where the German philosopher answered them.

Next, I try to propose my own views by summarizing my critiques of Habermas' conception. My intention was to keep quite clearly the separation between the exposition of Habermas' views and my own comments, but in order to avoid boring repetitions, my own comments come immediately after the expositions, especially when it has not seemed to be a crucial aspect.

How did I become interested in this topic?

As a theologian, I was always interested in the use of rationality within the religious experience and in theology itself. Influenced by sciences, I wanted to find a way to consider theology as the scientific discourse on the religious experience.

In order to do so, it was necessary to be more explicit about

the religious experience by asking: in which sense is there a religious experience, similar to the scientific and to the artistic one? This supposes a conception of religion that would allow researchers to consider it as a possible field for experience.

My quest was pursued first by exploring philosophies of sciences and philosophies of religions. But this was not enough; it has only proven to me that in dealing with the world, humans, including scientists, always presuppose a background, a framework, a lifeworld, without which no human actions are even possible.

For this thesis, I wanted a contemporary scholar whose studies were dealing with all these topics. Soon, sociology came into the focus, and Jürgen Habermas became the best candidate in order to explore all these paths.

Global context of Habermas' research

The first context in which we must try to read his contribution must then be the recent history of the philosophies of sciences and especially of the social sciences. Philosophy of sciences seems to me one of the most active areas of philosophy in the XXth century, and it is definitely not possible to summarize even the main chapters of its evolution. But let's review the following main landmarks.

For almost two centuries, positivism was the essential understanding of the scientific knowledge. Obviously by calling the scientific knowledge positive, it was suggesting that the philosophical and theological knowledge were not bringing to the humans a lot of 'positivity'.

This positivism was challenged and deeply transformed from the beginning of this century, with the astonishing advances of physics and mathematics. A new philosophy of sciences had to be developed.

According to these views, scientific knowledge was considered as the understanding of a relation between events such that we may elaborate a causal law: if there is the event a, there will be the event b. But it became difficult to transpose these conceptions into social sciences; in social actions it appeared difficult to elaborate these causal laws in such a way that we could say: if there is this social event a, the following b event will come. It was also clear that experimentation was different in sociological studies, because the observer was playing a more crucial role. But if sociology is not a normal science, what is it?

The sociological context

So what could we say about the different philosophies of social sciences today? A good answer would be to quote

William Outhwaite's New Philosophies of Social Sciences¹: he considers that three main trends exist in sociology today: realism, hermeneutics, and critical theory. Before concentrating our attention on Habermas, obviously a champion of critical theory, let's have a very quick look at these schools of thought.

A) Realism

The realist's common fundamental belief is that there is a world independent of what we experience, think or believe of it. They do not all agree in describing such an independent world in terms of : entities, events, persons, individuals, but what is crucial is that these 'things' exist 'outside' human minds. They also all consider scientific knowledge as a network of hypotheses, always transitive, and always expressed through descriptions in many different languages, notably ordinary language, and mathematical language. If empiricists postulate that the event b was caused by the event a, they understand this law only as a pure conjunction; some realists go further when they claim that there is such conjunction because it corresponds to the nature of a and b: those realists do not want to insist only upon statements and descriptions, but also upon the real nature of things.

¹ OUTHWAITE W. New Philosophies of Social Sciences. Realism, Hermeneutics and Critical Theory. New York, St. Martin's Press. 1987.

The modern realism is no more naïve: it accepts that there is always a gap between the description and the things described; it understands that the observer is never neutral or value-neutral; it claims that there is always more (or less) in a theory than in the observations. Some of this is a consequence of Quine's and Rorty's influences. For Outhwaite, the best representative of new realism is Roy Bhaskar.

If we transpose this realism to social sciences, what could we see? As there is a world of real entities described by sciences, there is a world of real social constructs observed by sociologists: the social concepts refer to real tendencies in a group or a society, definitions are not only rules in a language-game, but statements about the nature of social processes or structures; there are explanatory mechanisms making these events or phenomena understandable. Yes, this does not mean that the social concepts are not theory-dependent; when they observe their objects of studies, sociologists are more involved than for instance physicists, but this does not mean that the descriptions they make do not correspond to the nature of real social objects. The sociological realists want to avoid the reduction of society to a collection of individuals, and at the same time they wish to recognize the role of these individuals.

B) Hermeneutics

For Outhwaite, hermeneutics considers itself as the science of understanding. In this stream, sociologists consider themselves as hermeneuticians of societies, and their activities may be described as trying to understand social processes; they translate an ordinary way of talking about these processes into a more scientific language using concepts, metaphors, etc. But in doing so, Gadamer insists especially on this point, they must be aware that the understanding process is not only the description of some process but the fusion of two worldviews, of two horizons of meanings and expectations. The motivations and the interests of the inquirer are always a crucial part of the process, and in this sense there is no one single object of social sciences or of social researchers, but all the objects described by sociologists are particular and specific.

C) Critical Theory

Habermas criticized the hermeneutical approach to sociology because he strongly believed from the start that if the sociologists want to propose a critique of society, they will have to find criteria outside of personal interpretations and language. Because the hermeneutician sociologist never comes out of his own tradition, it appears impossible for him to suggest a critique of his own horizon. Habermas firmly

claims that it must be possible to find such universal criteria in order to elaborate a critical theory for all societies. The fusion of the horizons is not enough; there must also be a critique of each of these horizons, there must be a critical understanding of our self-understanding! Habermas gave two examples where it is obvious that such a critique must be made with criteria found outside the language: dream-actions, and manipulations within a psychoanalysis.

Habermas also rejects a positivistic conception of social sciences: the sociologist's interests are too crucial in his own work. Knowledge is not only scientific, there is real knowledge outside the sciences. There are different kinds of knowledge and each knowledge uses its own rationality: we must not reduce rationality to the scientific one, and we must not reduce our experience of the world to the scientific experimentation: we cannot understand a person only by experimentation, a person is better known through communicative action.

Therefore, where to construct the locus for such a critical theory of society? Habermas' answer is that if we want to find an answer, neither from a metaphysical perspective nor from a theological one, there is only one appropriate locus: intercommunicative actions.

Introduction to Habermas' works

We may now have a better look at Habermas' works in these last forty years.²

I

Early studies

Born in 1929, Jürgen Habermas obtained his doctorate in 1954 and became, in 1956, Adorno's assistant at the reconstituted Institute for Social Research, in Frankfurt. His interests were politics and societies, working on an habilitation thesis that would be rejected by Adorno and accepted in Marburg: Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, published in 1962. Two themes of Horkheimer's and Adorno's researches became recurrent in Habermas' reflection: rationality and modernity. It is not easy to summarize these reflections; we may propose these two formulations: our

² Jürgen Habermas is still an active philosopher and scholar, and any introduction or analysis of his works must be provisional. But his influence is already so strong that introductions to and analyses of his thought have already been published. For an introduction to Habermas' work, we suggest:

OUTHWAITE W. Habermas. A Critical Introduction (1994),
BRAATEN J. Habermas's Critical Theory of Society (1991),
MCCARTHY T. The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas (1978),
INGRAM D. Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason (1987),
WHITE Stephen K. The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas. Reason, Justice & Modernity (1988),
HOLUB Robert C. Jürgen Habermas. Critic in the Public Sphere (1991),
and PUSEY M. Jürgen Habermas (1987).

modern societies have produced the good and the bad, but how could we solve the pathologies of modernity? The only way to solve our human problems will be a rational one: what is such rationality and how could we use it to solve the problems of our societies?

II

Sociology

In 1964 Habermas returned to Frankfurt as Professor of Philosophy and Sociology, and seven years later he went to Bavaria to take up with C.F. von Weizsäcker the directorship of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of the Conditions of Life in the Scientific-Technical World. During this period of around 15 years, the main sphere of his interests became sociology and what we may call a philosophy of sociology, then a philosophy of societies. Alone or with other scholars, he has published an enormous amount of sociological material. But of this period we particularly wish to mention The Logic of the Social Sciences, Toward a Rational Society, and Knowledge and Human Interests.

Habermas' works rotate around one main anxiety: how do we use reason in our scientific researches in sociology? His attention is less upon politics and more upon sciences versus scientism. His major conclusion is that, even in their scientific activities, humans show signs of interests in such

ways that we cannot conclude that scientific knowledge is totally neutral and objective. Even the scientific community may serve specific interests, and therefore an external control may be necessary. In order to argue, Habermas must establish some distinctions:

- knowledge, even scientific knowledge, must be understood within a wider framework that includes human interests; the production process of science is a human activity. Therefore, we must be able to better understand human knowledge from a global theory of human actions. Which kind of human actions may help us to understand knowledge and sciences?

- In human knowledge, we must at least distinguish natural sciences and social sciences, and the acquisition of knowledge in these various spheres cannot be said to be a matter of only observations; the sociological types are the result of a social construction.

- As a human activity, knowledge may be considered within a larger framework, including meaning and interest. But we must also acknowledge that these frameworks suppose a dialogical process where the meanings interact through communication and language. If humans speak, it is not only to communicate; communication is also part of a larger process of domination. There is labour and interaction, there is also domination and other human interests.

- We may distinguish two levels: a level of action and

transformation of the world, mostly technological, and a second level of symbolic interaction, which includes scientific discourse.

Influenced by Chomsky, Habermas started to look at linguistic competences within the framework of human communication; so there are not only linguistic competences, there are more global pragmatic competences; Habermas started to explore what could be such a 'universal pragmatics' and concluded:

"I take the type of action aimed at reaching understanding to be fundamental."

(CS 1)

This is the type of action Habermas will soon call 'communicative action'.

At the same time, Habermas has not forgotten his second main interest: rationality and truth. How could we relate the different types of actions with rationality and truth? When we make a communicative action, we make claims of different types of validity: the comprehensibility claim, the truth claim, the rightness claim and the sincerity claim. Truth must not be considered as the correspondence between the claim and reality, but it consists in an agreement among the different actors of the communication. In this same context, Habermas develops some thoughts about the pathologies of these communications and the incompetencies of actors.

III

A global theory

All this may already be considered philosophical material about sociology, but Habermas needed a global theory as a framework for understanding sociological studies. Such a global analysis, he gave in The Theory of Communicative Action, published in 1981.

How was this done? By elaborating a more global framework to the scientific activities; the major concepts of this framework were language, communication, and action. I think that first The Theory of Communicative Action is a theory of human actions wherein Habermas claims that communicative actions are among the most essential human actions. Habermas has also two main targets: philosophies of consciousness or transcendental philosophy, and a specific concept of action as individual and goal-centered.

It is not easy to summarize The Theory of Communicative Action³, but we may consider these as the main theses of the book:

- human actions may be characterized into four main areas: teleological or strategic actions involving a decision based on means-ends rationality, actions regulated by norms and accomplished in order to comply with the norms, dramaturgical

³ The main section of our study is not a summary of TCA, but only a specific reading of some sections where we discover topics connected to religion.

actions involving the presentation of self, and finally communicative actions as the interactions between two or more actors who seek to reach understanding toward the coordination of their actions.

- Habermas considers that communicative actions have a leading role in the evolution of societies. He also studies the development of the concept in social theories. Against Weber and Marx, Habermas suggests that the best conquests of our societies are not strategic actions through which we better control the objective world, but communicative actions through which we build societies in a rational way.

- By rationality we must understand the good reasons or the grounds on which we agree to guide our social interactions. Human activities may be considered as made in three worlds: the objective world, the subjective world, and the societal world, and in each of these worlds we ground our actions in different validity claims, with different good reasons, on different grounds. There is rationality when the different actors agree on the same good reasons which provide a ground for their common actions. All the four types of human actions involve human rationality, but in different ways.

- The differentiation of these worlds supposes not only a worldview but also a lifeworld into which the different worlds may be understood. Habermas proposes

"that we conceive of societies simultaneously as systems and lifeworlds."
(TCA2 118)

Lifeworld is not only a context of relevance but also a stock of interpretive patterns, like a horizon within which humans understand their world. For reaching understanding, humans do not take their inspiration only from their lifeworld as a principle of interpretation, but the principle of interpretation itself must be understood as an element of the lifeworld. Communicative actions tend not only to interpret life, but also to orient and to transform it. Habermas considers that in the history of a society there is a dialectical process between its lifeworld and the society as a system, and that the more the system is leading, the less important is the lifeworld: the system integration through actions oriented to success and mechanisms of coordination is complemented and often opposed to social integration itself through actions oriented to understanding and mechanisms that stabilize these social patterns.

- Worldviews may be described as different forms of collective understanding developed by different social groups. Some of them are more ideological than others - as religious systems are, in Habermas' view. These transcendental worldviews, that were able to legitimize political orders (because the political orders were justified by the worldview), were ideological and irrational (because they were not making the necessary differentiation of the different worlds, which is a precondition for rationality).

- Among the characters of the modern lifeworld, Habermas mentions the rationalization of law, the Protestant ethic, the loss of freedom and meaning. Habermas may then consider, among the pathologies of modernity, the erosion of the sphere of communicative actions by the market and administration spheres:

"Neither the secularization of worldviews nor the structural differentiation of society has unavoidable pathological side effects per se. It is not the differentiation and independent development of cultural value spheres that lead to the cultural impoverishment of everyday communicative practice, but an elitist splitting-off of expert cultures from contexts of communicative action in daily life." (TCA2 330)

When elaborating such a critique in the final section of his book, Habermas proposes a new form of capitalist modernity, reconstructing a social theory from Marx's and the Frankfurt School's.

IV

Law and modernity

After his general Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas went back to history of philosophy and started fresh new critiques of French post-structuralism, of Hegel, of Adorno's and Horkheimer's Dialectic of Enlightenment, of Heidegger, Derrida, Bataille and of Foucault. He became more and more critical of the philosophies of the human subject and of consciousness, and he wanted to explore the learning processes of humans. Books of this period are

Postmetaphysical Thinking, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, The New Conservatism and Law and Morality. In this last book, published in 1988, Habermas has concentrated his attention on the status of law in modern societies, applying his general theory on public affairs debate.

For our purpose, the main aspect remains Habermas' views on metaphysics and rationality; he seems to welcome a post-metaphysical worldview that would still be rational. We may ask: what does such conception presuppose? What could we say about the worldview that at the same time rejects metaphysics and includes rationality? What does this mean for the conception of rationality and metaphysics?

In these studies, Habermas also deepened his sociological theory about modern societies. His evaluation is that Hegel, Marx, Heidegger and Weber have missed their societal analyses, because of their philosophy of consciousness. Habermas insists that the way of going beyond such philosophies of the subject is not with 'another than reason' or 'will', but with a wider conception of the communicative reason; in communicative reason, there is more than the subject, there is the society.

In the evolution of modernity, he emphasizes the transition from societies united by religion to societies that are more fragmented and individualistic because of the rationalization process and the deeper differentiation of different spheres;

such an evolution is evaluated positively as a step from superstition to freedom.

PART ONE
HABERMAS' VIEWS ON RELIGION

The Theory of Communicative Action

Introductory remark

We don't want to propose a complete exposition and discussion of the two volumes The Theory of Communicative Action, but we wish only to underline what could be connected with the human religious experience.

The Theory of Communicative Action first volume has the following subtitle: Reason and the Rationalization of Society. Max Weber's sociology is at its core. Four chapters compose the second volume, under the subtitle: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason. The first 110 pages open exactly where the first volume has finished, and almost literally with the same text: because rationalization cannot be dealt with adequately within a philosophy of consciousness, a paradigm shift is necessary towards a more global conception of action, and especially of communicative action.

Durkheim's theory on religion

The second and third sections of the fifth chapter could be crucial for our understanding of Habermas' views on religion. Their titles are: "The Authority of the Sacred and the Normative Background of Communicative Action" and "The Rational Structure of the Linguistification of the Sacred"⁴. Here Habermas wants to complete Mead's theory (evaluated as not social enough) with Durkheim's theory, especially of religions, because for Durkheim religions are expressions of social consciousness. So let's follow him on this way. But first let's try to understand how religions are introduced into the discourse. This happens between pages 43 and 46 of volume 2.

How does religion fit in?

It is through a critique of Mead's theory. Habermas considers that Mead's theory explains the individual development but not the social one:

"In the preceding section I gave a systematic presentation of Mead's attempt to explain, by way of reconstructing, symbolically mediated interaction and action in social roles (...) As I have emphasized, Mead reconstructs this developmental step only from the ontogenetic perspective of the growing child. He has to presuppose, at the level of the parents' socializing interaction, the competences for speech and interaction that the child is to acquire. This methodological restriction is legitimate so long as he is dealing with the genesis of the self. Mead was fully aware, however,

⁴ TCA2, pages 43 to 111.

that in going from the individual to the society, he would have to take up once again the phylogenetic viewpoint (...) Mead makes no effort to explain how this normatively integrated social organism could have developed out of the sociative forms of symbolically mediated interaction."⁵

For Habermas, Mead has well explained the individual evolution from one step to the next, but in doing so he presupposes the parents, because the child is learning from his parents. For society there are no parents to learn from! We have to find another explanation for the evolution of social institutions.

Mead tried such explanation through a comparison with the insect and mammal societies, but this "does not yet explain the emergence of institutions"⁶. Then he tried to suggest that a cognitive development was the explanation, in a way similar to Heidegger's discourse on the cognitive development consequent to the use of hand by humans, thus constituting an objective world of objects to which it becomes possible to predicate qualities:

"Unlike Heidegger, who adopts this pragmatist motif for an analysis of being-in-the-world that is insensitive to the phenomena of sociation, Mead knows as well as Piaget that instrumental actions are set within the cooperative interrelations of group members and presuppose regulated interactions. The functional circuit of instrumental action cannot be analyzed independent of structures of cooperation, and cooperation requires social control regulating group

⁵ TCA2, on page 43.

⁶ TCA2, on page 44.

activities."⁷

The reference to first hand experience within the world is, for Habermas, a reference to functional or instrumental action, in the sense that it refers to a human intervention within the world, with an intent to transform something. If Heidegger views such intervention only within an individual context, Mead, like Piaget, knows that such intervention cannot be considered outside of a social group, regulated by a social control. So, now, how to explain such social control?

Here seems to me the central claim connecting religions to societies:

"Now, however, Mead explains this social control which serves 'to integrate the individual and his action with reference to the organized social processes of experience and behavior in which he is implicated', by reference to the moral authority of the generalized other: 'The very organization of the self-conscious community is dependent upon individuals taking the attitude of the other individuals. The development of this process, as I have indicated, is dependent upon getting the attitude of the group as distinct from that of a separate individual -getting what I have termed the generalized other'."⁸

Why is this claim so central? Because Habermas will follow Durkheim in claiming that religions have played the essential role in shaping this 'generalized other', the social consciousness. In order to fill the gap between Mead and

⁷ TCA2, on page 44.

⁸ TCA2, on page 44.

Durkheim, Habermas evaluates Mead's views:

"Mead is moving in a circle."⁹

He explained the individual genesis (ontogenesis) by the influence of the social group; and he explained the development of society (phylogenesis) by the growth of the individual. Therefore, with Mead's theory, two questions arise:

"First, it would have been reasonable to seek out the phenomena through which the structure of group identities could be clarified -that is to say, in the language of Durkheim, the expressions of collective consciousness, above all of religious consciousness."¹⁰

While Mead presents the religious experience as an individual experience, Durkheim

"analyzes religious beliefs and patriotism not as extraordinary attitudes of contemporary individuals, but as the expression of a collective consciousness rooted deep in tribal history and constitutive of the identity of groups (...) This religious -in the broadest sense of the term- symbolism, which is located this side of the threshold of grammatical speech, is evidently the archaic core of norm consciousness."¹¹

This explains why

"I will next consider Durkheim's theory of religion (...) With these steps we will have recovered at the phylogenetic level the structures that Mead presupposed at the level of socializing interaction."¹²

⁹ TCA2, on page 44.

¹⁰ TCA2, on page 45.

¹¹ TCA2, on page 46.

¹² TCA2, on page 46.

The authority of the sacred

We must take note that Habermas' question is about social control: how is it that in a group there are attitudes or behaviours that are socially regulated, and how is it that these norms become obligatory? Following Durkheim, he will answer: this obligatoriness comes from the authority of the sacred.

This was Durkheim's starting point: how could we understand that institutions and values are normative within a society? Why are social norms obligatory? With these questions, Durkheim did not refer to technical rules in strategic actions (where it is a question of efficiency) but to moral rules about behaviours and attitudes. When a technical rule is violated, the action fails; when a social rule is violated, the group may react with a punishment!

If we consider the sacred as the expression of social consciousness, then this process becomes understandable: when the authority of the sacred is transposed onto the social rules, then the violation of the social rules is seen as an attack against the sacred, and because the sacred is also 'tremendous', it scares, it generates terror because of the possibility of sanction and punishment.

What Durkheim shows well, according to Habermas, are the similarities between the sacred and the moral: and the main similarity is that they both attract and frighten:

"The sacred arouses the same ambivalent attitude as moral authority, for it is surrounded with an aura that simultaneously frightens and attracts, terrorizes and enchants (...) The sacred produces and stabilizes just the ambivalence that is characteristic of the feeling of moral obligation."¹³

Thus

"Durkheim infers from these structural analogies between the sacred and the moral that the foundations of morality are to be found in the sacred. He puts forward the thesis that in the last analysis moral rules get their binding power from the sphere of the sacred."¹⁴

Religions

When he searched the origins of the sacred, Durkheim was then searching for the meaning of moral authority. At that point, Habermas explains Durkheim's definition of religions:

"Religions are said to consist of beliefs and ritual practices. Taking beliefs as his point of departure, he conceives religion as the experience of a collective, supraindividual consciousness. In virtue of its intentional structure, consciousness is always consciousness of something. Accordingly, Durkheim looks for the intentional object of the religious world of ideas; he inquires after the reality that is represented in concepts of the sacred. The answers that religion itself gives are clear: the divine being, the mythical order of the world, sacred powers, and the like. But for Durkheim what is concealed behind this is society - 'transfigured and symbolically represented'."¹⁵

In this context, Durkheim insists that society is not only the addition of all its members, but "a moral being

¹³ TCA2, on page 49.

¹⁴ TCA2, on page 49.

¹⁵ TCA2, on page 50.

qualitatively different from the individuals it comprises".

Is this clear on what are religions? At the bottom of page 50, Habermas proposes a critique of Durkheim's views, but his critique is not about Durkheim's presentation of religion, but of the circularity Habermas discerns in his argument: for Durkheim, morality would bind because it is sacred, and the sacred consists of a system of collective norms. Must we conclude that Habermas accepts Durkheim's definition of religions? The answer must be in the affirmative, because we do not see any disputing of these views in The Theory of Communicative Action¹⁶.

If for Habermas religion is not defined as a human experience, what is it? The next section will show that his reduced view on religion is a consequence of the sociological tendency to view everything only within the social framework.

Experience, language and religion

In section B¹⁷ of this section, Habermas answers three questions on Durkheim's views, and section C¹⁸ is an "Excursus on the Three Roots of Communicative Action".

What are these three questions? They are as follows:

¹⁶ Usually when Habermas disagrees with an hypothesis, he expresses his disagreement. On this specific definition of religion, he does not express any disagreement.

¹⁷ TCA2, pages 53-62.

¹⁸ TCA2, on pages 62-76.

- how could we explain the emergence of religious symbols?
- how could we explain the emergence of social institutions (not the religious institutions as such)?
- which explanation could we give of Durkheim's difficulty to articulate properly the nature of individuals with their social aspects?

The first two questions are good examples of the limits of Habermas' philosophy in articulating human experience with all its expressions and representations. In order to explain the emergence of religious symbols, Habermas suggests an evolution from "triggers", through instinct and religions, leading to communicative action in modern societies. But would it not be simpler to understand the religious symbols as expressions and representations of "religious experiences"? Because Habermas does not imagine a connection between religions and reality¹⁹, and by this I mean a religious experience of reality²⁰, he is unable to connect

¹⁹ In reducing the religious symbols to their social dimension, Habermas detaches them from reality. This is why he may write: "Religious symbols are disengaged from functions of adapting and mastering reality" (TCA2, on page 54; cf. also on page 55), and therefore he may emphasize their social functions as rallying center and as moral source.

²⁰ In all their experiences, humans always experience the same reality, the world(s) that constitute(s) their environment, but because they experience it with different perspectives and focuses, the resulting experience is of different types: scientific, aesthetic, philosophical, religious, and so on.

religious symbols to human experiences. There is a similar problem with the emergence of institutions.

Habermas' concept of language is disputable. It seems that for him language is not mainly the means through which a society expresses its experience of the world(s); it also seems that for him the religions are not simply the embodiment of religious experience. But if so, for Habermas, what is language and what are the institutions? Our understanding, at this point, is that the answer must be found in a sociological analysis of these realities, and by this I mean the tendency to reduce these realities to their social functions, to the functions they have within a human group. In the case of the religious symbols, he presents them as the rallying-center for a society, and the institutions are presented as giving the authority to social norms²¹.

Symbols and reality

We have noticed that Habermas has trouble connecting religions with human experience. This must be correlated with his insistence on the symbolic dimension of religions. When Habermas insists on the symbolic dimension of religions, he means that religions are something illusory, without a

²¹ This tendency of reducing these realities to their social functions is also visible on pages 62-64.

direct link with reality:

"Religious symbolism represents one of three prelinguistic (in the sense of propositionally differentiated language) roots of communicative action (...) What is puzzling about this root is that it is from the very beginning symbolic in nature. Cognitive dealings with perceptible and manipulable objects, and expressions of subjective experiences are in contact with our needs and desires. They are in touch with reality that not only transcends language but is also free of symbolic structures. Human cognitions and expressions, however shaped by language, can also be traced back to the natural history of intelligent performances and expressive gestures in animals. Norm consciousness, on the other hand, has no equally trivial extralinguistic reference."²²

A similar argument may be found later in this same section, where Habermas connects the sacred with the Platonic ideas or ideals. He starts by quoting Durkheim:

"'Animals know only one world, the one which they perceive by experience, internal as well as external. Men alone have the faculty of conceiving the ideal, of adding something to the real. Now where does this singular privilege come from? (...) The explanation of religion which we have proposed has precisely this advantage, that it gives an answer to this question. For our definition of the sacred is that it is something added and above the real.'"²³

Habermas makes this comment:

"According to Durkheim, a social group cannot stabilize its collective identity and its cohesiveness without projecting an idealized image of its society."²⁴

It seems to me that in these texts, Habermas, following Durkheim, presents religions as symbolic in the sense that

²² TCA2, on page 61.

²³ Quoted in TCA2, page 71.

²⁴ In ibidem.

these religious symbols are not connected to something in reality, but only to an idealized society that is nothing else but a projection of what this society hopes as an ideal for itself.

I would ask of Habermas: even if we admit that the religious symbols refer to this ideal society, where does this ideal come from? Does it come from any human experience? Suppose we answer that it comes from the human experience of projecting our limited experience to its limit ideal form²⁵, we will have to ask: but where does such a projection experience come from? How do humans develop such a 'faculty'? Is there anything within their own experiences that allows humans to make such projections?²⁶

²⁵ In the following sense: we experience in other humans what we call beauty, and we may conceive of an ideal beauty through a collective reflection by which we abstract the perfect beauty from everything to which we oppose it: this may be a typical philosophical process, according to me.

²⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas and the XXth century German theologian Karl Rahner see within the human constitution, within the human being, a potentiality for the infinite. Cf. especially KARL RAHNER. L'esprit dans le monde. La métaphysique de la connaissance finie chez saint Thomas d'Aquin. Mame, Paris, 1968, and L'homme à l'écoute du Verbe. Fondements d'une philosophie de la religion. Mame, Paris, 1968. Within the human being, there is an essential and constitutive openness to the infinite; this openness could be experienced in authentic religious experience. Cf. also LÉVINAS E. Transcendance et intelligibilité. Genève: Labor et Fides, 1996; ROYCE J. The Sources of Religious Insight. Edinburgh: Clark, 1912.

The linguistification of the sacred

In this third section of chapter V, Habermas wants to understand the evolution from symbolically mediated forms to secular modern states. His hypothesis is that the former functions served by rites have passed to communicative action; and the authority of the holy has been transferred to social consensus:

"This means a freeing of communicative action from sacrally protected normative contexts. The disenchantment and disempowering of the domain of the sacred takes place by way of a linguistification of the ritually secured, basic normative agreement; going with this is a release of the rationality potential in communicative action. The aura of rapture and terror that emanates from the sacred, the spellbinding power of the holy, is sublimated into the binding/bonding force of criticizable validity claims and at the same time turned into an everyday occurrence."²⁷

Habermas takes his main argument from Durkheim's views on the social evolution of law. Habermas considers that archaic law is basically criminal, and the modern law is based on private property, contract and inheritance.

I immediately reject these views, because my understanding is that religious laws were rarely replaced by civil laws, and that religious laws and civil laws have normally coexisted: good examples of this coexistence may be found in the Hammurabi code and in the many laws of what Christians call the First (Old) Covenant. When we note the emergence of the Roman law at the beginning of our era, while the development

²⁷ TCA2, on page 77.

of the Canon law took place from the XIIth century, it seems difficult to consider that the civil codes have emerged from religious ones²⁸.

And when he wants to transfer the formalism of rites to the formalism of social contract, Habermas again connects two different realities only by a common aspect that may be essential to the latter but does not seem so essential to the former; formalism is not a constitutive dimension of ritual practices, as it may be for a social contract in modern societies.

In order to argue his linguistification thesis, Habermas proposes a thought experiment²⁹ which confirms that his global philosophical framework differs totally from mine, especially about the relations between reality and language, or more precisely, between experience and language:

"This thought experiment requires that we think of the Durkheimian zero point of society as composed of a sacred domain that does not yet need a linguistic mediation of ritual practice, and a profane domain that does not yet permit a linguistic mediation of cooperation with its own dynamic."³⁰

²⁸ Cf. RAMSTEIN M. A Manual of Canon Law. Hoboken: Terminal, 1948, esp. pages 21-37; BIHLMEYER K. & TUECHLE H. Storia della Chiesa. Il Medioevo. Brescia: Morcelliana, 1960, esp. 225-226; KNOWLES M.D. "Structures de l'Eglise médiévale", in Nouvelle Histoire de l'Eglise. Le Moyen Âge. Paris: Seuil, 1968, esp. 270-286.

²⁹ As a principle, I am against any thought experiment, and I admit only of experience as a source of human cognition.

³⁰ TCA2, on page 86.

I will not pursue further the explanation on this thought experiment, because at this exact point my argument must be clear: if language (or any symbolic representations) is the expression (or representation) of human experience, there is no way of conceiving human experience without such expression, simply because the human experience and its expression in symbolic representations are constitutive of each other. And obviously this must be true not only for the sacred domain but also for the profane domain. Because this argument does not seem essential in my debate about religion, I consider what I have already written to be sufficient. It amounts to this that I cannot accept the thesis of a linguistification of the sacred: if the sacred is a human experience, to express it in language or in any other symbolic representation may be described as a linguistification, and if we look to the history of religions such expressions of the religious experiences exist as far as we have traces of human group³¹. There is a linguistification of human experiences in all societies, and I cannot accept the hypothesis of a linguistification of the sacred as a main

³¹ Paleontologists even discern the emergence of the humans (from animals) by the recognition of religious symbols. This means that as far as science may go into the history of religions, we find a symbolic representation of the religious experience of these humans. For instance, cf. LEROI-GOURHAN A. Les religions de la préhistoire. Paris: PUF, 1964.

factor in the evolution of societies.

But even if we so reject this ambiguous concept, may we still try to understand Habermas' argument? It seems to me³² that Habermas describes the linguistification of the sacred in this way: the cultural reproduction from one generation to the next was secured by the sacred in archaic societies, and now in modern societies most social reproduction is accomplished through communicative action, and obviously the speech acts are essential in such actions. In this sense, we may accept a crucial social function of language in modern societies.

In such discourse, Habermas supposes that the 'sacred' is not a sphere of human experience that may be expressed in language or in other symbolic representations, as for any human experiences. The sacred, in archaic as well as in any other societies, cannot exist if not as a human experience, and like any other human experience it is also partly constituted by its expressions. This does not mean that there is identity between the experience and its expression; it is just the reverse, there is always a gap between the human experience and its expression, in the sense that the expression is always different from the experience it expresses.

³² Especially from TCA2, in page 107.

System Theories

A concept of experience is not central in Habermas' thought³³.

Why? I may make the hypothesis that the concept of experience is not central in Habermas' thought because he connects it to a philosophy of consciousness, which he rejects, and secondly because he considers it too individualistic, while his purpose as sociologist is to develop social concepts, fitted to the social world.

Habermas' essential proposal concerns a new concept of society, which would include not only a lifeworld but also a system. If in Chapters V and VI, he read Mead and Durkeim in such a way as to show how a society is a lifeworld, with Chapter VII Habermas reads Talcott Parsons' system theory in order to understand in which sense a society is also a

³³ I study the concept of experience since 25 years. Where does my concept come from? I was influenced first by the Empiricists and the Pragmatists, and especially John Dewey: DEWEY J. Creative Intelligence, New York: Holt, 1917; Art as Experience. New York: Capricorn, 1958; Experience and Nature. New York: Dover, 1958. But I was also deeply touched by Process Philosophy, and especially Whitehead: WHITEHEAD A.N. Process and Reality. New York: Harper, 1957 (first edition in 1929). Finally I must admit that I was impressed by Psychology and Gestalt Theory, where they study the observation and the perception of reality: for instance, HASSET J. & WHITE K.M. Psychology in Perspective. New York: Harper, 1989; SOLSO R.L. Cognitive Psychology. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1991 (first edition in 1979). Cf. also SWARTZ N. Beyond Experience. Metaphysical Theories and Philosophical Constraints. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1991; GREENWOOD J.D. Explanation and Experiment in Social Psychological Science. Realism and the Social Constitution of Action. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1989. And what about the constructivist influence on me?

'system'. But Habermas has also a second objective: to explain modernity. When he reads these past sociologists, he tries to show the limits of their conception of modernity as a consequence of the limits of their conception of society: because for Weber society was essentially a lifeworld, his theory of modernity is insufficient, and because Parsons reduced society to a system, he has trouble presenting a complete view of modernity and of the pathologies of modern societies. These discussions on modernity conclude The Theory of Communicative Action's last chapter, Chapter VIII. Our purpose is more limited: we don't want to present a new theory of society, and we don't even wish to critique Habermas' one. Our hypo-thesis is that Habermas' views are limited by his conception of religion and of the religious experience of humankind, and we want to check it. What we try to follow is the path on which Habermas classifies (or refuses to classify) this dimension of human life. There is a good example of such denial in Chapter VII on Parsons, and two further minor confirmations in the same chapter about the churches, and in the last chapter, about secularization.

Human condition and Parsons

For Talcott Parsons, the concept of action was too narrow for giving a complete theory of society, and to widen it he has used the concept of 'system'. As illustrated in a sub-title

of Chapter VII, Parsons has evolved "from a normativistic theory of action to a systems theory of society"³⁴.

In Parsons' theory everything is conceived as a system or a sub-system: for instance, within the societal system, there are different subsystems:

"These subsystems are the action system viewed under its different aspects (...) These subsystems are able, within bounds, to vary independent of one another."³⁵

Globally we may summarize that the social system includes four subsystems, connected with : economy, polity, values, and norms.³⁶

What I want to underline is how Parsons has tried to integrate his views on society within a wider framework, within which religion was included, while Habermas rejects religion from such a framework with the back of one's hand. This occurs between pages 243 and 256.

First, Habermas explains how Parsons

"understands social systems theory as a special case of the theory of living systems."³⁷

Therefore, he must propose this wider system of life and, in

³⁴ Cf. TCA2, on page 204. In this chapter, Habermas exposes Parsons' evolution of his views on society and adds many personal comments and critiques. His main critique is that Parsons failed to integrate the lifeworld in his concept of society, reducing it to the environment of action.

³⁵ TCA2, 236.

³⁶ TCA2, 244.

³⁷ TCA2, 243.

order to do this, Parsons uses four functional aspects that are, according to him, the four essential aspects of any system: these four aspects are deduced from the system character that it evolves from an initial state to a goal state and that such evolution involves internal and external transformations:

"When the general action system, encompassing culture, society, personality, and behavioral system, is viewed in turn as only one of four subsystems and correlated in its entirety with the I (integration) function, it becomes necessary to construct a system of the most comprehensive aspects of human existence, to which Parsons gives the name 'the human condition'."³⁸

On one side, Parsons presents the four functional subsystems of the action system as: society, culture, personality, and behavioral system; and on the other side, he tries to include this action system within a wider system that he calls the human condition. This will mean that this wider system will have to include the same four functional dimensions of any system, and it is in this context that Parsons proposes the inclusion of religion as one of the subsystems of the human condition system. The four subsystems of the human condition are: the action system, the human organization, the physico-chemical nature, and finally what Parsons calls the ultimate structures or the telic system. Habermas gives this quotation from Parsons:

"Clearly, we think of the telic system, standing as it

³⁸ TCA2, 250.

does in our treatment in a relation of cybernetic superordination to the action system, as having to do especially with religion. It is primarily in the religious context that throughout so much of cultural history belief in some kind of reality of the non-empirical world had figured prominently."³⁹

Habermas' comments

I suppose Habermas presents himself as an unbeliever in such a sphere, and consequently we must anticipate that he will reject Parsons' inclusion of religion in this more global human condition system. This is what happens. He rejects it for two reasons:

- first, he accepts the four aspects of every system that Parsons developed as a necessary condition for all systems;
- and second, he rejects the way Parsons developed the human condition system, especially by searching for subsystems in order to satisfy his system theory;
- and third, Habermas proposes a new set of systems where the telic system is reduced to culture as a subsystem not of the human condition but simply of society itself;
- and finally, Habermas rejects religion as not necessary to culture.

Habermas starts by showing that Parsons speculates in his

³⁹ Quoted in TCA2, 250-251. Habermas also quotes this Parsons' sentence: "With full recognition of the philosophical difficulties of defining the nature of that reality we wish to affirm our sharing the age-old belief in its existence" (on page 251).

quest for the four functional aspects of the human condition as a system, and this speculation is especially perceptible with the hypothesis of the telic system:

"Parsons' filling of this gap is a result not only of his religious needs and experiences, but, as he rightly notes, of the demands of his system construction as well. It is not only that there is a fourth cell here to be occupied; his systems-theoretical approach itself blocks any transcendental account of the human condition; it requires an objectivistic understanding. The system of ordering accomplishments has to be reinterpreted into a system of highest controlling values or of ultimate structures in such a way that, as a world of supraempirical entities, it can interact with the other worlds, that is, the physico-chemical, organic, and sociocultural worlds. This way of viewing the matter leads to speculations I do not wish to take up here."⁴⁰

Two pages later, he adds that his rejection of such a system also comes from the fact that there are no scientific indicators for it:

"The telic system is supposed to occupy an analogous position. Parsons conceives of it as a region that indirectly influences communicative action via the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld. He is evidently postulating a supernatural counterpart to physicochemical nature and to the genetic nature of the human species. The ultimate structures supposedly enjoy the same autarchy, the same independence from the structures of the lifeworld as inorganic and organic nature. But there are no indicators accessible to social-theoretical analysis for a transcendence that is independent in this way from the communicative practice of human beings, from their sacrifices, entreaties, prayers, no indicators for a god who, to borrow an image from Jewish mysticism, does not himself have to be redeemed through the efforts of human beings. Thus the autarchic position that the telic system is supposed to occupy in the second version⁴¹ is due to an unjustified

⁴⁰ TCA2, 253-254.

⁴¹ Parsons has proposed different versions of his theory

reduplication of the cultural components of the action system, which takes the place of the lifeworld in Parsons' scheme."⁴²

It seems that for Habermas, Parsons' telic system, where he especially viewed religions, is nothing else than the cultural dimension of the lifeworld. For his sociological theory, Habermas concludes that he does not need the religious hypothesis within the cultural sphere.

My only comment on this position will be as follows: if there is a real religious experience as a part or a dimension of the human experience, it seems normal that humans have tried, not only individually but also socially, to express these experiences. And therefore, to me, it does not seem scientific to deny the existence of these experiences and their symbolic representation. Such denial is another manifestation that there is no science without a worldview: I do not deny that Habermas' theory is sociology, but I claim that any sociology supposes a worldview, that always includes something about religion: acceptance, rejection, or indifference, but in any case this attitude influences the scientist in his theories. Habermas' belief that religions are mostly speculations and illusions influences the theory he constructs of society, as Parsons' "needs and

of society.

⁴² TCA2, 256.

experiences"⁴³ has influenced his theory of society. My reading of Habermas claims that not only does he deny the necessity of the religious experience, but he does not contemplate enough its existence and its social role.

Churches and institutions

According to my basic worldview, humans make experiences and they express these experiences through a wide range of symbolic representations, including language.

These experiences cannot be considered as merely individual, they are also social, in the sense that we cannot experience the world without a horizon, a lifeworld, a worldview that we acquire within our own culture.

It happens that within a social group, basic social experiences are expressed not only through the language, myths and literature, as well as works of art, for instance, but they are also embodied and crystallized in institutions. In these cases, the institutions become the warrant of the social experiences of the group.

According to me, this is what happens with churches. Churches may be considered as an institutional expression of the religious experiences of a human group. Because of his worldview and especially because of Habermas' assumptions on

⁴³ The two terms used by Habermas in describing Parsons' "filling of the gap" with the hypothesis of a telic subsystem within the human condition system.

religions, he is unable to cope with this. We may become more aware of this, when we look at the way he explains Parsons' theory of media⁴⁴.

What is a medium? This is a concept that we must understand within Parsons' theory of the system. Systems evolve by exchanges with their environment: the medium is the way by which a system exchanges with its environment. For Parsons, money is the medium for the economic system; he also considers that power is the medium for the political system. But what is the medium for social integration and for cultural reproduction? With money and power, we see the economic system and the political one elaborating institutions in order to manage these media. But what are the institutions that manage the values of the cultural system? For Habermas, there are no such institutions, there are no institutions that back up values in the way that money does for economy⁴⁵.

This limitation of Habermas' theory is a direct consequence of his difficulty to understand what is the role of the churches⁴⁶ for the religious experience of a social group. My

⁴⁴ This is section C of the part where Habermas studies Parsons' theory of the system.

⁴⁵ Cf. TCA2, 272-276.

⁴⁶ I use this term here in a specific sense: as the institutional aspects of the religious experiences for a social group.

own worldview supposes that the religious experience is a specific space where social groups define their values and meanings, and they express these experiences (not only) in institutions like churches. In this sense, the churches back up the system of values and meanings within a social group.

Secularization⁴⁷

In the last pages of his extraordinary theory, Habermas tries to better specify what's modernity for sociology. One of the discussed features of these modern societies is secularization, described mostly as a loss of meaning and freedom. May we say that modern societies are characterized by secularization?

Habermas extensively reads again the sociological tradition

⁴⁷ Obviously Habermas is not the only sociologist to study secularization: cf. BERGER P.L. The Sacred Canopy. New York: Doubleday, 1967, and The Heretical Imperative. New York: Anchor Press, 1979; LUCKMANN T. The Invisible Religion. New York: Macmillan, 1967; ROBERTS K.A. Religion in Sociological Perspective. Belmont: Wadsworth, 1990 (first published in 1984); BIBBY R.W. Unknown Gods. The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada. Toronto: Stoddart, 1993; TESSIER R. Déplacements du sacré dans la société moderne. Montreal: Bellarmin, 1994; Société, culture et religion à Montréal: XIX-XXe siècles. Ed. by G. LAPOINTE. Montréal: VLB, 1994. WUNENBURGER J.-J. Le sacré. Paris: PUF, 1981, chapter III gives a good overview of the different interpretations of the transformation of the sacred in modern societies; in Sociologia e teologia di fronte al futuro, ed. by G. CAPRARO. Trento: EDB, 1995, Italian theologians and sociologists have debated their understanding of religion, society, and secularization.

in order to better understand this concept⁴⁸ and finally he chooses to reject it. Habermas is satisfied with his theory that the modern pathologies are a consequence of the uncoupling of the system dimension from the lifeworld dimension of society, a process that he also calls the colonization of the lifeworld by the system:

"If we work Weber's theory into our explanatory model in this way, the paradox of societal rationalization that he saw in the manifestations of bureaucratization also appears in a different light. The loss of freedom that Weber attributed to bureaucratization can no longer be explained by a shift from purposive rationality that is grounded value rationally to purposive rationality without roots. In our model, the pertinent phenomena can no longer appear under the description of highly rationalized action orientations. They now count as effects of the uncoupling of system and lifeworld (...)

This interpretation has the advantage of rendering superfluous the questionable secularization hypothesis that is supposed to explain the erosion of ethical attitudes."⁴⁹

What is my point here? My hypothesis is always that there is no science without a theory and this includes beliefs about religion and religious experiences. We know that Habermas considers that there is no reality to religions and to religious experiences, and, therefore, the scientific theory he construes does not include religion, and because the secularization hypothesis is based on a perception of what has happened to religions in the modern societies, Habermas

⁴⁸ Especially in connection with Robert Bellah's theses (289), with Parsons' and Weber's ones (290-291), with R.C. Baum's analyses (293).

⁴⁹ TCA2, 318.

is forced to evacuate the concept of secularization.

Is this right or wrong? I claim that there is no definite scientific argument to select either one or the other, because there are no scientific hypotheses without a worldview where religion is included (or excluded). In this sense, both answers are scientific: there are scientific hypotheses that are construed within worldviews where religious experiences are considered as something real, and there are scientific hypotheses that are construed within worldviews where religious experiences are not considered at all.

What is the process? Humans make experiences, and these experiences they express through concepts and words. In this case, the experiential data are the loss of freedom and meaning, with other data: the decline in the rate of religious practice, and so on. This set of experiential data is expressed by some sociologists through the concept and term: secularization. These sociologists express these experiences by such a term because in their worldviews religions are a reality. But there are other sociologists who reject religions and the religious experiences, and, consequently, they cannot accept the term secularization as a concept explaining something real in what they experience in social groups. This last case is Habermas' case⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ Obviously this all depends on my definition of the

At this point, my final claim will be that both theses are right and wrong. There is no human way to determine with certainty which one is the right one, because for humans there is no way to escape such circularity of the human experience: there is no experience without a worldview, and there is no worldview without human experience. We are not able to elaborate worldviews without our experiences, and we are not able to experience the world without worldviews⁵¹.

Rationality and myth

In exploring Habermas' views on religion, we cannot stop here. In his first volume of The Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas does not connect myth with religion, but we will propose a theoretical framework in which these two aspects will be mutually understandable. Therefore, let's have a look to Habermas' views on the myth.

This first section of his book discusses rationality. Why? Modern societies present themselves as more rational. They understand the role and the function of the scientific experience in their midst as a predominance of rationality. This is one reason why it seemed appropriate for Habermas to

religious experience, which I will start to propose in Part Two.

⁵¹ First this means that pluralism is an essential feature of human knowledge, expressions and understanding. About the circularity of the human experience, cf. BERGER R. Pycclosis. The circularity of Experience. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1977.

start his research by a first approach upon rationality.

Globally Habermas claims that rationality refers to 'reasons': a more rational assertion is an assertion for which more reasons are given, it is also a more grounded assertion. What is the purpose of these reasons? When a person is criticized, she may give good reasons for her action: this person is more rational; when a claim is criticized, good reasons are expressed in order to defend it, in such a way that this claim becomes more rational. Obviously, because there are different types of persons and assertions, there are different kinds of rationality: we do not defend a normatively regulated action the same way we give reasons for an expressive artistic self-representation! This whole process may be called argumentation:

"The rationality inherent in this practice is seen in the fact that a communicatively achieved agreement must be based in the end on reasons. And the rationality of those who participate in this communicative practice is determined by whether, if necessary, they could, under suitable circumstances, provide reasons for their expressions. Thus the rationality proper to the communicative practice of everyday life points to the practice of argumentation as a court of appeal that makes it possible to continue communicative action."⁵²

About rational societies

This first approach has permitted us to understand better what is a more rational person or a more rational expression.

⁵² TCA1, 17.

Sociologists have made a further step: they speak about the rationality of human groups and societies:

"The question is, rather, whether A or B or a group of individuals behaves rationally in general; whether one may systematically expect that they have good reasons for their expressions and that these expressions are correct or successful in the cognitive dimension, reliable or insightful in the moral-practical dimension, discerning or illuminating in the evaluative dimension; that they exhibit understanding in the hermeneutic dimension; or indeed whether they are 'reasonable' in all these dimensions."⁵³

Therefore, sociologists ask a new question: in which sense could we argue for or against the rationality of societies? If modern societies are characterized as more rational societies, how could we claim that these societies are more rational than other ones?

In this section, Habermas only introduces the argument by posing the main concepts through which the sociologists elaborate their arguments. What are these concepts?

The main concept is the distinction between archaic and modern societies, and in establishing such distinction the conception of the 'myths' is crucial:

"In archaic societies myths fulfill the unifying function of worldviews in an exemplary way - they permeate life-practice. At the same time, within the cultural traditions accessible to us, they present the sharpest contrast to the understanding of the world dominant in modern societies. Mythical worldviews are far from making possible rational orientations of action in our sense. With respect to the conditions for a rational conduct of life in this sense, they present an antithesis to the modern understanding of the world.

⁵³ TCA1, 43.

Thus the heretofore unthematized presuppositions of modern thought should become visible in the mirror of mythical thinking."⁵⁴

Sociologists oppose archaic to modern societies, and the main difference is the mythical worldviews of the former societies. At the same time, Habermas considers that this mythical worldview is strongly irrational. This argument will lead such sociologists to conclude that the evolution from the archaic societies to our modern ones was marked by a process of rationalization.

How does Habermas develop his point? First, he tries to propose a rough characterization of the mythical worldview, then he examines Levi-Strauss', M. Godelier's, Peter Winch's, and Piaget's studies in order to better understand what rationality is all about.

Mythical worldviews

We always want to exhibit Habermas' conception of religion. Many sociologists consider three kinds of human societies: the societies with a mythical worldview, the societies with a religious-metaphysical worldview, and the modern societies with a more scientific worldview. We could conclude that human societies went through an evolution from the myths to the religions until sciences, and some sociologists interpret this evolution as a rationalization process and as a

⁵⁴ TCA1, 44.

progress.

In order to argue with them, we have to better understand what is myth and what's religion, and what is the role of these realities in human societies. In two sections, A. and B., Habermas first exposes the main characters of the mythical understanding of the world, and then explains why these views are not rational.

What are the main characters of the mythical understanding of the world?⁵⁵

- "On the one hand, abundant and precise information about the natural and social environment is processed in myths";
- "On the other hand, this information is organized in such a way that every individual appearance in the world, in its typical aspects, resembles or contrasts with every other appearance."
- Within this totality, everything finds a sense: "By analogy, the whole world makes sense, everything is significant, everything can be explained within a symbolic order, where all the positive known facts may take their place with all their rich abundance of detail."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Cf. TCA1, 45-48. For a different conception of the myths, cf. the works of Joseph Campbell and of Mircea Eliade.

⁵⁶ It is interesting to compare what Habermas says about these mythical societies where everything finds a sense and the way he describes the pathologies of modern societies as a loss of meaning. If here he connects the overflow of meaning with the mythical dimension of these archaic societies, Habermas does not want to connect the loss of meaning in

- Such worldview is "concretistic": "Structuralists explain this synthetic accomplishment through the fact that the 'savage mind' fastens in a concretistic way upon the perceptual surface of the world and orders these perceptions by drawing analogies and contrasts (...) Analogical thought weaves all appearances into a single network of correspondence, but its interpretations do not penetrate the surface of what can be grasped perceptually."⁵⁷

- Another characteristic of the experience of the world in archaic societies is "the experience of being delivered up unprotected to the contingencies of an unmastered environment." Consequently, because they do not control their environment, in their worldview they will accept "invisible causes and forces (...) beings endowed with consciousness, will, authority and power, therefore as beings analogous to men."⁵⁸ This is the context into which magic may

modern societies with the secularization process.

⁵⁷ I must confess that this character of the mythical worldview is not too clear to me, but I believe these structuralists refer to the fact that in expressing what they perceive into the world, these 'savage minds' are more sensitive to the analogies and to the connections between everything, in such a way that they do not define them as closed system, always preferring to note what connects the things instead of what opposes and distinguishes them. I perceive a similarity between this perception of things and the holistic attitude.

⁵⁸ I feel that here Habermas considers that animism is characteristic of mythical worldviews. By animism, I refer to those beliefs, opposed to materialism, that consider that everything in the world is constituted not only of matter but

develop as a technique for controlling these powers.

Why are mythical views non rational?

Habermas' main answer is that in these mythical worldviews there is a confusion of nature and culture, as well as of language and world, and finally an unclear demarcation between the external world and the internal one.

The differentiation between nature and culture is "fundamental to our understanding of the world"⁵⁹:

"Myths do not permit a clear, basic, conceptual differentiation between things and persons, between objects that can be manipulated and agents (...) Thus it is only consistent when magical practices do not recognize the distinction between teleological and communicative action, between goal-directed, instrumental intervention in objectively given situations, on the one hand, and the establishment of interpersonal relations, on the other."⁶⁰

Habermas considers that the process of rationalization has generated a "desocialization of nature" and a "denaturalization of society" from which a new attitude has developed in front of the world.

When the differentiation between the language and the world is deficient, there is the consequent belief that we may intervene into the world through language:

also of a spirit, or of a soul... This is the belief that everything in the universe has a spiritual dimension.

⁵⁹ TCA1, 48.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

"The magical relation between names and designated objects, the concretistic relation between the meaning of expressions and the states-of-affairs represented give evidence of systematic confusion between internal connections of meaning and external connections of objects."⁶¹

The last confusion is the one between the subject and the object; in these mythical worldviews, the ego identity of the person is not yet mastered as the one of an autonomous subject:

"A clear demarcation of a domain of subjectivity is apparently not possible. Intentions and motives are just as little separated from actions and their consequences as feelings are from their normatively fixed, stereotyped expressions."⁶²

In the next C section, Habermas tries to answer the question if our modern worldview may claim to universality, and he argues against it by examining Peter Winch's arguments about the Zande's worldview as exposed by the anthropologist Evans-Pritchard. These pages are extremely interesting for our argument, and it could be that we will have to come back to some of these points, but at this moment a long explanation does not seem convenient. His final summary should be enough for the time being:

"The course of our argumentation can perhaps be summarized as follows: Winch's arguments are too weak to uphold the thesis that inherent to every linguistically articulated worldview and to every cultural form of life there is an incommensurable concept of rationality; but his strategy of

⁶¹ TCA1, 49.

⁶² TCA1, 51.

argumentation is strong enough to set off the justified claim to universality on behalf of the rationality that gained expression in the modern understanding of the world from an uncritical self-interpretation of the modern world that is fixated on knowing and mastering external nature."⁶³

The last section exhibits Piaget's argument according to which in the modern worldview there is a promotion of "a distorted understanding of rationality that is fixed on cognitive-instrumental aspects"⁶⁴. Piaget has shown that the rationalization of the worldview is parallel to a learning process where there was a tendency to emphasize the cognitive development, and this has generated reification and utopianism⁶⁵.

Weber's Theory

Of Volume I of The Theory of Communicative Action, Chapter II: "Max Weber's Theory of Rationalization" occupies a third

⁶³ TCA1, 66.

⁶⁴ TCA1, 66.

⁶⁵ Many philosophies of religion expose well the connections between religion, myths and rituals; two good examples are: ALESSI A. Filosofia della religione. Rome: LAS, 1991; WUNENBURGER J.-J. Le sacré. Paris: PUF, 1981. At least three scholars have explored the meaning of the myths: Mircea Eliade, G. van der Leeuw, and Joseph Campbell: cf. ELIADE M. Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses (3 vol.). Paris: Payot, 1976-1986; ELIADE M. Aspects du mythe. Paris: Gallimard, 1963; ELIADE M. Le sacré et le profane. Paris: Gallimard, 1965; VAN DER LEEUW G. La religion dans son essence et ses manifestations. Paris: Payot, 1970; CAMPBELL J. The Hero with a Thousand Faces. New York: Pantheon Books, 1949; CAMPBELL J. The Masks of God (4 vol.). New York: Viking Press, 1959-1968.

part, in the English edition from pages 143 to 271. The chapter is divided into four sections:

1. Occidental Rationalism,
2. The Disenchantment of Religious-Metaphysical Worldviews and the Emergence of Modern Structures of Consciousness,
3. Modernization as Societal Rationalization: The Role of Protestant Ethic,
4. The Rationalization of Law. Weber's Diagnosis of the Times.

From pages 168 to 178, Habermas tries to clarify Weber's concept of rationality. According to Habermas, the rationalization process is realized in many different ways:

- first, there is a rationalization process when there is a "regulated employment of means". At this level, Weber talks about a 'rational technique';
- a second level of rationalization can be found when there are tests to check the efficacy of the means;
- for the next level, Weber suggests that there is a rationalization not only of the means but also of the ends: "the ends themselves can be more or less rational, i.e., chosen correctly, in an objective sense, in view of given values, means, and boundary conditions"; an end will be rationally chosen when it will be chosen not by affects or by traditions.
- About values and beliefs, it seems that Weber considered

that there could not be any rationality, but only awareness:

"We can demand only that the actor be aware of his preferences, that he make precise the underlying values and check then for consistency (...). In normative questions Weber is a sceptic; he is convinced that the decision between different value systems (however clarified analytically) cannot be grounded, cannot be rationally justified. Strictly speaking there is no rationality of value postulates or belief systems as regards their content."⁶⁶

If this is true, it seems also true that he considered that some rationality may be used about the way an actor will choose his preferences and orient his values:

"The rationality of the values underlying action preferences is not measured by their material content but by formal properties, that is, by whether they are so fundamental that they can ground a mode of life based on principles."⁶⁷

It is here that Habermas can distinguish the purposive rationality from the value rationality, and suggests that the latter was more developed in Eastern worldviews.

- But there is another rationality that seems to me very important and which Habermas mentions as (f), introducing it with these words:

"Weber terms 'rational' the formal organization of symbol systems, of religious systems in particular, as well as of legal and moral representations. He attributes great significance to the intellectual strata both in the development of dogmatically rationalized religions of salvation and in the development of formal law. Intellectuals specialize in shaping and improving, from formal points of view, traditional symbol systems as soon as they are fixed in writing. This is a matter

⁶⁶ TCA1, on page 171.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

of rendering meanings precise, of explicating concepts, of systematizing thought motifs, of consistency among sentences, of methodical construction, of simultaneously increasing the complexity and specificity of teachable knowledge. This rationalization of worldviews attaches to the internal relations of symbol systems."⁶⁸

When done for religions, it is usual to call this activity 'theology', considered as reason confronting the religious experience⁶⁹, but I must note that Habermas never studies these different objects (or aspects) of the religious experience: in all social groups, there are intellectuals or scholars who try to 'rationalize' (give reasons for) the religious experience made in their own society.

Habermas added that Weber evaluates the biggest achievement of this rationalization into the overcoming of magical beliefs⁷⁰. But Habermas does not propose his own evaluation of the theological process.

- The last dimension of the rationalization may be found when there is a significative enhancement within an autonomous sphere according to its own inner logic:

⁶⁸ TCA1, on pages 174-175.

⁶⁹ For a good study on the relationship between faith, religion, and theology, cf. MCBRIEN. Catholicism. San Francisco: Harper, 1981, on pages 23-29.

⁷⁰ A good study on this topic is: TAMBIAH S.J. Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Till now, I was not able to consult: STENMARK M. Rationality in Science, Religion, and Everyday Life: A Critical Evaluation of Four Models of Rationality. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.

"As soon as science, morality, and art have been differentiated into autonomous spheres of values, each under one universal claim -truth, normative rightness, authenticity or beauty- objective advances, improvements, enhancements become possible in a sense specific to each."⁷¹

This form of rationalization is called 'value-enhancing rationalization'.

The disenchantment

For Weber, there is another question: how was this rationalization process possible in the Western societies? The answer to this question is what he calls the disenchantment of the religious-metaphysical worldviews. This is the main subject of the second section of this chapter on Max Weber.

What does this disenchantment mean? How does it come out? Obviously it was a long and difficult process. It started with some differentiations between facts and values, between ideas and interests. In the previous worldviews, values and ideas were the main elements, and with the rise of the new worldview facts and interests took over; there was a transfer of interest from the ideal interests to the human material interests, from values like salvation and eternal life to prosperity, health, and longevity.

But a stable society always needs both levels, not only the

⁷¹ TCA1, on pages 176-177.

satisfaction of the basic human needs, but also an order of meanings, that is supported by an intellectualization process. At this point, with Weber, we may distinguish traditional societies from modern ones: in the traditional societies, the orders of meanings were stable and fixed, and a main change could happen only under the strong influence of a charismatic figure. This is what has happened with the foundation of the world religions; subsequently intellectuals were able to stabilize these new orders of meanings through a process of rationalization.

But how could we measure this rationalization?

"Weber judges the rationalization of worldviews by the extent to which magical thinking is overcome."⁷²

This may be done in the relationship between God and the believer, and secondly through a demythologization of the world itself. This has occurred in the Western societies where the potential from Greek Philosophy has merged with the potential from Judaism and Christianity.

The last step of the rationalization process of the Western societies was produced through the secularization that has expelled out of the worldview religious and metaphysical concepts like God, salvation, being, and nature. This was possible because of the role of Protestant Ethic (section 3) and of law (section 4). It was not only a rationalization of

⁷² TCA1, on page 212.

the worldview, but also a societal rationalization, because it was embodied into the main social institutions of these societies:

"The two institutional complexes in which Weber sees modern structures of consciousness mainly embodied -and which he regards as exemplary for spelling out the process of societal rationalization- are the capitalist economy and the modern state."⁷³

In these pages, Habermas agrees with much of Weber's presentation, except for two aspects.

-1- Cultural value spheres VS cultural action systems

"Weber does not draw a precise distinction between the level of cultural tradition and that of institutionalized action systems or orders of life."⁷⁴

-2- No place for religion

Habermas claimed that we may understand Weber's main theses in the following way:

- the cognitive-instrumental rationality is institutionalized in the scientific enterprise;
- the aesthetic-practical rationality is institutionalized in the artistic enterprise;
- the moral-practical rationality of the world religions ethic is incompatible with the modern men;
- even the Protestant Ethic is condemned;
- but in this situation the need for meaning is not satisfied.

⁷³ TCA1, on page 217.

⁷⁴ TCA1, on page 234.

In his diagnosis, Weber seems to regret what has happened to religion. Here is the second Habermas' critique; he considers that Weber's idea that the Western rationalization was only one possible rationalization process

"retains a certain plausibility only so long as Weber does not take into account, with respect to the moral-practical complex of rationality, a form of religious ethic of brotherliness secularized at the same level as modern science and autonomous art, a communicative ethic detached from its foundations in salvation religion; that is, so long as he remains generally fixated instead on the relations of tension between religion and the world."⁷⁵

I understand that Habermas wants to detach the modern worldview from all the religious complex, and he laments that Weber continues to connect the loss of freedom and the loss of meaning found in the modern societies to a loss in the religious value sphere.

The last section of this chapter is called, "The Rationalization of Law. Weber's diagnosis of the Times". In this title, there are two elements, and I believe that these two elements are a symptom of Habermas' difficulty to capture what religion is. Why do I claim this?

Not only in the title, but also within this section, there are two parts, A. and B. In A, Habermas examines "the two most important elements of Weber's diagnosis", and in B he studies "the rationalization of law"⁷⁶. My claim that this is

⁷⁵ TCA1, on page 242.

⁷⁶ TCA1, on page 243. At the beginning of each section,

a symptom of Habermas' misunderstanding of religion comes from the fact that, under a title announcing a global study on the rationalization of law, Habermas studies at least one element that I believe is 'religious'. Which element? The loss of meaning. According to me, the loss of meaning, on which Habermas agrees with Weber as a distinct character of the modern societies, is not connected with the rationalization of law, but with what many sociologists call the secularization of these societies, and therefore with the decline of religious experience.

The two important elements of Weber's diagnosis of modern societies are: the loss of meaning and the loss of freedom. How did they come up? Weber sees two main reasons: the differentiation of independent cultural value spheres and the growing autonomy of subsystems of purposive actions have combined to produce these two social effects. I have claimed that the first of them is 'religious', but I am not sure that I must not make a similar claim for the second element⁷⁷. Let's have a better look at the first element.

almost always, Habermas exposes himself the plan of his exposé.

⁷⁷ The communist experience of the Eastern European societies could lead me to believe that freedom is an element of the religious experience; it seems to me a fact that in these societies there was an attempt to destroy the religious experience and (related or not) there was also a terrible loss of freedom. Were these two aspects connected? Freedom is also a very important theme of the South American theologies of liberation, as it was in the ancient history of

When the various cultural spheres are more and more autonomous, people become aware of their own inner logic, and this has two consequences: first, there is a rationalization of the symbol systems by which these cultural spheres are expressed; and second the unity of the whole worldview falls apart:

"The meaning-giving unity of metaphysical-religious worldviews thereby falls apart. A competition arises among the autonomous value spheres (...) These spheres of life drift into the tensions with one another."⁷⁸

Weber and Habermas are conscious that the metaphysical-religious worldviews of the past societies gave them a unity that insures meaning to the whole, and this could have induced Habermas to connect the loss of meaning with the religious experience.

In the following pages, Habermas examined the connection between the loss of meaning and the loss of unity. Obviously, the problem of unity exists in all societies, and was solved differently in the various kinds of societies: in the mythical societies, the conflicts among the different spheres were represented (and personified) into the myths; in traditional civilizations, the unity was insured by the religious-metaphysical worldviews; at least, this seems the sociological hypothesis. But now, in the modern societies,

the Jewish people.

⁷⁸ TCA1, on page 244.

this unity is not insured as much, and

"worldviews as such fall to pieces."⁷⁹

We may ask: why did the traditional worldviews have this unifying power?

"Both ethically rationalized religious worldviews and cognitively rationalized metaphysical worldviews still held together -in principles such as God, Nature, Reason, and the like- the three aspects under which the world can become accessible to rational treatment, as an objective or social or subjective world. They were thus able to impart a unitary sense to the life-conduct of those who oriented themselves according to these worldviews in their thought and action."⁸⁰

From this diagnosis, Habermas disagrees with Weber on a consequence: for Weber, the falling apart of the united worldviews makes possible a new polytheism:

"It is, of course, true that with the appearance of modern structures of consciousness the immediate unity of the true, the good, and the perfect, which is suggested by religious and metaphysical basic concepts, falls apart (...) But Weber goes too far when he infers from the loss of substantial unity of reason a polytheism of gods and demons struggling with one another."⁸¹

Habermas' argument is that if it is true that each value sphere has its own argumentation, there must be a connection of all of them through the formal properties of all the validity claims. Habermas is aware that we have not yet developed

⁷⁹ TCA1, on page 245.

⁸⁰ TCA1, on page 246.

⁸¹ TCA1, on pages 248-249.

"a pragmatic logic of argumentation that satisfactorily captures the internal connections between forms of speech acts. Only such a theory of discourse could explicitly state wherein the unity of argumentation consists and what we mean by procedural rationality after all substantial concepts of reason have been critically dissolved."⁸²

If Weber was not able to overlook his diagnosis of polytheism, it is because he does not distinguish enough between the value contents of cultural traditions and universal formal standards of value, according to Habermas.

⁸² TCA1, on page 249.

The Chicago Conference

On October 7-9, 1988, at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, a conference was held on "Critical Theory: Its Promise and Limitations for a Theology of the Public Realm". Organized by Phil Devenish and Don S. Browning, it regrouped about 25 participants: among them, F. Schüssler Fiorenza, David Tracy, Helmut Peukert, Matthew Lamb, and Charles Davis. Jürgen Habermas was also there⁸³.

Especially after the publication of The Theory of Communicative Action, many monographs and articles were published by theologians, commenting Habermas' work and explaining its implications for theology. Often some limitations of Habermas' thinking on these aspects were emphasised. Already in 1980, Charles Davis had published Theology and Political Society, but it was mostly Helmut Peukert's book Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology that displays the importance of Habermas for a better, more critical and more modern understanding of the religious

⁸³ I don't even claim that the Chicago Conference will give us everything that's missing on Habermas' views of religion. It seemed to me interesting to complement our reading of some sections of The Theory of Communicative Action with a fast look on this conference, especially because in his talk Habermas used a lot the term 'experience', which I evaluate crucial in my critique.

experience and of theology⁸⁴. A deeper dialogue between Jürgen Habermas and theologians became convenient, and the Chicago conference was a major step into it. Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology was edited by Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, with almost all the speeches of the conference and also with Habermas' response "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World"⁸⁵.

In his introduction, F. Schüssler Fiorenza made the important following remark:

"The theologians here share the conviction that religious traditions contain resources necessary for interpreting human nature and society. Consequently, theological reflection on the meaning of religious traditions can significantly contribute to an understanding not only of human nature and society, but also of rationality and modernity. On the basis of this shared conviction, they argue that if Habermas would attend more to the role of religion within human life and society, he would more closely realize his project for a communicative rationality under the conditions of modernity and would offer a more comprehensive understanding of rationality, society, and modernity."⁸⁶

⁸⁴ I was amazed to notice that H. Peukert followed a path similar to mine in reaching Habermas's thought: my questioning started with how to find a foundation for theology in experience, and therefore in exploring the scientific concept of experience. Peukert explores the evolution of philosophy of sciences in the XXth century before studying Habermas' suggestion about communicative action.

⁸⁵ Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology, Ed. by Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza. Crossroad, New York. 1992. In a preface, Don S. Browning explains the logistic of the conference, while in an introduction Francis Schüssler Fiorenza develops the main elements of its contents (page VI and 1-18). We will refer to it in the following way: HMPT (1992).

⁸⁶ HMPT (1992), 3. I totally agree with this remark.

The Concept of Experience

In his response to the conference, Habermas starts by explaining why he has always refrained from a dialogue with theologians, "for I am not really familiar with the theological discussion"⁸⁷.

According to Habermas, if the sociologists could assume the observer's perspective in front of religion, the situation is slightly different for the philosophers, "at least for one who has grown up at German universities with Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, including the latter's Marxist legacy"⁸⁸. Such heritage comprises Kant's inclusion of the Christian tradition "before the forum of reason"⁸⁹, and Hegel's inclusion of the religious salvific interpretation of the whole of history within his global concept of the development of the Absolute Spirit.

If this is the specific philosophical background, Habermas also notes an experiential one: after the war, theologians gave some answers to the unsustainable questions:

"It was the Confessing Church which at that time with its acknowledgement of guilt at least attempted a new

This is one of the reasons for this study.

⁸⁷ Ibidem, 226.

⁸⁸ Ibidem, 227.

⁸⁹ Ibidem.

beginning."⁹⁰

Habermas has seen

- laypeople and theologians seeking to free the church from its alliance with temporal power,
- also searching for universal standards for the public political realm,
- religious people with a public engagement "which broke away from the conventionality and interiority of a merely private confession"⁹¹, working seriously for human dignity, social emancipation, and democratization.

I have quoted this paragraph because it shows that Habermas' experience of religion is not only from books but also from life, and even public life. Theology is a 'logos', a discourse about something, and this something is what globally we may call religion. What is this "something"? My personal answer would be: the religious experience. But does Habermas consider the possibility of such human experience? This is why I want to concentrate here on the uses Habermas makes of the term "experience" in this Chicago talk.

In these pages, there is a conception of the relationships between human experience, thought and language, that we must explicate, because our main hypothesis claims that this is the core of what is problematic with Habermas' views.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, 228.

⁹¹ Ibidem.

In the section 'The Truth Claim of Theological Discourse'⁹², the word 'experience' is used 18 times in 5 pages! In this post-Empiricist, post-Metaphysical, and post-Scientific era, the word 'experience' is crucial to all thinking, and especially to epistemology. So let's have a better look at Habermas' uses of this term⁹³. We will not only show how Habermas uses this term, but we will also explore the assumptions such use supposes, as well as make comments and critiques.

-1-2-

Habermas distinguishes between religion and theology, and he also distinguishes religious discourse from theology. It is one of his main hypotheses that a discourse is something interactive, and consequently he suggests that the religious discourse is conducted by the religious community. Such a religious discourse, to what does it refer? Here come the first two uses of the term 'experience':

⁹² In ibidem, from page 231 to page 236.

⁹³ There are some occurrences of this term in Habermas' The Theory of Communicative Action. I have noted one right into Durkheim's definition of religion, where religion is presented as a collective experience: cf. TCA2, 50. Then, when he exposes Parsons' theory upon the human condition. Habermas writes that "Parsons' filling of this gap is a result not only of his religious needs and experiences (...)": TCA2, 253. If there is a 'religious experience' as a dimension of human experience, is it not normal to include this experience in a view of what is the human condition?

"The religious discourse conducted within the communities of the faithful takes place in the context of a specific tradition with substantive norms and an elaborated dogmatics. It refers to a common ritual praxis and bases itself on the specifically religious experiences of the individual. It is, however, more than the non-objectifying, hermeneutically understanding reference to religious discourse and to the experiences underlying this discourse that characterizes theology."⁹⁴

The religious discourse takes place within the community of the believers. Such contextualization is true not only for the religious discourse, but for all discourses; all human discourses, even if they are made within the walls of a private room, take place within a community, and at least use the community language. There is no discourse without a language, and all languages are of a human group.

But a community is not only a language, it is always a context, a culture, with beliefs, knowledge, experiences, norms, procedures, and so on; it is a lifeworld, as explained in The Theory of Communicative Action. Therefore, Habermas notes rightly that the religious discourse of a religious community takes place also in the specific context in which this community lives. This context, we may call a 'tradition', as everything that is 'transmitted' from one generation to the next, in this case from a generation of members to the following generation of believers. Such a human process is not linear and it supposes constant changes, as we all suppose when we mention the generation gap.

⁹⁴ Ibidem, 231-232.

Habermas refers explicitly to substantive norms and elaborated dogmatics. For our purpose, let's consider first that in a religious tradition there are norms (they are not all substantive) and dogmatics (they are not all elaborated). Habermas continues by mentioning also a common ritual praxis and the religious experiences of the individual. Can we consider that this list of four elements is an adequate description of a religious tradition? In what sense are we able to place on the same level the norms, the dogmas, the rituals and the individual religious experiences?

Let's make the following comments. All human experiences are at the same time individual and collective, and this seems especially true as well for the religious experiences. I consider the religious norms, dogmas, and rituals to be not only individual experiences but also collective experiences. This is obvious especially with rituals. But what about the norms and the dogmas?

I am not sure that I agree with Habermas' answer to this question; I see a tendency to separate these religious norms and dogmas from the human experiences. As a matter of fact, in my estimation, these norms are nothing else than rules that the community, through different procedures, has decided to accept as its 'norms', its 'principles of conduct', its 'laws'. A similar argument may be made about the dogmas, as the formally codified beliefs of a religious community:

obviously, as all other human groups, a religious community has many beliefs and hypotheses. When a religious community presents a belief as a dogma, it also says something about the nature and importance of this belief for the community: the community (or the community leaders, or the theologians) hold that someone cannot be a full member of the community without accepting this belief.

For me, what is true of religious communities is true of all human groups: all human groups identify themselves with beliefs, hypotheses, sciences, norms, principles, philosophies, and practices... And all groups tend to reject deviant people, deviant because they do not accept part of the common heritage: it could be a belief (and they will be declared heretics⁹⁵), it could be a behaviour (they will be declared sinners or insane⁹⁶). So we must recognize that there is more in religious communities than norms, dogmatics, and rituals⁹⁷, but we may accept with Habermas that these are

⁹⁵ The freedom of thought and of speech is a recent conquest of just a few human groups.

⁹⁶ A good example is the attitude of the human groups in front of homosexuality and abortion. Cf. FOUCAULT M. Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique. Paris: Gallimard, 1972; FOUCAULT M. Histoire de la sexualité. Paris: Gallimard, 1983-1984; BOSWELL J. Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

⁹⁷ Books like Van Der Leeuw's Phenomenology of Religion and Eliade's history of religious thought are good examples of a wider conception of religion. Some insights may also be found in many books of philosophy of religion, when they try

crucial elements in all religious communities.

So what is Habermas' argument? It is twofold: first he says that the religious discourse takes place within the context of a tradition of norms and dogmatics, second that it refers to a ritual praxis and bases itself on individual religious experiences. These two claims must be questioned in the following way.

Obviously, each discourse takes place within a context, but we cannot agree that the context of the religious discourse is only norms and dogmatics; the context of the religious discourse is more than just the norms and the dogmatics of this religious community.

But when Habermas writes that the religious discourse 'takes place in this context', what does he mean? Obviously he means that if we want to understand and interpret a religious discourse, we must put it into the right context, and on this he is correct, even if it is also true that to better understand a discourse it is also useful to try to put it in different contexts⁹⁸. If this is true, this is not the whole

to define what is religion.

⁹⁸ Examples? If I want to understand the 'redemption discourse' of the Catholic Tradition, it is useful to study it also against the Protestant Tradition; and for a better understanding of the Christian redemption discourse, it is useful to compare it with the Buddhist, the Hinduist and the Islamic discourses. If I want to understand the relationships between men and women in the Western civilization, it is good to compare it with the relations between women and men in African cultures, in Asian cultures,

picture, because the relations between the discourse and its context is not unidirectional, but mutual: if the discourse is influenced by the context, this same context is construed also by the discourse itself. This is one of the main claims of Habermas' theory on communicative actions: in all human groups there are actions of communication (mostly but not exclusively through discourses) by which these groups search and construe their own context or lifeworld. We must then conclude that the religious discourse and the religious context in which it is held influence and construe each other.

Habermas also claims that the religious discourse refers to a ritual praxis and bases itself on individual religious experiences. I do not believe that religious discourse refers only to the ritual praxis; when two believers talk about their faith, they do not talk only of their ritual praxis, they also refer to beliefs and ethic, for instance. But in all cases, I claim that they refer to their religious experiences.

This is the term we are trying here to clarify. From this one quotation, we could conclude that Habermas has an individualistic conception of human experiences, as he mentions only the 'experiences of the individual'.

And this is not clarified by the second use of the term, in

and so on.

the sentence we have already quoted:

"It is, however, more than the non-objectifying, hermeneutically understanding reference to religious discourse and to the experiences underlying this discourse that characterizes theology."⁹⁹

Habermas expresses clearly his views that experiences underly discourses, but here he does not clearly express that experiences are always individual as well as collective-social.

-3-

The third use of the term 'experience' appears when Habermas exposes Metz's views, according to which the basic concepts of metaphysics are too rigid

"to be able to retrieve rationally those experiences of redemption, universal alliance, and irreplaceable individuality which have been articulated in the language of the Judeo-Christian history of salvation"¹⁰⁰.

Therefore, at least in Metz's view, although the wording does not exclude that Habermas agrees with it, within the religious experience there are experiences of redemption, universal alliance and irreplaceable individuality. We must note that this seems more than norms, dogmas and ritual praxis, even if it may be said that these experiences may be made within the context of norm, dogmatic and ritual experiences.

⁹⁹ Ibidem, 231-232.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem, 232.

-4-5-6-7-

The next four uses of the term 'experience' appear within the same context. Habermas describes Adorno's project as following 'the same impulse' and he continues:

"Here it is the experience of an equality that does not level out difference and of a togetherness that individualizes. It is the experience of a closeness across distance to an other acknowledged in his or her difference. It is the experience of a combination of autonomy and self-surrender, a reconciliation which does not extinguish the differences, a future-oriented justice that is in solidarity with the unreconciled suffering of past generations. It is the experience of the reciprocity of freely granted acknowledgement, of a relationship in which a subject is associated to another without being submitted to the degrading violence of exchange -a derisive violence that allows for the happiness and power of the one only at the price of the unhappiness and powerlessness of the other."¹⁰¹

Clearly, Habermas refers to an experience where opposed dimensions or aspects are merged in a certain unity or communion, an experience where certain pluralisms do not destroy unity, the experience of a diversity within unity. And he seems to refer this experience to Adorno's project. It is difficult to be more explicit about such experience because there are no quotations or references to any of Adorno's books. I may suggest the following comment: in connecting these experiences to Adorno's project, Habermas seems to suppose that even a philosophical project could be related to human experiences.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem, 232-233.

-8-9-10-11-

First, Habermas studies the consequences of a rejection of metaphysics, and he names Metz and Adorno as examples. But there is a second point on which he studies the relations between philosophy and theology: how could philosophy be related to religious discourse? It is in this context that he refers to Glebe-Möller and his methodical atheism, because Habermas believes that philosophy could not accept the religious discourse as 'religious'. He writes:

"Philosophy cannot appropriate what is talked about in religious discourse as religious experiences. These experiences could only be added to the fund of philosophy's resources, recognized as philosophy's own basis of experience, if philosophy identifies these experiences using a description that is no longer borrowed from the language of a specific religious tradition, but from the universe of argumentative discourse that is uncoupled from the event of revelation."¹⁰²

Philosophy and theology are parts of what Habermas calls expert cultures, and at this level the experts, in the former case the philosophers and in the latter case the theologians, appropriate what is talked about at another level of discourse; for the philosophers appropriate in their own way the discourse of the common sense, while the theologians appropriate religious discourse.

But could the philosophers appropriate the religious

¹⁰² Ibidem, 233. The next three uses of the term 'experience' immediately follow this section.

discourse in their own philosophical way? Habermas answers negatively. If philosophers were to appropriate religious discourse, the philosophers' discourse would not become theology but remain philosophy, because they will add this religious discourse to their own basis of human experiences, without acknowledging it's religious quality. Why would this be so? Why is it that the religious discourse loses its 'religious' quality when it is integrated within the philosophical discourse? I feel that there is an ambiguity apparent: it is true that the religious discourse is no more a religious discourse when it is made by philosophers as philosophers¹⁰³, because we may a priori consider the philosophical discourse as distinct from the religious one. But when the philosophers talk about the religious experience, this philosophical discourse does not change the human experience, the religious experience expressed in the discourse remains the same; but now, when it is transposed (translated) into philosophy, this same human experience is

¹⁰³ Obviously, philosophers may have religious experiences and may express them into a religious discourse. But when they do so, they are the faithfuls of a religious community, the believers of a faith. It is also obvious that this distinction may be questioned: when a person expresses one of her experiences, may we say that she uses only a part, a section, a dimension of her lifeworld, of her philosophy of life, only a chapter or some chapters of her philosophy? In a very strict sense, the answer must be: no. Therefore, the philosophical discourse always takes place into a context into which religion and spirituality are never totally absent.

expressed within another specific framework, that is philosophy. In order to be better understood, I want to give another example, taken from theology: theologians may also make a theology of the city, a theology of humans, a theology of death, and everytime their discourse is theological¹⁰⁴, but obviously theologians are not the only experts to make a expert discourse on cities, humans, or death: sociology, anthropology, psychology, biology, and medicine, among other expert discourses, also make a discourse on these human experiences, each one with its own perspective and focus.

So Habermas is wrong when he writes that philosophers cannot appropriate the religious experiences as religious, but he is right when he claims that the philosophers' discourse about these same religious experiences will neither be a religious discourse, nor a theological one, but a philosophical discourse.

When he describes this process, Habermas connects the theological discourse to the specific religious tradition into which it is held. Here again, in a sense he is right, and in another sense he is wrong. Obviously, a Catholic theology must refer to the Catholic tradition, and this is why it will be a Catholic theology; but the Catholic experience could be looked at by a Buddhist theologian, or by

¹⁰⁴ It is one of my theses that each of these discourses is specific because of the focus with which it looks at the human experience.

a Anglican theologian; in all these cases, the discourses that will result will always be theological, even if they will refer to different religious traditions. So there is a link between a theology and its own religious tradition, but it is not this link that makes it theological: this link makes it either Catholic, Protestant, Islamic, or Shintoist...

But I also want to emphasize that Habermas considers that the expert discourse has human experiences as its basis; when he writes that the religious experiences (not as religious) will be recognized by the philosophers "as philosophy's own basis of experience". We must note that Habermas connects discourse to the human experiences through different terms: sometimes he connects them by using the verb 'to refer', as in the sentence on page 231 according to which the religious discourse refers to a common ritual praxis; sometimes he uses the verb 'to join', for instance in a sentence on page 233 where he writes that "religious discourse is closely joined to a ritual praxis"; and sometimes the term is 'basis' as in the text we have just quoted. All these terms refer to the same experience, that is to say, there is a relation (a connection, a link) between the human experience and human language. What is this relation? Habermas presupposes an answer, that he (or his translator) does not make explicit here.

-12-13-14-

We find these three uses of the term 'experience' immediately after the four previous ones. Therefore, we may suppose the same context. What is it? Habermas claims that philosophy cannot appropriate the religious discourses as religious, and in his project this means that the philosophical discourse cannot accept the global discourse of the religious tradition. So the discourse of the philosophers must be 'uncoupled from the event of revelation'.

Habermas continues that if such a neutralization of the religious discourse fails, then the philosopher will have to confess failure to make a philosophical discourse about the religious experience. At this point, Habermas comes back to the redemption experience he mentioned about Metz, and he adds other experiences as 'messianic light' and 'restoration of nature'. He says:

"The metaphorical use of words such as 'redemption', 'messianic light', 'restoration of nature', etc., makes religious experience a mere citation. In these moments of its powerlessness, argumentative speech passes over beyond religion and science into literature, into a mode of presentation that is no longer directly measured by truth claims. In an analogical way, theology also loses its identity if it only cites religious experiences, and under the descriptions of religious discourse no longer acknowledges them as its own basis. Therefore, I hold that a conversation cannot succeed between a theology and a philosophy which use the language of religious authorship and which meet on the bridge of religious experiences that have become literary expressions."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem, 233.

What does this mean? Here Habermas speaks about the metaphorical use of words such as 'redemption', 'messianic light', and 'restoration of nature'. I may understand quite well what he means by the metaphorical use of the second of these expressions, 'messianic light', but I have more difficulty with the use of the other two expressions. I believe that all words may also be used metaphorically, or that in the use of words, there are always metaphorical as well as non-metaphorical uses¹⁰⁶. I wish to make some distinctions: in both cases, what is important is to find what they refer to in 'real life', and by this metaphorical expression I mean first in 'human experience'. The word 'redemption' is used by theologians, by believers and by other people (poets for instance), and in each case these people refer to specific human experiences. The reference may be said to be metaphorical, allegorical, or parabolical, or factual, etc., but in all cases there is a reference to

¹⁰⁶ As a matter of fact, it would be more precise to claim that in the use of a term there are always different aspects, more or less metaphorical, more or less factual, more or less aesthetic, more or less emotive... As a pendulum, the use of a term by a social group swings between these different aspects. The same term used by philosophers may become very factual (in the sense that these philosophers are more and more explicit about the experiences to which they refer it), theological when used by theologians, and metaphorical when used by poets: an example could be the term 'light' used by the gospel of St. John, by an expert in physics, or by a poet. Cf. STENGERS I. & SCHLANGER J. Les concepts scientifiques. Paris: Gallimard, 1988.

something; what is important is to connect it to the right thing (or event or person, etc.). And, according to me, this does not become 'a mere citation' because it is referred to in a metaphorical way, or in a factual way, or any other way. The human experience is always so rich and complex that it may be expressed in many different ways, and there is no one particular way that totally expresses it. With his 'Eureka!', the naked Archimedes referred not only to a mathematical formula, but was also expressing a happy achievement.

Habermas seems to suppose that philosophy uses an argumentative speech where metaphors (or parables, etc.) are excluded¹⁰⁷. This is not true, just as it is not true that metaphors are the domain of literature. Obviously, in poetry we find more metaphors than in chemistry, but in both cases the discourses refer to human experiences. It is not because the reference to the experience is metaphorical that an expert discourse cannot be made, or a philosophical one. Obviously, literature, as sociology, psychology and

¹⁰⁷ There is a philosophy in Shakespeare, for instance, and some philosophers have tried to expose their views in non-argumentative discourse: for instance, Jean-Paul Sartre in his plays, like Huis-Clos, and all the autobiographies of philosophers. Often, the scientific discourse has started with a metaphor and became more and more factual: this is the case with the term 'atom', that started very philosophical and is now understood almost exclusively in a factual way.

philosophy, may talk about the human religious experiences¹⁰⁸, but I claim that it will not be the nature of the reference between the terms and the experiences that will create the specificity of each of these discourses: I believe this specificity comes from the focus with which the human experience is viewed.

Nevertheless, Habermas is right when he claims that theology will lose its identity "if it cites only religious experiences and under the descriptions of religious discourse no longer acknowledges them as its own basis". So it is clear that between the religious experience and theology, there must be a specific relation: which one? Here Habermas claims that the religious experience must be taken as the 'basis' of theology, as common sense must be taken as the basis of philosophy. What do we mean by such 'basis'? In this use of the term 'basis', as in any other use, we must not be blocked by the fact that its use is more or less metaphorical, more or less factual, more or less allegorical, and we must try to understand the connection between this term and our human experiences. This is the whole question of meaning. Therefore, in this context, what is the meaning of 'basis'? Again Habermas does not explicitly answer this question here.

¹⁰⁸ A good example of a philosophical discourse about the religious experiences is William James' The Variety of the Religious Experiences.

-15-

The following use of the term 'experience' occurs within the section where Habermas tries to elaborate the difference between theological discourse and the religious discourse: in specifying this difference, Habermas uses the term 'translation'. The experts 'translate' the 'lower' level discourse into another level. But these translations occur in different contexts: if in the past the context was largely metaphysical, we now live into a postmetaphysical context. When theology was translating within a metaphysical context, there was no problem. But Habermas comments:

"This situation only changed with the collapse of metaphysics. Under the conditions of postmetaphysical thinking, whoever puts forth a truth claim today must, nevertheless, translate experiences that have their home in religious discourse into the language of a scientific expert culture -and from this language retranslate them back into praxis."¹⁰⁹

I truly agree with Habermas that the expert culture, scientific, philosophical, theological or artistic, translate human experiences into a specific language. But I disagree when he claims that the philosophical context (metaphysical or not) may have an influence on the existence itself of these expert discourses.

If Habermas is describing only the fact of the extraordinary influence of the scientific culture upon all the other expert

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem, 234.

discourses of today, then he is right; but if he is making a normative claim, I disagree. If Habermas is describing only the fact that, at the end of this century, the sciences have become so important in our paradigm that we tend to believe that only scientific discourse may be qualified as true or false (truth claim), I agree. But if Habermas claims that non-scientific discourses cannot put forth truth claim, he is wrong. This supposes a whole conception of truth, and Habermas has made a strong contribution to it.

What we must retain here is the following claim: of the same human experience, there are different discourses; we may even speak of the translation of a specific expert discourse into a different expert discourse. All these discourses are influenced by the assumptions, beliefs, creeds of their own paradigm or lifeworld.

-16-17-18-

The last three uses of the term 'experience' occur within the context of a discourse about the relation between theology, the religious discourse, and the religious experiences.

First, Habermas claims that religious discourse must keep as basis these human experiences as religious. He writes:

"For religious discourses would lose their identity if they were to open themselves up to a type of interpretation which no longer allows the religious experiences to be valid as religious."¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Ibidem, 234.

Second, Habermas comments that this is exactly what a type of Catholic theology has made; this enlightened Catholicism

"does this without renouncing the acknowledgement of the experiences articulated in the language of the Judeo-Christian tradition as its own base of experience."¹¹¹

These three uses emphasize the importance for a discourse to have a basis in experience. I will not further comment on this aspect.

Conclusions on Experience

Habermas uses the term 'experience', but he does not make explicit any one meaning. I consider that this is one of the fundamental weaknesses of his expert discourse as a sociologist. As a conclusion to this already long excursus, let's make the following remarks, trying to underline what could be common and different between Habermas' conception of experience and my own views.

What is there? For humans of all cultures and centuries, what is basic is the human experience, as the complex set of activities and passivities between humans and their environments. This experience is translated into different discourses.

A first differentiation is between the common language and the expert discourse: philosophy translates the discourse of

¹¹¹ Ibidem, 235.

the common sense, as theology translates the religious discourse.

All these discourses must be understood within different contexts: first there is the human group within which they exist, and this is why Catholic theology must be understood over the background of the experiences made by the Catholic community: the Catholic Tradition. But there are also other contexts, for instance the philosophical context: the theological discourse within the metaphysical context translates the religious experiences in a different way than the theological discourse of a postmetaphysical era. In a similar way, the Catholic experience is translated into a Catholic theology (as an expert discourse upon the Catholic experience) by theologians of the XXth century in a different way (because they translate it within a culture largely influenced by science, for instance).

There are other aspects of Habermas' uses of the term 'experience' with which we have many more questions. Let's mention some of these questions:

- how do we connect language with experiences: we could call this the problem of 'meaning';
- how could we verify that what is expressed in the discourse is rightly connected to the human experiences: this could be referred as the 'truth' question;
- Habermas connects religious experiences and discourses to a

specific 'tradition': it could be convenient to better explicate such relation¹¹².

Helmut Peukert

According to Habermas, theologians do not "want to be bound to one of the three alternatives that I have named"¹¹³; they do not want to follow the demythologization path, they do not

¹¹² In a previous note, I have tried to explain where does my concept of experience come from, here I want to make more explicit where my concept of religious experience comes from. In almost all the philosophies of religion, there is a chapter about the religious experience: for instance, STEPHEN EVANS C. Philosophy of Religion. Thinking about Faith. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985; Philosophy of Religion. Selected Readings. Ed. by ROWE W.L. & WAINWRIGHT W.J., San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989. One of the most famous books about this topic is: JAMES W. The Varieties of Religious Experience. New York: Penguin, 1985 (first published in 1902). An analysis of the concept of experience applied to religions is made by the following studies: EDWARDS D. Human Experience of God. New York: Paulist Press, 1983; PROUDFOOT W. Religious Experience. University of California Press, 1985; FRANKENBERRY N. Religion and Radical Empiricism. New York: State University of New York Press, 1987; God: Experience or Origin. Ed. by A. de NICOLAS & E. MOUTSOPOULOS. New York: Paragon, 1985; XXX, L'expérience comme lieu théologique. Montreal: Fides, 1983; XXX, L'expérience religieuse, in Chemins de Dialogue, Marseille, Janvier 1994; MESLIN M. L'expérience humaine du divin. Paris: Cerf, 1988. Cf. also the concept of religious experience in Eastern thought: HAYWARD J.W. & VARELA F.J. Gentle Bridges. Conversations with the Dalai Lama on the Sciences of Mind. Boston: Shambhala, 1992. The two studies with which I feel the most comfortable are: MANCINI I. Filosofia della religione. Genoa: Marietti, 1991. Cf. also YANDELL K.E. The Epistemology of Religious Experience. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993, but none of them suggests something similar to my concept of the focus as the feature of human experience constituting the religious experience.

¹¹³ Ibidem, 236.

want to accept the Barthian one, and finally they feel that the Catholic enlightenment is particularistic as too connected with only one tradition:

"For settling on a basis of experience which remains bound a priori to the language of a specific tradition signifies a particularistic limitation of the truth claims of theology."¹¹⁴

Therefore, always according to Habermas, in this dialogue between philosophy and theology, theologians choose "the indirect procedure of apologetic argumentation".

This is the case of Helmut Peukert, for Habermas, who studied not only his Chicago speech, but also his master work Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology¹¹⁵.

First, Habermas makes three general comments on his views about religion:

- it is true that the world religions do not function exclusively as a legitimation of government power;
- it is true that it is a simplification to subsume with Weber a strong privatization of religions in modern societies;
- Habermas also acknowledges that he has "suggested too quickly an affirmative answer to the question 'whether then from religious truths, after the religious world views have

¹¹⁴ Ibidem, 236.

¹¹⁵ Peukert's speech may be found in HMPT (1992), pp. 43-65; and his book reference is: PEUKERT Helmut. Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology. Cambridge, MIT Press, 1986.

collapsed, nothing more and nothing other than the secular principles of a universalist ethics of responsibility can be salvaged, and this means: can be accepted for good reasons, on the basis of insight.'"¹¹⁶

So here Habermas recognizes that his conception of religion and of the influence of religion on societies was too marked by reductive views that we may trace back to Marx and Weber especially. Such a recognition took place in 1989, and I don't know if and how Habermas has evolved on these issues¹¹⁷. What is more interesting here is his last comment about secular principles. He acknowledges that he has suggested too quickly that these secular principles were the only ones that could be used for a universalist ethics of responsibility; this means that in our modern societies, the 'religious truths' and the 'religious world views' perhaps¹¹⁸ could possibly be used for this purpose. As a matter of fact, Habermas does not declare that the religious world views may be used, but he claims that the question "has to

¹¹⁶ HMPT (1992), 237.

¹¹⁷ My experience of Habermas is limited because I do not read and speak German, and many of his more recent works are not yet translated in one of the European languages I understand. But my project was always limited to discuss some of Habermas' views on religion, as shown in TCA and in the Chicago Conference.

¹¹⁸ I add this 'perhaps', because Habermas himself does not conclude that this is the case.

remain open from the view of the social scientist"¹¹⁹. Ten lines later, he adds:

"The process of a critical appropriation of the essential contents of religious tradition is still underway and the outcome is difficult to predict. I willingly repeat my position: 'As long as religious language bears with itself inspiring, indeed, unrelinquishable semantic contents which elude (for the moment?) the expressive power of a philosophical language and still await translation into a discourse that gives reason for its positions, philosophy, even in its postmetaphysical form, will neither be able to replace nor to repress religion'."¹²⁰

Therefore, Habermas accepts that the appropriation of the essential contents of the religious traditions¹²¹ is still underway, and he asks for a 'critical' appropriation; by critical, here, I believe he understands a discourse "that gives reason for its positions". What does he mean? I believe that here Habermas confuses and mixes up religious discourse and the theological one. This critical appropriation must be expected from theology, but not from religious discourse, just as the critical appropriation of everyday life language is a philosophical task, and not the job of the everyday language and common sense.

In previous pages, Habermas himself made this distinction

¹¹⁹ HMPT (1992), 237.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, 237. Here Habermas has quoted a passage from his The Postmetaphysical Thinking, on page 60 of the German edition.

¹²¹ I consciously put this word on its plural form, because I believe that this process is still underway not only for one religion, but for all religions.

between the religious discourse and the theological one. It seemed clear that the theological level was an expert level, a more scientific one, while the religious discourse level was not such an expert discourse. If the religious level is not such an expert discourse, then it must be the ordinary and everyday people discourse, the religious discourse of the 'normal' believers trying to express their faith and their religious experiences. We cannot ask people to develop the critical appropriation that Habermas expects of the religious world views; but we must expect such critical appropriation from the experts, and we may expect from them the use of all the expertises available now.

Habermas seems to consider that theologians are not doing this. I do not really know who are the theologians Habermas knows, but personally I believe that the XXth century theologies, especially the Christian theologies, are trying to accomplish this same project¹²². Habermas adds that such

¹²² I will give only one example, in biblical studies. First the Protestant scholars have used all the tools of modern critics to study the Bible, and more or less from World War II the Catholic scholars have followed. What does this mean? Before this renewal, it was normal to give the interpretation 'x' of the Bible because this 'x' was the teaching of the Church, because 'x' was the interpretation of the Church tradition; this has changed, and now if the theologians mention the 'x' interpretation, very few will stop their inquiry at this stage. It remains true that a neo-conservative movement still exists in all the major Christian churches. Another example will be on ethics: how many Catholic moralists were expelled from a Catholic university because they were teaching differently from the official teaching of the Catholic church? In Germany, Eugen

process is still underway, and on this he is right; I will even propose that such process will never be completed. Habermas' argument, according to which philosophers must wait the outcome of such process before answering the question whether only secular principles must inspire an universalist ethics, is an excuse; we cannot expect such an outcome, we cannot and must not expect this process to be completed, and from now we must give an answer: today the world expects an answer from all experts.

But how to give an answer "that gives reasons for its position"? Habermas is right in asking this question. I claim that the experts must answer now and give now reasons for their position: this will be nothing else than the kind of communicative actions through which a society reaches an understanding.

I have extensively quoted his crucial passage on page 237 about the critical appropriation of the contents of religious tradition because, in my opinion, it shows the basic problem with Habermas' views: in this quotation, Habermas explicitly talks about world views that are religious. My question is: are 'religious truths' part of world views? And if the answer is positive, I have a further question: when we experience the world, could we experience it without a world

Drewermann is a good example, so is Hans Kung.

view? If the religious 'beliefs'¹²³ are essential elements of a human world view, in the sense that there is no world view without this religious dimension¹²⁴, then there is no human experience without it. The question is 'closed', "even in its postmetaphysical form". What is the problem with Habermas? I must answer in a very humble way: my feeling is that Habermas reflects the opinion of the majority of the people in Germany and elsewhere in the Western civilizations, who do not want to become aware of and to make explicit their own religious experience.

According to me, the source of the problem rests in the conception of human experience. Influenced by scientism and by positivism, these scholars tend to believe that an absolutely neutral and objective human experience is possible, an experience not influenced in any way by a 'theory' or a world view. Kant, in his own world view and vocabulary, has shown that there is no perception without a priori conditions; Habermas himself has shown that sciences

¹²³ I use this expression only for simplicity of discourse, but as a matter of fact the religious dimension of the world views does not include only beliefs, but also norms, ritual praxis, and many other things, as we can start to comprehend in Van Der Leeuw's works and in the works of many philosophers of religion who try to answer the question: what's religion?

¹²⁴ I believe that atheism, methodical atheism, religious indifference are religious attitudes.

are not without ideology¹²⁵, and according to me there is no ideology (as a global worldview, 'logoi' expressing ideas) without a religious dimension (theistic or atheistic).

This same problem may be seen in Habermas' next argument against Peukert's thesis that ethics needs a theological foundation. For Habermas, a universalist ethics is possible without any religious dimension. Does Habermas develop his argument? Yes, in two directions.

The first direction is about Peukert's and Metz's argument that a real solidarity with the oppressed, and especially with the annihilated victims, presupposes the existence of God; Habermas rejects such a claim:

"That the universal covenant of fellowship would be able to be effective retroactively, toward the past, only in the weak medium of our memory, of the remembrance of the living generations, and of the anamnestic witnesses handed down falls short of our moral need. But the painful experience of a deficit is still not a sufficient argument for the assumption of an 'absolute freedom which saves in death'."¹²⁶

I would agree with Habermas on this point. There is no valid and definitive argument in favor of the existence of God, not even Metz and Peukert's argument. But then, the real question becomes the following one: must the belief in God

¹²⁵ Cf. Habermas Jürgen. La technique et la science comme idéologie. Paris, Gallimard, 1973 (the German edition was published in 1968); and it is a main thesis of his Knowledge and Human Interest that there is no human knowledge without human interest.

¹²⁶ HMPT (1992), 238. Here Habermas quotes Peukert.

be the result of such an argument? In intercommunicative action, do we agree on the existence of something only because there was an argument for it? Is the argument, in Habermas' vocabulary, an argument that gives reason for its position, the only way by which we humans accept or do not accept the existence of something? What is the reasonable argument in favor of the existence of cats, trees, and atoms, of neutrality, peace, love, and solidarity, of hunger and desires?¹²⁷ According to me, the real and only answer is: human experience. It is because I experience trees and atoms and neutrality and solidarity that I believe in the existence of trees, cats, peace, and desires. Is it not the same with God? Habermas is aware of this situation, because he continues:

"The postulate of God 'which is outlined in temporal, finite, self-transcending intersubjective action in the form of a hopeful expectation' relies upon an experience that is either recognized as such in the language of religious discourse -or loses its evidence. Peukert himself resorts to an experience accessible only in the language of the Christian tradition, interwoven inseparably with religious discourse."¹²⁸

In a strict sense, Habermas argues here with Peukert, but I

¹²⁷ If someone argues against the existence of the maple trees, I will go into the woods and I will explain him that 'this' tree is what I call a 'maple tree'; if someone argues against love, I will explain and show him the experiences to which I refer when I talk about 'love'. When someone argues about the existence of God, I will ask him: what are the experiences you refer to when you so talk?

¹²⁸ Ibidem, 238. The quotation was again from Peukert.

want to open the debate, because this does not concern only religious experience, it is true for all human experiences. There is no human experience without language and without a tradition into which the simple sense-observation or perception becomes a human experience. I am not talking here of the simple vision of something, that cows may also have, because they have eyes to see, I am talking of something other than mere sense-perception, and this I call the human experience. In these pages, as we have shown extensively, Habermas is not talking only about sense-perception and observations, he is talking about 'experience' and he extensively uses this term; we must ask him: what is the difference between the cow's vision of a tree and the human experience of a tree? What makes the human experience different from the cow's vision?

Our answer is definite: our vision is different (not only) because we express this vision with language¹²⁹ which

¹²⁹ There is first a body experience, not only into the brain, but mostly into the brain; this bodily trace of the tree vision is the material side of what we call thinking, but I claim that thinking is more than this bodily traces that biologists and neurologists may follow on their tools and experiments. The next step will be for the humans to express themselves, and they do it not only through the languages they have developed, but also through arts, gestures, and other means. My claim is that the development of everything that we normally call 'culture' has permitted the humans to transform the basic sense-perception into a human experience, because it has created a framework into which we are able to give a meaning (a place into a whole) to what we experience. In such context, the perception becomes an experience with a meaning.

presupposes a culture, or in Habermas' term, a world view and a lifeworld.

Therefore, all human experiences are possible only within such framework, such horizon, such world view, such lifeworld, only within a culture. Peukert is right when he claims that the Catholic experience of God is made within the Catholic tradition, and this is why Catholics believe in the existence of God; Catholics do not believe in the existence of God because philosophers or theologians have presented them the right and definite argument for the existence of God, they believe in God because they have experienced him¹³⁰. The fact that it is hard to separate this Catholic belief in the existence of God from the Catholic tradition (including the Catholic discourses, the Catholic world views, the Catholic philosophies, the Catholic praxis, and so on) does not make invalid the basic experience. It could be that another human will make the same human experience within a different tradition, for instance the Buddhist tradition or the Atheist tradition, and conclude differently: the same human experiences, but made within different world views, are expressed in different ways by different societies: within the Catholic tradition, this experience is expressed through

¹³⁰ I give the example of Catholic tradition, because in this section Habermas discusses Peukert's argument that is about Catholic tradition; but obviously I believe the same for all the world religions, even for the religions in which God does not play an important role, as in Buddhism.

the belief in the existence of God, but within the Atheist tradition this same experience is expressed in the belief that there is no such personal God. I strongly believe that both 'statements' are true¹³¹.

Obviously, this is difficult to accept for someone who aspires to a universalist understanding as the final resulting point of intercommunicative actions between all people of all cultures and all generations.

¹³¹ Someone may think that this is contradictory; it is not, because what makes it apparently contradictory is the different interpretation of the SAME human experience within different traditions: the 'object' of the experience is the same, but because humans 'experience' it in different ways according to their world views, they express (statements, propositions, language, arts) what they have experienced in 'statements' that materially (logically) may be interpreted as contradictory. The expressions may be contradictory, but not the experiences which they express. This is why I reject the Aristotelian principle of no-contradiction.

PART TWO
CRITICAL VIEWS

It's time to express my personal views on religion, myth, rationality, and modernity in a more global way. Why? You may noticed that, in the first part, I dealt more with literary criticism and history of ideas than philosophy. It is not that literary criticism and history are not part of philosophy, but they are not specific to it. What is specifically philosophical? The effort to exhibit a worldvision is, for me, more specifically philosophical.

Some people feel that philosophical statements are ex cathedra¹³². This is a theological expression, but when it is used in the ordinary or philosophical discourse, it refers to a statement whose foundations are not made explicit. This is one of my basic hypotheses: there are no human hypotheses without ex cathedra statements. Humans are not able to formulate a single hypo-thesis without assumptions, that their discourse cannot make all explicit.

In the first part of my study, I have made comments and

¹³² Theologians are never ex cathedra; in the Roman Catholic Church, only the official magisterium could teach or proclaim ex cathedra. In the next sentences, therefore, I don't use this phrase with its precise theological meaning. It is normal that a term has different meanings when it is used in different contexts.

criticisms on some of Habermas' statements and views. It was impossible to explain all the assumptions that make my views fully understandable. To clarify the totality of my assumptions would be to make explicit not only a whole culture and language, but also the whole experience of a person and of his social group¹³³. In this second part, in which I want to clarify my vision, is this attainable? I think not; it would not be sound to claim on one hand that a total clarification is never possible, and on the other to claim that this second part of my hypo-thesis makes explicit all my assumptions.

It is not always possible to make more explicit this horizon, worldview, and lifeworld. But a M.A. thesis seems to me a good opportunity. I know that this is not an essential requirement for such a thesis, but I am not the usual student, in the sense that the pursuit of a M.A. thesis in philosophy at 52 years of age, after 25 years of teaching and reflecting, is clearly such an opportunity. These years of returning to school provided the perfect opportunity to clarify my own worldview.

I insist, I wish to clarify the philosophical dimension of my

¹³³ And my experience is the experience of a Catholic theologian and missionary priest, this I do not deny. It influences my whole worldview. But this does not mean that I cannot use a philosophical focus on my experience. If I have read Habermas with my experience as the background, it does not mean that I would not accept Habermas to read my experience from his own background. For the moment, this is

worldview. Consequently, I want to use only one focus, the philosophical one. I am open to a debate in order to clarify if I will meet my objectives, which presupposes views about what are philosophy and theology.

But these following statements, where do they originate? I want my answer to be: the basis of all the following statements is experience. For me, there is no other source of knowledge. In order to respect the limitations of a M.A. Thesis, I must restrain myself and summarize my views; consequently, it will not be possible to make explicit the experiential data for all these statements.

About religion

At the beginning of my research, I have studied the summary Habermas makes of Durkheim's views on religion: beliefs and ritual practices. Here I must question this presentation of what is religion. My question is not if Habermas summarizes and interprets well Durkheim's views on religion, but rather to confront these views with my own experience and theory.

I have to say that Durkheim's presentation of religions as 'beliefs and ritual practices' is obviously a reduction of what is in human life the religious experience. There are at least two symptoms of this reduction: their difficulty to connect religion with ethics and with meaning. It is highly

my M.A. thesis.

symptomatic that here and elsewhere it seems difficult for these sociologists to connect the religious experience with morality and ethics, and with practices that are not merely ritual ones. It is also symptomatic that they do not connect religions with meaning to life and history. But when I look to philosophies of religion¹³⁴, I must admit that the

¹³⁴ I found a good summary of sociological views on religion in Keith A. Roberts's Religion in Sociological Perspective. This book is a kind of manual with a general presentation of the sociological studies on religion, and obviously chapter one is "What do we mean by the term Religion?". Roberts distinguishes three kinds of definitions: substantive, functional, and symbolic definitions. At the end, he proposes his own view: "Without attempting to offer a new definition, let me synthesize the debate over definitions by simply highlighting my own view of the distinguishing characteristics of religion. First, religion is a social phenomenon that involves the grouping of people around a faith perspective. Faith is an individual phenomenon that involves trusting in some object, event, principle, or being as the center of worth and the source of meaning in life. I sympathize with Yinger's insistence that the nature of believing is probably more indicative of religion than the nature of belief itself. Hence, a profound commitment to Marxism, intense nationalism, or faith in science and technology as the ultimate solution to our human predicament could be considered at least quasi-religious phenomena. But religion is also viewed here as a social phenomenon -involving a group of people with a shared faith or a shared meaning system. Beyond being just a social phenomenon, religion has to do with that assortment of phenomena that communicates, celebrates, internalizes, interprets, and extrapolates a faith. These phenomena include beliefs (myths), rites (worship), an ethos (the moods and moral values of the group), a world view (the cognitive perspective by which the experiences of life are viewed as part of a larger and ultimately meaningful cosmology), and a system of symbols (which serve to encapsulate the deepest feelings and emotion-packed beliefs)." (21-22) Among the differences between religion and magic, Roberts mentions in the former the existence of a moral ethos, or a system of ethics to guide behavior. And in the last page, he summarizes the chapter in the following way: "Substantive

religious phenomenon is a lot more than 'beliefs and ritual practices'. The object of this thesis is not to propose a philosophy of religion, but to demonstrate that Habermas' views on religion are extremely limited¹³⁵. Habermas, following Mead and Durkheim, has chosen a very reductive definition of religion. When I compare Habermas' definition with my own, I must include some comments, and in these comments I want to argue in favor of my claim that there is no scientific theory without a more global theory, without a philosophy, understood as a global lifeworld or world vision into which all the elements receive a meaning. For me, the central concept is human experience, and it is as a human experience that I situate religion: if I distinguish

definitions usually emphasize a specific belief such as in spiritual beings or in a supernatural realm, or they stress the distinction between the sacred and profane realms of experience. Substantive definitions delineate the traditional forms or religiosity. Functional definitions identify religion as that which provides a sense of ultimate meaning, a system of macrosymbols, and a set of core values for life (...). Social scientists who are interested in cultural change and the new forms of meaning that emerge in times of cultural transition tend to favor functional definitions. They view religion as changing rather than as declining." Cf. KEITH A. ROBERTS. Religion in Sociological Perspective. Belmont: Wadsworth, 1984.

¹³⁵ My understanding of religion was also largely influenced by Anthropology: cf. MORRIS B. Anthropological Studies of Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, where the author studies Marx, Weber and Durkheim (as Habermas does in TCA), but with his anthropological perspective (he also studies Freud, Jung, and Lévy-Bruhl). Cf. also WUNENBURGER J.-J. Le sacré. Paris: PUF, 1981; DESPLAND M. La religion en Occident. Évolution des idées et du vécu. Montreal: Fides, 1979.

religion from the religious experience, it is in the same way that Habermas presents the institutionalization of other social phenomena: religions are institutionalized religious experiences within a social group.

On this background of a human experience, I try to give sense to the different aspects of the religious experience, such as the beliefs, the rites, and the ethics. Beliefs express the worldview of the believers, they summarize their lifeworld, they give them a theoretical global framework into which they will find a meaning to their own life and history¹³⁶. The cognitive aspect of the religious experience is more clearly expressed in these beliefs, embodied in creeds, myths and rites: rites are not only an unmeaningful practice, but they are a practice through which the beliefs are lived, celebrated, and transmitted¹³⁷.

Globally, it seems obvious that Habermas sees religion more as a social institution than a human experience. This is one of the many implicit assumptions of his theory.

¹³⁶ I don't claim that worldviews are expressed only by beliefs. They are a lot more than a set of beliefs.

¹³⁷ These statements are not ex cathedra, I am not a bishop. They are the result of my understanding of the religious experiences, especially in Africa. Cf. L.-V. THOMAS & R. LUNEAU. La terre africaine et ses religions. Paris: Larousse, 1974.

Social and individual experience

Habermas, Mead, Durkheim and others are sociologists, and I cannot be too surprised that their conception of religion is 'sociological'; therefore, religion is understood more as a social phenomenon than as an individual human experience¹³⁸. This is not false, but I want to emphasize here that the religious experience is also an individual experience, and by this I mean an experience made by individuals. Experience includes always individual and social aspects; all experiences, and this obviously includes the religious one, include social as well as individual dimensions. This comment is directed not against but rather about Durkheim's presentation of religion as the expression of collective consciousness. I do believe that religions are the institutionalized forms of the religious experiences, but I also emphasize that these religious institutions come from the religious experiences of the socialized individuals. As a matter of fact, all the major religions come from a founder, whose personal religious experience became typical for a group of disciples. There are personal religious experiences that were never transformed into an institutionalized religion; this is especially the case for many individual mystical experiences in all the major

¹³⁸ This social understanding of religion is more visible on TCA2, pages 45-46 and 50.

religions¹³⁹.

About the myth

I have already noted that Habermas does not connect myth and religion, but, following J. Campbell, M. Eliade, and many anthropologists, I do. This is why I want immediately to add some remarks about Habermas' characterizations of the mythical worldviews, as we have found them in his exposé of Weber's theories and especially when Habermas distinguishes societies with mythical worldviews, religious societies, and modern ones.

-1- Archaic VS modern societies

This characterization may seem harmless, but as a matter of fact it implies a judgment, i.e. a global evaluation.

When we speak of archaic worldviews or societies, I claim that such phrase already implies a negative judgment on these societies or worldviews, especially when we oppose them to modern ones. I believe that when we use such terminology, it does not refer only to a chronological datum: Habermas and his fellow sociologists know very well that the Zande society is not a society who has lived in the fifth century B.C. but is still living in Sudan, Zaire and République Centre

¹³⁹ DUBET F. Sociologie de l'expérience. Paris: Seuil, 1994, insists that human experience is always individual-personal as well as social.

Africaine¹⁴⁰.

-2- Worldviews VS societies

Habermas is prudent, and he knows very well that sociologists do not study societies of the fifth century B.C., but societies living today¹⁴¹. Therefore, what he characterizes as archaic are not the societies but their worldviews.

It is possible that a society living at the end of the XXth century has kept views that were more usual among societies of the Vth century B.C.¹⁴² Therefore, in this argument, there is a shift from societies to their worldviews.

The distinction between societies and worldviews is crucial, and we must acknowledge that Jürgen Habermas has studied and elaborated an extensive theory upon these topics in order to better define and articulate these realities¹⁴³.

I still claim that this shift from societies to their

¹⁴⁰ Cf. especially TCA1, on page 92.

¹⁴¹ Other sciences may study past societies, like archaeology, history.

¹⁴² The reader has already understood that when I refer to Vth century societies and to XXth century societies, it is only as examples. Two readings seem possible when a human group of nowadays has kept the lifeworld of another group of, let's say, two thousands years ago: either the contemporary group is 'primitive', or the group living two thousands years ago was very 'progressive', avant-garde!

¹⁴³ In a first draft of this thesis, I proposed a detailed analysis of The Theory of Communicative Action sections about lifeworld and worldview. I had to cancel them in order to respect the requirement of a 100-150 page study.

worldviews does not correct the implicit judgment I have explained in my previous comment. Even when it is the worldview that is characterized as 'archaic', there is an implicit evaluation that such a worldview is less rational than our modern ones.

Concerning this point, I must make another comment. In choosing to talk about 'archaic worldviews' and by characterizing them as 'mythical', Habermas avoids the difficult task of explaining what myth is. In those pages, about the mythical and the modern ways of understanding the world, Habermas never explains what a myth is, what could be its place and role in a society, what are the contexts in which we (and sociologists) may understand it. His concern is not with the 'myths', but with the 'worldviews', and, therefore, he feels comfortable with the fact that he does not have to be more specific about what a 'myth' is.

-3- A differentiation problem¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ My arguments about differentiation and rationality are crucial to my critique of Habermas' conception of modernity. For me, the differentiation argument is connected with the substance theory and with the objectification/reification argument: there is a result of differentiation when in a social group an object is recognized (defined) as autonomous-distinct-independent from the rest. The process is connected to the substance theory, because the hypothesis of a substance may be considered as the last step of the differentiation process: when in a social group a substance is claimed for an object (or person or thing), then this object is defined as fully independent from the rest of reality. I deny the existence of substance -and I choose

Here I want to emphasize Habermas' argument as to why these so-called archaic worldviews are less rational: this has to do with the lack of differentiation between nature and culture, between language and the world, and between the individual subjective ego and the objective world. There are two aspects here: it could be true that these are real

holism against any differentiation process. This means that I discern two fundamental attitudes in front of reality: the first one tends to objectify, to substantify, i.e. to differentiate, the process of differentiation may become a process of substantiation; the second attitude tends to connect, to interrelate, and it is generally called holism. Holism is not a theory, but basically it is a human attitude, and holistic theories try to express such human experience. Because I describe the scientific experience as the result of a differentiation/selection process, and the religious experience as the result of an holistic process, I will agree with those sociologists who present a scientific society as distinct from a religious one; this means that in a scientific society the dominant attitude is differentiation, while in a more religious society holism is the dominant attitude. This does not mean that for me there are no differences between differentiation and disconnectedness: obviously, two things that are differentiated may also be connected. Empiricists, as Locke and Hume, have already elaborated a strong critique of the traditional concept of substance; Dewey has continued this critique. My conception is also largely influenced by Process philosophy (A.E. Whitehead) and Phenomenology (E. Husserl); for the former there are only processes, for the latter we cannot know anything else than what appears of things. Cf. also AUSTIN J.L. Sense and Sensibilia. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962; AYER A.J. Language, Truth and Logic. London: Gollancz, 1936; AYER A.J. The Central Questions of Philosophy. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976; P.F. STRAWSON, Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics. New York: Routledge, 1959; QUINE W.V.O. Word & Object. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960. Connected to vitalism and Gestalt theory, the holistic attitude is now considered as the first character of the new age paradigmatic shift: cf. CAPRA F. and STEINDL-RAST D. Belonging to the Universe. San Francisco: Harper, 1991; GUITTON J. and G. and I. BOGDANOV. Dieu et la science. Paris: Grasset, 1991.

characteristics of the so-called archaic societies, but this does not imply that these societies are not rational. In my view, Habermas misses the point when he concludes that these characteristics explain the bigger irrationality of these worldviews.

In order to better argue my point, I must return to the debate concerning the Zande's views as revealed by Evans-Pritchard's masterwork. It is not my intention here to summarize in any way the Zande's worldview, but only to comment about Habermas' explanation that the less rational worldviews such as the Zande's do not put the same 'differences' into the world as do the more modern and rational worldviews.

I have worked in Zaire for five years, and I also taught some Zande students. I spent several weeks in the Zande territory in Zaire, but I do not claim any special expertise on these anthropological matters. What I will refer to here is only the results of some personal experiences. I was puzzled by the obvious fact that the Zande students apparently accept both worldviews: the so-called archaic one, as well as the modern one. Obviously I have tried to understand how this was possible. Habermas is right: the answer is a different 'differentiation'.

I will give only one specific example: suppose someone is sick. The Zande student who has studied biology and a little

bit of medicine accepts without any difficulty that the disease was caused by a virus¹⁴⁵. The difference begins here. As a westerner, I am satisfied with this answer and I do not pursue my quest. When the doctor explains to me that my flu was caused by a virus, I stop my quest and I assume that the doctor's statement is true. Why do I stop there? I am satisfied with this answer because for me a flu is a biological problem, and the doctor's answer has totally clarified the biological dimension of the question. In our worldview, we reduce a flu to a biological disease, we define it within these limits, and when the doctor's answer fills these limits, I experience a feeling of satisfaction¹⁴⁶.

What I have noticed is that a Zande is usually unsatisfied with the doctor's answer. He pursues his quest: why is it that I have caught this virus? Obviously, my western doctor has already heard such a question, and he has an answer ready: because you were in contact with a person carrying the virus, and by just coughing in your face, the virus was transmitted through the air from his mouth to your respiratory system. What I have noticed is that the 'archaic' zande is not yet satisfied with this answer, he is

¹⁴⁵ In order to simplify my example, and because I am neither a doctor nor a biologist, I assume it is a viral infection.

¹⁴⁶ I want to emphasize the connections between the cognitive and the emotive dimensions of the process.

still pursuing his quest: why is it that I met this person carrying the virus, why is it that at that precise moment this person has coughed in front of me, and so on.

So the real question is the following one: why is it that we are satisfied with the doctor's answer, while the Zandes are never satisfied with it? My hypothesis is the following one: for the Zande, the flu is a disease, but his definition of a disease is 'different' from ours! He does not consider that a disease is only biological; he does not reduce a disease to a biological affair. A disease is a biological affair, and this is why he accepts as true the doctor's statement, but the doctor's statement does not totally satisfy him, because a disease is not only a biological affair. A disease is also a psychological as well as a social affair! Therefore, he also expects some answers at these levels! Was his immune system weaker because his 'enemy' has cursed him? Is this view really archaic and irrational?

It is assumed today that some diseases find a cause also in our polluted environment; therefore, we may consider that their causes are not exclusively biological. It is also more accepted today that social factors (like difficulties with a spouse or children or at the job, stress) may weaken the immune system¹⁴⁷. Therefore, is it not more rational to

¹⁴⁷ Time (Vol. 147, no. 26 of June 24, 1996) had this cover story: "Can Your Faith Make You Whole? Scientists have worked hard to purge medicine of the remnants of ancient

expect an answer also at these levels? Is it not more rational to search not only for biological causes, but also for social and environmental factors?

Habermas claims that the Zande worldview makes a "confusion between nature and culture", but is it an undue confusion or a realistic connection? When I listen to the reasons the Zande gives as to why one should not reduce a disease to its biological dimension, I am not able to conclude that his worldview is 'less rational': this is why Habermas is wrong on this second aspect. I am not sure that a better differentiation between nature and culture, between language and the world, between the individual ego and the objective world must be defined as a rationalization of the worldview.

About rationality

In Habermas' horizon, rationality is opposed to mythical views. In my view, myths are connected to the religious experience, and therefore, it becomes important to underline some aspects of the way Habermas has studied Weber's concept of rationality, in order to clarify if there is a rationality for the religious experience¹⁴⁸:

mysticism. But driven by the spiritual yearnings of their patients, doctors are starting to re-examine the healing power of prayer." Cf. pages 34-44.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. especially TAMBIAH S.J. Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality. Cambridge: University Press, 1990. And: STEINMARK M. Rationality in

- in both Weber's and Habermas' theses, rationality is opposed to tradition¹⁴⁹. Is it true that it is more rational to suspect and oppose tradition?
- Another aspect is the autonomization of the value spheres: why is it more rational to distinguish and to autonomize these spheres? I will claim that this is the main difference between a rationalistic worldview and an holistic one: in the former everything is always differentiated (the 'distinguo' of the classical tradition), while in the latter everything is always interconnected. A reality (a thing, a person, etc.) is not defined by its specific aspects, but by its relationship with the rest.
- Weber and Habermas do not agree on the universality of the western rationalism. While Weber makes claims for a limited relativism of the western rationality, Habermas makes a distinction that allows him to claim the universality of the formal properties of such rationalism. How could we evaluate this distinction? Is it really possible to distinguish these formal properties from the content of the western

Science, Religion, and Everyday Life. A Critical Evaluation of Four Models of Rationality. Notre-Dame: University Press, 1995. Also: SANTAYANA G. Reason in Religion. Reason in Art. Reason in Science. (these are the three volumes of The Life of Reason). New York: Dover, 1905-1906. WHITEHEAD A.N. The Function of Reason. Boston: Beacon Press, 1929.

¹⁴⁹ They normally use the term 'tradition' in a narrow sense, which I feel too limited. Further I will explain my point of view.

Rationalism? What does such a distinction mean?

- A last aspect, but its importance is obvious for our research, is Weber's tendency to reduce rationality to cognition and purposive action. Are humans more rational only when they know more? Are humans more rational only when they may elaborate a justification discourse that reduces their actions to means in order to reach an end?

The reader may understand by these questions the main orientations of my own concept of rationality. For me, it seems obvious that one of Weber's and Habermas' deepest assumptions is an opposition between the religious and metaphysical worldviews, and rationality: they do not consider that the whole human experience (including the religious one) may be rationalized, but they describe the rationalization process as a progressive rejection of the human religious experience and tradition, because they regard it as being totally superstitious. There are different reasons for such an assumption: they also oppose knowledge to tradition, reason to emotion; and they also consider that values and beliefs must not be considered as knowledge¹⁵⁰.

¹⁵⁰ Reason, rationality, and rationalization may be considered as anthropological concepts, in the sense that they were developed in relation with a conception of what humans are (anthropology is a discourse about humans): is the reason what distinguishes them from animals? Within my anti-substantialist horizon, I don't define reason as a human faculty, but only as a tool that humans have developed in order to better survive. The rationalization process is nothing else than the progressive refinement of such a tool

No explicit theory without an implicit theory

My claim here is that there is no explicit theory without a global theoretical background or framework that makes it meaningful, but that at the same time remains partially implicit: there is no human knowledge without such a theoretical framework. I also believe that it is not possible to make explicit all the assumptions of a theory, and therefore, under any theory, there are always implicit assumptions: a theory cannot make explicit all its assumptions¹⁵¹.

(through evolution we have refined other tools too: eyes, walking, but at the same time we have almost abandoned other opportunities: like smell, that other creatures have developed more). The topic of reason and rationality in philosophy is found all along the history of western philosophy; it is almost absent from eastern ones (cf. NAKAMURA H. A Comparative History of Ideas. New York: KPI, 1975; QADIR C.A. Philosophy and Science in the Islamic World. New York: Routledge, 1988; SCHARFSTEIN B., ALON I., BIDERMAN S., DAOR D. AND HOFFMANN Y. PHILOSOPHY EAST/PHILOSOPHY WEST. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). For philosophy, cf. WHITEHEAD A.N. The Function of Reason. Boston: Beacon Press, 1929; PETERSON M., KASKER W., REICHENBACH B. AND BASINGER D. Reason and Religious Belief. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991. I must also mention the new constructivist epistemology: cf. LE MOIGNE J.-L. Les épistémologies constructivistes. Paris: PUF, 1995. This question could also be studied in connection with the reflections in cultural anthropology and in psychology (for instance, the so-called intelligence test).

¹⁵¹ Uncertainty and indeterminacy have become physical, and therefore scientific, principles; Einstein and Bohm have shown uncertainty as a result of human limitations, Bohr as a result of experimental and conceptual limitations, and finally Heisenberg as a feature of the universe. My claim is also an extension of these principles. Cf. BARBOUR I.G.

What is important to underline here is that this is true not only for religious, metaphysical, or philosophical theories, but also for scientific theories. When a scientist makes a scientific hypothesis, he always supposes at least a world where his hypothesis could be tested. And when scientists put together different hypotheses in order to propose a scientific theory, there is always a theoretical background on which it is possible to understand it and to give it meaning. The first major element of this global background is always the language, be it English, French, or Chinese, be it a global representation of scientific symbols, as in Mathematics, in Physics, or in Chemistry. If someone does not understand English, he will not be able to give meaning to a scientific hypothesis or theory expressed in English, and if someone does not know the symbols used by Mathematicians, this person will not be able to understand a Manual of Algebra or Geometry! These are very general claims, but I have the impression that scientists tend to forget them.

In our cases, this means that in order to present his hypotheses and his theory of societal rationalization in modern societies, Weber had to assume a global framework that is not always explicit in his writings and studies. This is

Issues in Science and Religion. San Francisco: Harper, 1966, especially on pages 137-174; and PAGELS H.R. The Cosmic Code. New York: Bantam, 1982, especially on pages 46-89.

also the case for Habermas. And in proposing his reading and his understanding of Weber's theories, Habermas is able to make more explicit some of Weber's assumptions, but at the same time, in order to propose his own reading, Jürgen Habermas presupposes other assumptions, that he cannot make all explicit. And as it was Habermas' duty to help us understand Weber's implicit assumptions, it is my duty to try and help the readers to understand Habermas' own assumptions. According to me, this is one of the main tasks or functions of philosophers: to help human groups to be aware of the assumptions they make in life and theories.

One of the hypotheses I am trying to check in this work is an assumed understanding of religion by Habermas and Weber, as well as the fact that such 'definition' of religion may be confronted¹⁵².

¹⁵² In his very famous 1962 book, T.S. Kuhn showed that there is a scientific revolution when the scientific community shifts from one paradigm to a new one: KUHN T.S. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962. This means that around the explicit scientific knowledge, there are 'hidden' or 'assumed' statements, beliefs, attitudes, methods, and so on. I add that science, and any knowledge, is not possible without such a background. We must also recognize that the term 'paradigm' is not used anymore only within the same Kuhn's context, but has already assumed a variety of meaning. Philosophy of sciences has become more and more aware of these implicit assumptions in all knowledge, including the sciences: for instance, cf. GILLIES D. Philosophy of Science in the Twentieth Century. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993; BARBOUR I.G. Myths, Models and Paradigms. A Comparative Study in Science & Religion. San Francisco: Harper, 1974. In France, some constructivist philosophers are trying to explore these new epistemologies: cf. LE MOIGNE J.-L. Les

Rationalization as a differentiation

In analyzing Habermas' characterizations of the so-called mythical societies, we already came to his claim about the link between differentiation and rationalization. On that point, I have already criticized Habermas' argument from my experience among some African tribes. Because I believe that this is the core of Habermas' argument about modernity and rationality, I feel it convenient to come back to this topic, to continue our dialogue with Habermas but this time from Habermas' global interpretation of Max Weber.

Weber describes the rationalization process mostly as a differentiation process. Habermas does not seem to disagree with this hypothesis, even if he does not agree with all of it.

I don't believe that Weber and Habermas would claim that only three types of societies are possible, but it seems to me that they propose their own sociological theories within a framework where three main types of societies are distinguished: mythical societies, traditional societies,

épistémologies constructivistes. Paris: PUF, 1995; STENGERS I. AND SCHLANGER J. Les concepts scientifiques. Paris: Gallimard, 1988; PRIGOGINE I. AND STENGERS I. La nouvelle alliance. Paris: Gallimard, 1979. Some thinkers are also trying to make more explicit the new paradigm that they see cropping up: CAPRA F. and STEINDL-RAST D. Belonging to the Universe. Explorations on the Frontiers of Science and Spirituality. San Francisco: Harper, 1991; GUITTON J., G. and I. BOGDANOV. Dieu et la Science. Paris: Grasset, 1991.

and modern societies. As scientists, sociologists try to test their theories, and in order to do that they must present a global characterization of each social type. According to Habermas, Weber's theory suggests that the most specific characteristic of modern societies is their rationalization; this is already posited in the first sentence of the chapter on Weber. Thus, this theory connects modernity with rationality.

First, I confront the concept of modernity when it is defined in a geographical way instead of a temporal way. This means that I believe that the so-called traditional societies that we now find in the heart of Africa are as modern as are our western societies of the northern hemisphere, if we conceive modernity as a temporal concept, simply because these societies exist within the modern period of history. But Weber, and after him many sociologists, give a different definition of modernity, connecting it not to a temporal definition but to some characteristics specific to the western societies of the northern hemisphere. This is what Weber did when he tried to present a theory of modernity as rationality.

Habermas shows that not only Weber has tried to present modernity as rationality, but that he has also proposed a specific understanding of what is rationality, and according to Habermas, this is a confused theory. Habermas is right

when he criticizes Weber's conception of rationality, but Weber is wrong when he connects the rationalization process with a process of differentiation.

Among the many differences between the so-called mythical or traditional societies and the modern ones, there is, in Weber's view, a process of differentiation at many levels: one is between cultural spheres, and especially between the cognitive sphere, the normative sphere, and the aesthetic sphere. The autonomisation of each sphere has produced the development of an inner logic specific to each sphere.

I claim that it is the exact same phenomenon that he is looking at when Weber talks about the loss of meaning because the modern worldview does not have the same unifying power that the mythical and traditional ones have. Weber makes a sharp distinction between the differentiation process that he considers as a factor in the rationalization process on one hand, and the loss of meaning that he interprets as a residual (but important) consequence of the same rationalization process on the other hand. For me, there is here an implicit assumption that depends upon his worldview. In my worldview, the loss of meaning is not only a consequence of the rationalization process, it is constitutive of it, it is as constitutive of the rationalization process as is the differentiation process for Weber. I do not deny that sociologists make empirical

research, first about what they conceptualize as a differentiation of the value spheres, and second about what they conceptualize as a loss of meaning, but I claim that in both cases they study the same phenomena, from two different points of view; I do claim that the differentiation of the value spheres and the loss of meaning are facets of the same phenomenon.

There is a second aspect: the differentiation process is connected with the rationalization process, and the whole process with a loss of meaning and freedom. If the question is, what is rational? then, I also have trouble in answering that it is more rational to differentiate than to unite, as well as in answering that rationality implies a loss of meaning.

I repeat: sociologists cannot make sociology without theories, and Weber proposes that rationalization be connected with differentiation and loss of meaning, but why is this so? Is it not possible to elaborate a concept of rationality, that would be connected not to differentiation and loss of meaning, but to unity and meaning?

For a theory of action

Another of Habermas' conclusions argues for the need of a more global theory of action. The German sociologist is right.

But we do not need only a theory of action that would tell us the different kinds of action, but also a theory that would tell us what is action, what is activity, and what are human activities.

Sometimes critiques say that Habermas becomes very abstract. I feel that it is true if we mean that he proposes his hypotheses without always connecting them to human life: it is not always easy to correlate his very abstract and complex statements to the human experience. I believe that the use of a term always supposes a degree of abstraction, and I do claim that the use of the term 'action' puts it in a more abstract level than the use of the term 'activities', and especially human activities¹⁵³.

Habermas, probably following Weber and many sociologists, sometimes refers to rationality and to modernity as if these were not human phenomena, I mean, not as a series of human actions and activities.

There is a similar problem with religion. Within the theoretical background of Habermas' theory, what is religion? How is it connected with human activities? Is religion a

¹⁵³ The English title, The Theory of Communicative Action, was translated in French: La théorie de l'agir communicationnel, instead of 'action' or 'activité'; why? The term 'agir' is more practical and experiential. Is it the same with the English term 'action', instead of 'activity'? This is a good example of implicit assumptions behind the use of any single term, of which a foreigner is almost never aware.

human activity? If so, what is specific to this human action? If Habermas would have started his sociological philosophy with a concept of religious experiences, instead of the concepts of myth, rites and beliefs, would his philosophy of society have been different? I believe so.

Tradition

When they propose the different types of societies, Weber and Habermas speak of the mythical societies, of the traditional societies, and of the modern one. Again, here, by doing so, they suppose more than a distinction between modernity and tradition.

At this point, my claim is that there is no theory without a tradition. Obviously, this is true of the main world religions, that usually present themselves as 'religious tradition', but this is also true of all the cultural spheres. What makes up philosophy is the philosophical tradition, and what composes sociology is a sociological tradition. Modern philosophy is constituted by the philosophical tradition, as modern sociology is built up by the sociological tradition. Obviously, the philosophical tradition is older than the sociological tradition, but they are both a constituted tradition.

What constitutes a tradition is conventional¹⁵⁴, for at least

¹⁵⁴ Cf. especially FOUREZ G. La construction des

two reasons: first, the object of a science is made up by the progressive and unnecessary unfolding of its studies; second, it is also conventional because there is no predictable evolution of a tradition.

At the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1961-1965), there was an interesting reflection on what is 'traditional' in the Catholic life and faith. Many theologians have made a distinction between the traditions, with a small 't', that may be changed at any moment, and the Tradition, with a capital T. By traditions, they meant all the minor and major habits that a community has accumulated over the centuries, and sometimes more recently! Obviously, it was a main task of the Council to establish what is such a tradition, and what is part of the main Tradition. This does not prevent many Catholics (later called 'traditionalists') from having the impression that their faith has been changed essentially! But what was the Tradition? In a few words, the Tradition, the one with the capital T, was defined as the essential features of the Catholic life that are transmitted from one generation to the next. In this second sense of the same term 'tradition', the accent was not put on what is usual and habitual, but on what is 'transmitted! And when

sciences. Les logiques des inventions scientifiques. Introduction à la philosophie et à l'éthique des sciences. Montreal: ERPI, 1992; FOUCAULT M. L'archéologie du savoir. Paris: Gallimard, 1969, and Histoire de la philosophie à l'âge classique. Paris: Gallimard, 1972.

we examine the Catholic faith under this aspect, we will have to recognize that we are faced with what could be the essentials of what it is to be a Catholic! The Second Vatican Council has therefore tried to read the same Catholic Tradition and to give a modern understanding of it¹⁵⁵.

This is exactly what Habermas is doing with The Theory of Communicative Action, and this is also what he has done with Knowledge and Interests. What has he done? Through a new reading of the sociological Tradition (with a capital T), Habermas proposes a new understanding of some basic and essential sociological theories. As a matter of fact, there is a small problem with Habermas' two books: must we understand them within the path of the sociological tradition or within the path of the philosophical tradition? In a sense, they are on both paths. In Habermas' bibliography, there are some studies that are exclusively constitutive of the sociological tradition, and there are other books where the German thinker enlarges his views and proposes theories that are more philosophical than sociological. My next comment continues this reflection.

If we give to the term 'tradition' this different meaning, then it becomes difficult to agree with the way Habermas

¹⁵⁵ La révélation divine. Paris: Cerf, 1968 (2 vol.); Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II. Ed. by H. VORGRIMLER. New York: Herder, 1968, especially the third volume.

opposes traditional and modern societies. There is a second consequence: if the tradition is what is transmitted from one generation to the next, then it becomes impossible to understand Habermas' argument that modern societies are more rational than traditional ones: in what sense could we claim that it is more rational to reject what we received from the previous generation? If we must be critical about everything that is transmitted by tradition, it is not more rational to reject anything traditional on the only ground that it comes from the previous generation. The Descartes' systematic doubt is necessary, but today we know that it always supposes a lot of assumptions on which it becomes possible.

I don't claim that any of Habermas' definitions are false, for instance his definition of tradition, rationality, and religion; I claim that any theory (including sociology), as well as any theorist, assumes definitions from a specific background, culture, worldview and experience, and that a different one would then generate a different theory, because of different definitions.

Sociology and philosophy

I am not a sociologist. My total concentration and research at this point is in the discipline of philosophy, not theology. All these are traditions that have developed in a specific way, and now they are constituted by this history.

Is there a way to distinguish what comprises (and therefore defines) these diverse traditions? I believe so¹⁵⁶.

At a first level, there is the scientific enterprise, at a second level there is the philosophical enterprise, and at a third level there is the religious enterprise. On my understanding and view, these are three ways of grasping the same world¹⁵⁷.

But if so, what is the difference between these three ways of approaching the world? As answer to this difficult question, I have a very personal theory¹⁵⁸ that I cannot totally exhibit

¹⁵⁶ In the next page, I will speak of the three main levels or focuses, but I don't claim that these terms, level and focus, are the best ones to express my experience; second, I don't claim either that there are only three levels or focuses.

¹⁵⁷ When we focus on 'science', it is easy to reduce it to its cognitive dimension. But when we speak of the scientific enterprise, or the scientific process, it appears easier to discern that science is not only knowledge, but also emotions, business, interests, and so on: cf. HABERMAS J. Connaissance et intérêt. Paris: Gallimard, 1976 (first ed, in 1968); POLANYI M. Personal Knowledge. Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958; HULL D.L. Science as a Process. An Evolutionary Account of the Social and Conceptual Development of Science. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. If we cannot reduce the scientific enterprise to its cognitive dimension, we must not either reduce the artistic experience to its emotive dimension. These dimensions, as other ones, are present in all the different human experiential enterprises, including the religious one.

¹⁵⁸ A personal theory is not necessarily a set of ex cathedra statements, but it could be and should be a set of coherent and rational statements into which we express our experiences. Following Habermas, it becomes rational when the experiencer may give reasons for it. Within the limits of this thesis, the reasons for my theory cannot be all

here but only summarize. I do believe that what makes a knowledge scientific, philosophical, or religious is the focus that the experiencer uses when he experiences the world.

The term 'focus' is used metaphorically and refers to the photographic experience. When using a camera, I always focus on what I see, and the choice of one focus instead of another will allow me to see something, while the rest will be blurred, outfocused. The scientist uses a focus with which he selects the objects he wants to observe, concentrating on some very specific and restrictive aspects; from the whole picture of the world in front of him, he chooses only one aspect and he eliminates all the others. Globally we may say that, till the beginning of the XXth century, scientists focused on some material aspects, but with the advent of human and social sciences, this reduced focus was more and more challenged. When sociologists started to study phenomena as secularization and rationalization, it became clearer that their focus was a lot wider than the focus used to study calcium, speed, or even the cell. Philosophers and theologians use a wider focus, in which they try to include more things and events, and in so doing they are able to elaborate more abstract concepts, as history and mind, nature and God, salvation and reason.

given.

I will not insist on this aspect that I do believe essential, but I want to make one more crucial statement: meaning is an element of the religious focus. I do believe that the religious experience of the world includes the experience of meaning. I also believe that some philosophers, especially when elaborating a secular philosophy of history (I think especially of Hegel and Marx), have approached a religious understanding of the world; this is why Marxism, or better the Marxist interpretation of the world, may be considered as a religion¹⁵⁹.

The experiential datum

I believe that the core of my dispute with Jürgen Habermas rests on a specific understanding of the human experience. I call experience the complex process by which humans relate to their environment. I also reject the philosophy of the subject and of consciousness in the sense that I do not

¹⁵⁹ My concept of the focus as a constitutive feature of the human experience is specific to me, according to my knowledge, but I also feel that my concept is quite close, for instance, to Heidegger's concept of the 'horizon' and to the philosophical concept of 'level': at this level, at that level! But I must add that I was very interested by the way Josiah Royce describes the religious insight: cf. ROYCE J. The Sources of Religious Insight. Edinburg: Clark, 1912; by the Gestalt Theory that describes the act of knowing as the focusing of elements under a blurred background: cf. PERLS, HEFFERLINE and GOODMAN. Gestalt Therapy. New York: Julian Press, 1962; as well as by some presentations of eastern philosophies: cf. PODGORSKI F. "Three models of Chinese Religious Experience", in Religious Experience. Bangalore: Dharmaran, 1981, p. 40-61.

define the experience as the object experience experienced by a subject experiencer: the experiencer also is the object of the experience, and the experienced reality is also a subject of the experience. There are no human experiences, not even human sense observations, without pre-requisites.

We sometimes express what we experience in our language, and we also sometimes express it in other symbolic representations. A poem is a representation of human experience, as is the whole language of a social group, its institutions, its artistic representations, and its whole culture. There is an obvious circularity between our experiences and the way we express them: we experience the world as our culture determines it, and the world, as represented in our culture, is determined by our individual and social experiences.

All this is also true of sociology, as the expert discourse on societies. Each sociologist expresses his theories (hypotheses and theses) according to his own worldview. He thinks the experiences of societies with the help of concepts that his society gives him, he expresses his experiences of societies with the vocabulary that his group gives him, he interprets these experiences over the background of the worldview that his social group develops; so that his own experiences of societies correspond to his lifeworld¹⁶⁰.

¹⁶⁰ Obviously as a process philosopher, I do not deny

In reading The Theory of Communicative Action, what have we noted? When Habermas reads the sociological tradition, from Weber and Mead to Adorno and Parsons, I have noted how the same sociological experiences¹⁶¹ are expressed in different concepts and terms. Each sociologist has his own vocabulary; sociologists do not all express the same fact(s) with the same term, and they do not all give the same meaning to the same word¹⁶².

Socio-LOGY, as geo-logy and theo-logy, and all human corpus of knowledge, claim to propose an organized discourse (= 'logos') on a topic: societies, earth, religions, etc. But if what I just claimed is right, this must mean that there is no such discourse without a theory, without a global theoretical framework into which the discourse becomes meaningful: to give meaning to a concept is to find a

that concepts, worldviews, theories, cultures, languages, and so on, are nothing else than processes always changing; consequently, the scientist not only uses a language within a culture that pre-exist, but he also contributes to the evolution of this language and culture.

¹⁶¹ For instance, a loss of meaning and freedom is a sociological datum from experiences made in the modern societies. Sociologists have an experience of these modern societies where they discern facts and events, and for expressing some of these data they use the concept and term of secularization, while other sociologists use different concepts and terms.

¹⁶² My whole thesis is about the fact that I don't give to the term religion the same meaning as Habermas, and I have noted how Habermas does not give to religion the same meaning as Weber or Parsons.

context into which it fits, to find the meaning of a term is to know how to use it in sentences into which the term has a sense. To explore the meaning of a term is to study the contexts into which connections may be established and discovered between this term and the other terms of the ad hoc vocabulary. This presupposes a worldview. In contemporary philosophy, this reality is expressed by many different terms: horizon, level, paradigm, lifeworld, worldview...

In Habermas' worldview, there is almost no place for religion, and therefore, he is unable to give to such human experience a place and a role in his sociological discourse. He does not deny some facts (loss of meaning and freedom), but these experiential data are captured, expressed and interpreted by him in a non-religious way¹⁶³.

Habermas' worldview and his sociology

Does Habermas' horizon influence his own sociology? Obviously it does. A discourse on society cannot be made and expressed without a worldview (largely implicit), and without a worldview where societies exist, and where sociological

¹⁶³ Must I repeat again that there is nothing false or wrong with Habermas' worldview? I do not claim that his worldview is false; I claim that his sociology is influenced by such worldview and I also claim that different worldviews are as rational and possible, different worldviews on which different sociological theories become possible (not truer).

experiences are possible.

But could we also claim that Habermas' understanding (or misunderstanding) of religion influences the basic principles of his theory of communicative action?

We must remember here that his book claims to be A Theory of Communicative Action. So we may ask if Habermas' views on religion allow him to experience and describe correctly such communicative action. I believe I must answer that I do not see a direct and major influence of his views on religion within his theory of communicative action. I believe that Habermas would have been able to propose the same theory as a believer. His limited (and for me faulty) understanding of the human religious experience does not invalidate the global claims of his theory of communicative action.

This may be expressed in another way: even if Habermas has a wrong understanding of what is the religious experience within the human experience, his claim in favor of a new type of action -that he calls communicative action- remains meaningful, adequate, and valid. It is possible to have a worldview which includes communicative actions and does not include the religious experience, and I even add that, for me, such worldview is not irrational.

But I claim that Habermas' understanding of religion does influence his sociology. I do claim that a discourse on human society that does not include in a meaningful manner

the religious experience -even if such experience would be made only by a very small group of people within a society - is incomplete; such sociology, i.e. this scientific discourse on society, is incomplete because it does not integrate the religious experience of the society within its horizon.

I am less cautious with Habermas' theory of modernity. The two volumes of The Theory of Communicative Action do not propose only a theory of communicative action, they also suggest a theory of modernity, trying to explain the defining features of modern societies. Now if I ask: is Habermas' theory of modernity influenced by his understanding of religion, I must answer affirmatively.

Because his theory of modernity is about loss of freedom and meaning, I claim that these concepts (and terms) cannot be fully understood without an understanding of the nature, role and place of religions within a social group. Because Habermas has a wrong¹⁶⁴ conception of religion, I cannot accept his whole argument about the loss of meaning and

¹⁶⁴ Here my claim is not only that Habermas' conception is incomplete and different, my claim is that his definition of religion does not correspond to my experience of what is a religious experience. But this does not even mean that I am right and that he is wrong: it could be that Habermas has not made a religious experience (he does not know what he is talking about), it could also be that we both have a religious experience, but we express it in different ways (therefore, a dialogue could clarify the positions; I have written 'could' and not 'should', because such a dialogue is never finished).

freedom in modern societies. And therefore, I cannot accept without major reservations his theory of modernity.

Obviously, there are basic sociological facts that I accept, because I also experience them: for instance, the decline in religious practice. But I do not express these facts by the same terms, and I do not give them the same definition: for instance, the term 'secularization'. And therefore, I do not interpret these facts in the same way, simply because the context, horizon, worldview or lifeworld into which I situate these facts, is different. My theory of modernity will be different from Habermas'.

So where is the problem with Habermas? I will simply claim that his problem is very common in the scientific community: scientists do not want to leave their specific scientific focus in order to explore the philosophical and theological aspects of their own horizon. Because, in The Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas does not explore, i.e. does not make more explicit, his own philosophical background (horizon), he is unaware of the way he uses basic concepts as experience, language, expression; he uses these concepts and terms without giving them a clear definition because he does not situate them clearly enough into the (philosophical) context into which their meaning could have been found and made more explicit¹⁶⁵. Obviously, this does not mean that for

¹⁶⁵ I have limited my research to The Theory of

him these concepts are not meaningful, Habermas uses these concepts in a meaningful way, but because he refuses to become philosophical or theological, he keeps implicit the philosophical as well as the theological assumptions of his own horizon.

Habermas does not explore his religious or theological horizon. This seems to me especially clear when he describes the societies as a whole. Parsons has tried to explore the context into which societies could be understood, and Parsons proposed a contextual framework for the human condition.

For Habermas, what is the context into which he makes meaningful and understandable the societies as a whole? At the end of his two volume studies, he comes back to the critical theory of societies, but does he think that the criteria with which such a critique will become possible could be determined without exploring the context into which societies could be understood? Habermas wants to propose a critical theory of society, but he never explores the whole horizon, context, or lifeworld into which such an evaluation process may become meaningful, and therefore rational.

Communicative Action, and within this context my statements are valid, I believe. But I am also aware that in other works, and especially in more recent ones, Habermas explores a little bit more the philosophical tradition.

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works about Habermas

OUTHWAITE W. Habermas. A Critical Introduction. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.

New Philosophies of Social Science. Realism, Hermeneutics and Critical Theory. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.

BRAATEN J. Habermas' Critical Theory of Society. New York: State University of New York Press, 1991.

MCCARTHY T. The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978.

INGRAM D. Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987.

PUSEY M. Jürgen Habermas. London & New York: Routledge, 1987.

PEUKERT HELMUT. Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology. Towards a Theology of Communicative Action. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986 (First edition in 1984).

Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology, ed. by Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza. New York: Crossroad, 1992.

Global background Philosophy of sciences

AUSTIN J.L. Quand dire, c'est faire. How to do Things with Words. Paris: Seuil, 1970 (First edition in 1962).

GIERE R.N. Explaining Science. A Cognitive Approach. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

GILLIES DONALD. Philosophy of Sciences in the Twentieth Century. Four Central Themes. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

FOUREZ GÉRARD. La construction des sciences. Les logiques des inventions scientifiques. Introduction à la philosophie et à l'éthique des sciences. Montréal: ERPI-Science, 1992.

HULL David H. Science as a Process. An Evolutionary Account of the Social and Conceptual Development of Science. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

JARROSSON BRUNO. Invitation à la philosophie des sciences. Paris: Seuil, 1992.

KUHN Thomas S. La structure des révolutions scientifiques. Paris: Flammarion, 1983 (First edition in 1962).

PAGELS HEINZ R. The Cosmic Code. Quantum Physics as the Language of Nature. NY: Bantam Books, 1990 (First edition in 1982).

POPPER Karl. The Logic of Scientific Discovery. Hutchinson, 1972 (First edition in 1934).

_____. Conjectures and Refutations. The Growth of Scientific Knowledge. NY: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963.

_____. Realism and the Aim of Science. Hutchinson, 1983.

_____. Objective Knowledge. An Evolutionary Approach. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.

QUINE W.V.O. From a Logical Point of View. London: Harvard University Press, 1980 (First edition in 1953).

_____. Word & Object. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960.

_____. Quiddités. Dictionnaire philosophique par intermittence. Paris: Seuil, 1992 (First edition in 1987).

RORTY RICHARD. Consequences of Pragmatism. (Essays: 1972-1980). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

RUSSELL Bertrand. The Problems of Philosophy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991 (First edition in 1911).

_____. Our Knowledge of the External World. London: Allen & Unwin, 1949 (First edition in 1914).

_____. Logic and Knowledge: Essays 1901-1950. London: Allen & Unwin. 1984 (First edition in 1956).

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig. Tractatus logico-philosophicus, suivi de Investigations philosophiques. Paris: Gallimard, 1961

Philosophy of Arts

COLLINGWOOD R.G. The Principles of Art. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958 (First edition in 1938).

DEWEY JOHN. Art as Experience. NY: Capricorn Books, 1958 (13th edition).

Philosophical Aesthetics. An Introduction. Edited by O. HANFLING. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994 (First edition in 1992).

About Religion and Theology

ALESSI ADRIANO. Filosofia della religione. Roma: Las, 1991.

BOFF Clodovis. Théorie et pratique. La méthode des théologies de la libération. Paris: Cerf, 1990. 404 pages.

CROMBIE A.M. "The Possibility of Theological Statements", in Faith and Logic. Ed. by Mitchell. London, 1958.

EDWARDS DENIS. Human Experience of God. NY: Paulist Press, 1983.

PETER EICHER. La théologie comme science pratique. Paris: Cerf, 1982. 288 pages.

EVANS C. STEPHEN. Philosophy of Religion. Thinking about Faith. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1982.

FLEW A. "Theology and Falsification", in New Essays in Philosophical Theology. Ed. by Flew and MacIntyre. London, 1955.

FRANKENBERRY NANCY. Religion and Radical Empiricism. NY: State University of New York Press, 1987.

GIBELLINI Rosino. Panorama de la théologie au XXe s. Paris: Cerf, 1994 (First Italian edition in 1992). 684 pages.

HICK J. Faith and Knowledge. Ithaca: 1957.

_____ The Existence of God. NY: 1964.

KAUFMANN W. Critique of Religion and Philosophy. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990 (First edition in 1978).

MAGNANI GIOVANNI. Filosofia della religione. Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1993.

MANCINI ITALO. Filosofia della religione. Genova: Marietti, 1991.

MESLIN MICHEL. L'expérience humaine du divin. Fondements d'une anthropologie religieuse. Paris: Cerf, 1988.

ROBERTS KEITH A. Religion in Sociological Perspective. Belmont: Wadsworth, 1990 (First edition in 1984).

ROYCE JOSIAH. The Sources of Religious Insight. Edinburgh: Clark, 1912.

SCHILLEBEECKX Edward. Gesù. La storia di un vivente. Brescia: Queriniana, 1976 (First edition in 1974). 774 pages.

SOVERNIGO G. Religione e Persona. Psicologia dell'esperienza religiosa. Bologna: Dehoniane, 1993 (First edition in 1990).

Initiation à la pratique de la théologie. I. Introduction. Ed. by B. LAURET and F. REFOULE. Paris: Cerf, 1982. 544 pages.

Philosophy of Religion. Selected Readings. Ed. by W.L. ROWE & W.J. WAINWRIGHT. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989 (First edition in 1973).

The Philosophy of Religion. Ed. by B. MITCHELL. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982 (First edition in 1971).

Religion & Twentieth Century American Intellectual Life. Ed. by M. J. LACEY. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 (First edition in 1989).

On Science and Religion

BARBOUR Ian G. Myths, Models, and Paradigms. A Comparative Study in Science & Religion. San Francisco: Harper, 1976 (First edition in 1974).

Issues in Science and Religion. San Francisco: Harper, 1971 (First edition in 1966).

CAPRA FRITJOF. The Tao of Physics. Boston: Shambhala, 1991 (First edition in 1975).

The Turning Point. Science, Society, and the Rising Culture. NY: Bantam Books, 1988 (First edition in 1982).

CAPRA FRITJOF & STEINDL-RAST DAVID. Belonging to the Universe. Explorations on the Frontiers of Science & Spirituality. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.

HOOYKAAS R. Religion and the Rise of Modern Science. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1972.

MORRIS BRIAN. Anthropological Studies of Religion. An Introductory Text. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 (First edition in 1987).

PADEN WILLIAM E. Interpreting the Sacred. Ways of Viewing Religion. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.

PROUDFOOT WAYNE. Religious Experience. San Francisco: University of California Press, 1985.

ROLSTON H. III. Science and Religion.

STANESBY DEREK. Science, Reason & Religion. London: Routledge, 1988 (First edition in 1985)

L'expérience religieuse. Dans "Chemins de Dialogue", no 3 de janvier 1994.

Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis. Edited by Steven T. KATZ. NY: Oxford University Press, 1978.

On the concept of experience

The British Empiricists

The American Pragmatists

DUBET François. Sociologie de l'expérience. Paris: Seuil, 1994. 280 pages.

BERGER RALPH. Psychosis. The Circularity of Experience. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1977.

GREGORY Richard. The Intelligent Eye. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970.

HUSSERL Edmund. Idées directrices pour une phénoménologie. Paris: Gallimard, 1950.

La crise des sciences européennes et la phénoménologie transcendantale. Paris: Gallimard, 1976 (First edition in 1954).

KALINOWSKI GEORGES. Expérience et phénoménologie. Husserl, Ingarden, Scheler. Paris: Editions universitaires, 1992.

KOHAK ERAZIM. Idea & Experience. Edmund Husserl's Project of Phenomenology in Ideas I. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

PERLS & HEFFERLINE & GOODMAN. Gestalt Therapy. NY: Julian Press, 1962.

Creative Intelligence. NY: Holt, 1917.

Religious Experience. Bangalore: Dharmaran, 1981.

L'oeil magique. Une nouvelle façon de voir le monde. Richmond Hill: Scholastic, 1994. 35 pages.

L'oeil magique II. Une nouvelle façon de voir le monde. Richmond Hill: Scholastic, 1994. 35 pages.