



Civitas - Revista de Ciências Sociais

ISSN: 1519-6089

ISSN: 1984-7289

Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul

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Civitas - Revista de Ciências Sociais, vol. 22, 2022, January-December, pp. 1-10

Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15448/1984-7289.2022.1.41208>

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CIVITAS

Revista de Ciências Sociais
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências Sociais

Civitas 22: 1-10, jan.-dez. 2022
e-ISSN: 1984-7289 ISSN-L: 1519-6089

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15448/1984-7289.2022.1.41208>

ATUALIDADE POLÍTICA DA TEORIA CRÍTICA

Towards a phenomenological contribution for social criticism: a critique of the normative conceptions of the lifeworld in Habermas

Por uma contribuição fenomenológica para a crítica social: uma crítica das concepções normativas do mundo da vida em Habermas

Hacia un aporte fenomenológico de la crítica social: una crítica de las concepciones normativas del mundo de la vida en Habermas

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Received: 28 jul. 2021.

Approved: 21 out. 2021.

Published: 16 maio 2022.

Abstract: This article will attempt to show how Habermas turns away from a critical-phenomenological perspective and towards an analytic and pragmatic understanding of language and society. I want to point out that there is minimal phenomenology in Habermas' appropriation of the concept of *Lebenswelt*. I concede that Habermas provides us with a fascinating re-assessment of some classical elements in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, but in his "Critique of Functionalist Reason," he seems to abandon most of the methodological elements that would allow us to call his own method "phenomenological."

Keywords: Transcendental Intersubjectivity. Phenomenology. Critical Theory. Lifeworld.

Resumo: Este artigo tentará mostrar como Habermas se afasta de uma perspectiva crítico-fenomenológica para uma compreensão analítica e pragmática da linguagem e da sociedade. Saliento que os elementos fenomenológicos são quase inteiramente abandonados na apropriação do conceito de *Lebenswelt* por Habermas. Admito que Habermas nos fornece uma reavaliação fascinante de alguns elementos clássicos da filosofia de Edmund Husserl, mas em sua "Crítica da razão funcionalista", parece abandonar a maioria dos elementos metodológicos que nos permitiriam chamar seu método de "fenomenológico".

Palavras-chave: Intersubjetividade transcendental. Fenomenologia. Teoria crítica. Mundo da vida.

Resumen: Este artículo intentará mostrar cómo Habermas se aleja de una perspectiva crítico-fenomenológica hacia una comprensión analítica y pragmática del lenguaje y la sociedad. Quiero señalar que hay una fenomenología mínima en el chorro de Habermas del concepto de *Lebenswelt*. Admito que Habermas nos proporciona una reevaluación fascinante de algunos elementos clásicos de la filosofía de Edmund Husserl, pero en su "Crítica de la razón funcionalista" parece abandonar la mayoría de los elementos metodológicos que nos permitirían llamar su propio método "fenomenológico".

Palabras clave: Intersubjetividad transcendental. Fenomenología. Teoría crítica. Mundo vivido.

Habermas seems to see phenomenology as a philosophy of consciousness that is operative on the "lifeworld paradigm." This perspective motivates Habermas to see system-theory, as developed in the social sciences, as an heir to the reflections in Schutz and Husserl (Habermas



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1984, 128). In this, Habermas seems to want to take Schutz further than the descriptive intentions of interpretative sociology, insisting on the possibility of consensus as a guiding principle for sociological reflection: social interaction presupposes that individuals are in consensus about the meaning-like structures of the world and the value-like expressions of language. This element in Habermas is in tension with a phenomenological account of social action, but at the heart of an epistemological aspect of political liberalism: the question of language and discourse as a leading clue to the constitution of society and politics.

The re-framing of the project of modernity as the attempt to secure some universal perspective to the constitution of meaning and its relation to the institution of rights allows Habermas to develop the idea of communicative action and communicative reason as a response to what is identified as the de-rationalization of the concept of truth and meaning in post-structuralism, and, to some extent, in phenomenology. This issue is tackled quite early in Habermas' oeuvre, but it takes decisive shape in his *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, and acquires final density in the *Theory of Communicative Action*. Such process of de-rationalization motivates Habermas to move away from his roots at both the Frankfurt School and in Husserlian phenomenology.

Habermas focuses on the development of communicative reason as a tool for *positive homogeneity*. I have coined this term to describe the form in which reason has an *a priori* potential to elucidate the primordial structure of social reality. In this sense, Habermas offers an alternative to some dilemmas within Husserl's diagnosis of a crisis within modern sciences (Husserl 1970): he follows Husserl up until the diagnosis of a problem of confusing an instrumental interest as a universal guideline for conduct, but he does not follow Husserl's option for a transcendently constituted lifeworld, focusing instead on an *a priori* structure for language which will inform any communicative practices. In doing so, Habermas

is decidedly and consciously moving in direct contradiction to a phenomenological approach, and if he is correct about the consequences of taking a transcendental approach to reason, we indeed have absolutely no reason to continue to attempt a phenomenological perspective on social sciences.

But Habermas seems to be mistaken for supposing that a transcendental approach in phenomenology necessarily implies a de-rationalization of the meaning and truth, as well as a narrow and outdated psychological subjectivism. Habermas follows Tugendhat's interpretation of the question of self-consciousness in phenomenology (Tugendhat 1986), concluding that a phenomenological position will ultimately lead to a de-rationalized notion of truth and to the impossibility of a shared, linguistic lifeworld which allows communicative action to take precedence over other forms of instrumental action. In what follows, I hope to show that this reading is not fair to the intersubjective nature of the lifeworld and its territorial character.

From absolute meaning to communicative reason: Habermas' normative phenomenology

Habermas does not simply disregard Husserl in his *Theory of Communicative Action*. To be sure, the understanding of the social world as a dimension of the *Lebenswelt* still echoes Husserl (Husserl 1970; 1975). However, the methodological assumptions that characterize a phenomenological method are dropped by Habermas, and this abandonment of the method is connected to the assumption that ordinary language philosophy is in a better position than phenomenology to deal with issues of language and communicative praxis in general (Habermas 1984, 396–397).² Tugendhat's influence is of particular interest here, as Habermas seems to subscribe to his critique of Husserl's philosophy. Habermas reconstitutes the Weberian understanding of reason and meaning in terms of communication, reframing the

² As we will see, the theories of consciousness that Tugendhat has reformulated in "semantic terms" include a Husserlian analysis of the lifeworld, and *specially* the Husserlian account of givenness and subjectivity.

discourse on reason and rationality accordingly (Habermas 1984, 50).

Further, I hope to stress, first, what are the normative elements of Habermas understanding of society, second, how Habermas strategically uses these normative elements in order to implement a determined notion of the lifeworld as a paradigm for social action, and finally, the consequences of such approach in a phenomenological perspective.

If, in Weber (1994), culture is connected to preferences that are conscious and effectively preferred by individuals within society, in Schutz (2011), culture is connected to contingencies and disordered elements affecting individuals within those societies. Indeed, there is action oriented towards meaning, but in this perspective this sort of action does not constitute the social construction of reality, whereas, in Weber (1949), action towards meaning *is* the subject of social reality.

Still, reason in Weber (1980) is a regional phenomenon. Particular societies have particular conceptions of what stands as reasonable and how it stands so. The constitution of what is and what is not acceptable within social circles and the movement from the social institution of preferences into a system of rights is a historical contingency that should be analyzed on a case-by-case basis. During the 1960s, Habermas still follows Weber, though through an Adornian inspiration, as he writes on the connection between reason and interest. He adopts the Frankfurtian language of instrumental reason and seems to be comfortable as an heir to the tradition of German Marxists. In the early 1970s, however, Habermas starts to abandon elements of his former Marxist analysis of social reality, suggesting the necessity to drop a transcendental and pre-predicative analysis of language, association, and subjectivity in order to enter the discussion on the social construction of values and institutions, as if a phenomenological account of socio-political philosophy were implausible (Habermas 1984, 2).

The stage is then set for Habermas to devel-

op the conditions in which we could exercise our speech abilities. From the epistemological point of view, Habermas holds that we should no longer privilege consciousness as a clue to intersubjectivity. Instead, the focus of an analysis of intersubjectivity should be a philosophy of language and a philosophy of language that allows us to understand the predicative nature of speech acts (Habermas 1984, 343).

Habermas intends to overcome something that he perceives as a limitation in Schutz, that is, the "culturalistic concept of the lifeworld" (Habermas 1987, 138–139). In this instance, Habermas drops the phenomenological idea of the lifeworld in favor of a predicative understanding of normativity and society in the articulation of discursive practices (the so-called subsystemic colonization of the lifeworld; Habermas 1984, 219) with normative (Habermas 1987, 61), *a priori*, criteria, and conditions for discourse – the idea of communicative reason (Habermas 1987, 64).³

Habermas suggests that a communicative approach to the lifeworld might solve some of the paradoxes within interpretative sociology, particularly the problems connected with moral and political relativism. This suggestion is the context in which a normatively guided interaction surfaces as a medium for social relations. Such medium stresses that individuals in a determined society can only communicate with each other if they agree to the terms they are using to refer to the external world.

This agreement concerning the structure of the external world is a function of orienting discursive practices rationally: because Habermas takes the linguistic turn as a departure point and accepts the central presuppositions of an ordinary understanding of language, he can then stress that *because* we can reach an agreement on the terms we use to refer to objects, we have reason to orient our language towards this agreement. We have reasons to build up a system of references and rules for interaction.

Is this to say that Habermas super-impos-

³ Note the description of the elements of how speech acts can operate in a communicative-like patterns if and only if certain components of speech are integrated.

es one form of meaning constitution as determinant over other forms? In a way, asking this question puts us outside the epistemological terms Habermas is presupposing. For Habermas, it does not make much sense to speak of a plural form of meaning constitution: because language is structured ordinarily, and given the opportunity to do so, we will organize language towards mutual understanding, the cultural stock of knowledge which is acquired in a contingent form (dependent on socialization, geography, etc) has a necessary structure. The interpretation of the cultural stock of knowledge, which is made by every individual, every time any expression of any sort of preference is uttered, reproduces the necessity of communicative reason: even when individuals instrumentally use language in an attempt to miscommunicate something, the communicative-linguistic background of reason remains. Thus, meaning constitution is understood within the parameters of the necessity of communicative reason.

These are the methodological and epistemological presuppositions that allow Habermas to state the communicative structure of subjectivity, or better yet, the communicative structure of an intersubjective lifeworld. However, Habermas would have betrayed his Kantian tendencies had he trusted that the individuals would use communicative reason by *fiat*. Individuals are *competent* to develop communicative praxis, but these competences must be nurtured within a legitimate and regulated social order, a system.

Here we have a process of historical construction for how individuals may fulfill their communicative competences. This process means, in short, that individuals need to be motivated to act towards mutual understanding. On the one hand, the interpretation of a given social action depends on the social framework in which such action is occurring. On the other hand, and this is the peculiar element in Habermas' proposition, communicative reason reproduces a movement within the constitution of a cosmopolitan history in Kant (2009): societies will become more rational as they adopt the necessity of a specific form of

assertion.

Rationality is then a function of communicative reason, which is made effective according to the verifiability of any given assertion (its truth-character), the institutional motivation for individuals to act responsibly (a State-based notion of mutual identification and solidarity), and the moral development of individuals (Habermas calls this the "responsibility of the adult personality" (Habermas 1987, 141), I would instead call it the pedagogical cherishment of communicative competences). Habermas is describing a process of mutual nourishment between system and lifeworld, where we have, on the one hand, the codified, established, means for social relations stratified within a systemic order, and a sub-systemic, cultural set of possibilities that inform the constitution of a system. Societies will organize these relations between system and lifeworld according to their heritage and history. And yet, are we satisfied with a description of the processes of meaning constitution in different social realities? Within the parameters of communicative reason, we must, again, recognize the limitations of this question. In Habermas, the plurality of reasonable conceptions of meaning is only conceivable within the parameters of the necessary orientation towards meaning and understanding peculiar to a predicative understanding of language.

As a true heir of the illuminist tradition, Habermas wants to stress a humanistic approach in which the development of specific speech practices will lead to the construction of an increasingly rational and fair society. However, this means that we ought to take some steps to construct the basis on which such a society will operate. Of course, the same privileged position that the philosopher has as one that can operate within the demands of rationality now becomes an obligation towards society as a whole: Habermas expects that the institutional framework of a society ought to be organized and framed in order to implement the steps that will lead individuals toward communicative praxis.

It seems that Habermas sees the project of enlightenment as one of *positive homogeneity*.

Indeed, Habermas never uses this term, so I must clarify what I mean by this. I want to stress here that the notion of communicative action turns the division between primary and secondary socialization into more than just a process of estrangement of different traditions and historical mutual recognition. Instead, Habermas wants to point that in time these heterogeneous forms of communicative praxis that constitute different systems of legitimation ought to be turned into more homogenous praxis.

There is space for diversity of idioms and beliefs in this conception of communicative action. What I mean by positive homogeneity is that Habermas indicates that the nature of rationality inbuilt within language presses us to state the language of human rights as *the* guide for legitimate sorts of systems, and these legitimate sorts of systems will, in their turn, inform what are the acceptable praxis that will lead us to communicative action. In that sense, it is acceptable to have a plurality of assertions and beliefs, as we think in terms of plans of life, religion, or sexuality. However, the legitimacy of these praxes (which is, in Habermasian language, their rationality) is connected to the necessary normative character of communicative reason.

In that sense, communicative reason informs and frames the rational construction of legitimate social order, and social choices within this social order will be more rational as the procedures that are taken as legitimate within the system inform individual and group practices.

As read by Habermas, the project of modernity is to *implement* equality in a legitimately built systemic order. Equality here is understood not in terms of economic equality or equality of opportunity, but in broader terms. Habermas understands equality in linguistic and pragmatic terms in which individuals are equal insofar they share a disposition towards rationally and predicatively organizing their discourse towards mutual understanding (in the sense that Weber

would call *Wertrationalität*). Nevertheless, if the orientation towards understanding, even in an absolute form, was dependent on the typification of the rational within a determined familiar context in Weber (1954;2005), in Habermas, the typification of the rational is given within universally shared linguistic capabilities.

Habermas will thus develop a wide role for political philosophy. In fact, the project that Habermas begins in his "linguistic turn" after 1976 and the publication of *Was heißt Universalpragmatik?* (Habermas 1982)⁴ is an ambitious declaration of purpose, one that supposes that any account of the political must also account for the structure of knowledge, language, and morals. For Habermas, political philosophy understood as an isolated field that can stand freely, without the support of a coherent and dependent theory of knowledge and language, is incoherent. Habermas points that Rawls himself was unable to do so, as his own attempt to give an account of a "freestanding" political liberalism supposes a heavy epistemological baggage (Habermas 1995, 131).

For example, Habermas sees the considerations on rational choice from the standpoint of exchange of goods and priority as limited and shortsighted. Partially, this is a result of the influence of system-sociology, particularly Talcott Parsons. In his *Structure of Social Action*, Parsons provides an outstanding review of political economy, which he sees as a theory of action, more specifically, a theory of *individual* action. Political economy is concerned with how singular individuals can make singular choices according to particular viewpoints. Logical, or rational, action then refers to a system of means aiming at a determined end that can be described in terms of goods, and, from a political standpoint, it will exchange interests to fulfill their particular ends. In that sense, I exchange a good "x" for "y," trusting that "y" may finally lead me to my pursued end. Obviously, I also negotiate and mitigate preferences according to availability, as scarcity is

⁴ There is some debate as to where the "linguistic turn" in Habermas can be located, but his reflections in 1976 are particularly important as they represent a breakaway point from both the notion of Communicative Ethics, in Apel, and the earlier reflections on instrumental reason in Adorno.

always a fact in any non-ideal political scenario (all actual scenarios will be non-ideal). Rational choice would thus presuppose actors that perform in such model: they will be able to express references according to a "selective standard regulating the choice of means" (Parsons 1968, 252). Such individualistic and economic approach for choice will not be enough for a plausible theory of social choice, in Parsons, because it ignores that the system of connections leading means to end is not only interpreted in terms of a selective, economic, standard, nor does it operate on the level of the individual, alone. In that sense, what is generally identified as the strength of political economy (its selective domain of analysis) becomes a burden as the account of a given social action will be restricted to an *aspect* of such given action (Parsons 1968, 262). Habermas takes advantage of this insight to attack Rawls on methodological grounds: though he agrees with the general spirit and conclusions of Rawls' political liberalism, particularly as it points to a universal language of human rights, Habermas (1995, 110) stresses that the processes leading to the choice of values that will take us to a democratic and legitimate order cannot be described in terms of a "freestanding" doctrine, much less in terms of an economic account of informed exchange of goods. Instead, they ought to be thought through in terms of an epistemic necessity for specific patterns of discursivity, which, in their turn, will move us to specific patterns of choice.

Again, I must stress the homogenous character of such a hypothesis: Habermas wants to argue that because we share the same linguistic capabilities, it is feasible to state that the necessity of certain forms of making choices will follow. In that sense, radically heterogeneous forms of government, for example, indicate disastrous strategies in implementing government. It should then come as no surprise that Habermas will support efforts to establish a universal system of rights that will regulate different forms of assertion: diversity will be possible within the parameters of communi-

cative reason, which states a universal norm for all forms of predication (Habermas 2015, 111).⁵

However, where Weber (1954) tried to stress that norms were constituted regionally and dependently on social contexts, that, later, interacted with and would incorporate or resist different ways of producing and regarding norms, Habermas places the pragmatic structure of language as an ever-present norm that regulates and permeates communicative action and hence characterizes any sort of rational choice. In that sense, an individual, or a society, will rationally choose a value, in Habermas, when that choice is consistent with the universal character of communicative reason. Here, we are back to a Kantian move: the reasonability of any stated preference is only recognized when that preference can be universalized according to a form. If in Kant this form is given in terms of a moral consciousness (Kant 2003), in Habermas (2007), moral consciousness becomes the communicative reason.

The main point here is that if Habermas is right about the structure of language and the necessity of communicative reason, then the idea of the multiplicity of lifeworlds and meaning-constitution makes no sense, and even if it did make epistemological sense, we would have to question its advantages as a tool for the implementation of socio-political strategies. Habermas points at the predicative structure of language, stressing that the notion of pre-predicative language is, at the best-case scenario, best left as the realm of the mystical. We have no reason to think that language is anything but ordinary and that the constitution of meaning is connected to transitivity, which is to say, in short, that the problem of truth is only understood in terms of reason, and reason is only conceivable in terms of an analysis of language—for Tugendhat (1982; 2006), this means an analysis of the internal coherence of sentences, for Habermas, an understanding of the pragmatics of language and speech acts.

These are solid and important points to be analyzed. After all, why should we abdicate con-

⁵ The key passage here is "along with the system of rights, one must also create the *language* in which a community can understand itself as a voluntary association of free and equal consociates *under law*".

trol of the processes of meaning constitution? Tugendhat is particularly eloquent on this matters, as he convincingly shows how Heidegger's disregard for rationality as a guide to social action and preferences might have to lead him to opt for some particularly horrifying policies, policies that he defended using the very epistemological language that would later ground much of the works on phenomenology and ontology (Tugendhat 1986, 217–218). Habermas was equally eloquent in his *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, where he makes a persuasive case for his normative and abstract conception of a rationally oriented lifeworld (Habermas 2007b, 346).

Habermas is thus able to develop a notion of lifeworld which is not connected to suppositions of a transcendental nature; instead, it is connected to the attitudes of other *actual* members of a community of speakers, which encompasses the totality of individuals that can fulfill the conditions of communicative reason – that is, the totality of adult individuals. A lifeworld is hence a totality of meaning relations constricted by communicative reason (Habermas 2007b, 358–359), where individuals and social groups choose preferences and values, minding that others are actually orienting themselves in a similar manner. This will allow Habermas to defend the feasibility of the cosmopolitan model, which he sees as a fact in the European Enlightenment (Habermas 2007b, 360).

Nevertheless, does that mean a complete abandonment of the presupposition of a phenomenological perspective? Once Habermas trusts language and speech acts as the basis of intersubjectivity, he replaces "the primacy of intentionality with that of linguistic communication and understanding," (Zahavi 2001, 181) which stresses a move away from the primacy of perception and affection in the constitution of the world, privileging the place of reason and the constitution of a stable and homogenic normality. Habermas cannot find in a phenomenological methodology the elements for the construction of a systemic order of signification, or the continuation of knowledge claims, in time, that will lead to a stable, organized, and solidary society

(Habermas 1987, 137).

If for Schutz (1967; Schutz e Luckmann 1973) the phenomenological attitude regarding the social constitution of meaning suggested that the multiplicity of meaning constitution referred to a multiplicity of lifeworlds that were constituted intersubjectively and somehow passively, Habermas suggests that we constitute meaning onto a linguistically shared lifeworld, one that is not divided into differently constituted social reality, but where reality is interpreted successfully if and only if we follow the parameters of a necessary attitude towards reason and mutual understanding. Husserl (1970) was right to point at a crisis of legitimation in modern sciences, but he was wrong when he thought the terms of this crisis through a transcendental strategy. Moreover, if we take Husserl seriously, consensus regarding the structure of social reality is impossible, and asserting the validity and normativity of truth claims becomes only possible within the parameters of a transcendently posited subjectivity. The communicative position, wherein individuals can adopt an attitude towards mutual understanding, is hence impossible from the standpoint of a phenomenological perspective, at least as far as Habermas is concerned (Habermas 2007b).

Thus, Habermas does not provide a phenomenological account of the lifeworld, nor does he offer a misinterpretation of the main points of this concept in Husserl, as Dan Zahavi (2001, 191) seems to indicate. Habermas creates his notion of the lifeworld as a stage in which communicative practices may, and ought to, occur. Lifeworld is no longer interpreted as a topologic situation where individuals constitute meaning differently, but as a constrain to the possibilities of world formation and intersubjective practices. Dan Zahavi insists on an interpretation of such formation of the lifeworld as if Habermas retained a phenomenological conception of consciousness (Zahavi 2001, 188–206), but this is precisely the point in which a "rejoinder" with a phenomenological tradition is impossible: Habermas abandons the model of consciousness to focus on the philosophy of language as a clue to intersubjectivity. In that

sense, when Habermas adopts the language of self-consciousness and self-representation, he is doing so in the terms developed by Tugendhat, which are incompatible with a transcendental account of the self.

If we accept the terms of a Habermasian reading, then we will have to accept that a phenomenological reading of social reality leaves us without any grounds in which to still access meaning constitution and moves the interpretation of the processes of legitimation to a space where the validity of forms of legitimation is understood outside the realm of a universal leading clue for their interpretation—which, for Habermas, will, without doubt, have disastrous consequences in terms of the sort of policies we will find ourselves accepting, as we will have no reason to state their irrational purpose. From the standpoint of a phenomenological take on a social constitution of reality, what support do we have to state that defending stoning women to death because of adultery is absurd and illegitimate? If we are honest about the implications of a phenomenological reading of society, should not we accept these forms of constitution as regionally constituted optimal interpretations of reality? Habermas does not think that the phenomenological take on consciousness allows us to answer these questions while retaining a defense of a particular core of rights that permeate humanity, as a whole, regardless of local contingencies.

Conclusion: towards a phenomenological contribution: the concrete limits of communicative reason

It remains to be seen, however, if Habermas is right about phenomenology. I already anticipated some elements that Habermas fails to incorporate into his account, particularly the structure of consciousness and passivity, which might suggest persistent materiality for reality, which individuals react to and incorporate within limits. This same materiality also allows us to point at modes of constitution that will be more or less satisfactory, in terms of the verifiability of the assertion, that is,

if the description of a given object does justice to the materiality of what is described.

But it seems to me that the central weakness of Habermas' position is in his comprehension of what is the normative level of analysis, that is, the level in which we constitute and appropriate something like a stable reference point (Steinbock 1995).

Habermas (2015, 159) confesses that the level of pragmatic, ethical, and moral issues, and their reverberation in terms of a systemic organization of these issues, is purposed, from the standpoint of communicative reason, as an ought. I have suggested throughout this article that Habermas resistance to a disordered constitution of the lifeworld arises from his conviction that we can and should orient ourselves towards a rationally constituted system of values and that we have enough elements to defend a homogenously formed and regulated lifeworld which will provide individuals with an institutional framework where they will be able to fulfill their communicative potential.

A norm, then, is understood as what a dialogical agreement between parts operating on a legitimately built lifeworld reaches as a stable reference regarding a determined type. This is a heavily charged definition, as it presupposes a determined notion of dialogue, agreement, legitimacy, lifeworld, and reference. I suppose I have already clarified how communicative action will be foundational to each of these notions, particularly as it informs ethical relations within a lifeworld which in time will constitute the basis of a system of regulation for social action. This is a process of mutual nourishment, but supposes that the normative organization of a system that regulates social relations in a lifeworld is always already informed by a cultural stock of knowledge that is universally shared in the structure of language. This process means that we have a limit to the organization of social priorities about the good, and this limit is given by the structure of language, which frames and orients consensus about what is good.

This is not to say that variations on the des-

cription of the good are not possible. As I have already emphasized, they are possible within the parameters of communicative reason: in modern, secularized, societies this is to say that the normative (systemic) point of view “will regulate our common life in the equal interest of all” (Habermas 2015, 161). However, this normative is only a construction of a process of deliberation to a certain extent. Had Habermas remained on the level of description of a process of social deliberation as it referred to the historical construction of norms in societies, he would not have gone any further than Weber (1954). Once again, I must stress that this process has an ought-like structure in Habermas.

Habermas is in a Platonic position here (Rawls 1992): the philosopher knows how to educate, inform and conduct society towards the normative patterns that are given in nature; he is in a privileged position regarding the knowledge of what society ought to look like and how discursive practices ought to operate.

Interestingly, Habermas could have avoided this artificial position had he has not opted for a methodological strategy that allowed him to identify a linguistic structure in consciousness which frames communicative action in any context and that will further shape our judgments about less or more adequate social and epistemic action. This universalistic position in Habermas could, at first, be similar to the universal sociability that we find in Husserl, particularly in the *Crisis* (Husserl 1970). Still, Husserl's later account of transcendental subjectivity (Husserl 1991; 2001a) and passivity (Husserl 2001a) allows us to understand the paradoxes in social action, especially as they relate to advanced democracies and their peculiar character and the contradictions within our social realities and encounters.

This is not to say that a phenomenological and transcendental perspective would not bring a different set of issues, and certainly, there is much to be said about the limitations of the Husserlian perspective and its peculiar form of nominalism (Husserl, 2001b). Still, normative claims Habermas believes to have rendered phenomenology

obsolete have a peculiar density that the idea of communication reason does not seem to acknowledge properly. If anything, a phenomenological perspective could have helped Habermas realize the limitations of his ordinary understanding of representation and communication and the passive and non-cognitive ghosts that haunt our representational, communicative practices.

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Os textos deste artigo foram verificados pela Poá Comunicação e submetidos para validação do autor antes da publicação.