
The Epistemology of Jürgen Habermas's Critical Theory

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the epistemology of critical theory, focusing on the thought of Jürgen Habermas as a representative of the second generation of the Frankfurt School. Epistemology, as the study of knowledge, plays a central role in understanding how knowledge is formed, disseminated, and used in social contexts. In this context, Habermas critiques positivism and emphasizes the importance of communicative rationality and the public sphere as a means to achieve valid knowledge. He distinguishes between three types of knowledge: technical, practical, and emancipatory, each of which serves to understand and change social reality. Through discourse theory, Habermas emphasizes that social norms and legitimacy must be generated through an inclusive deliberative process, in which all voices are heard equally. The article also explores criticisms of Habermas's epistemology, including postmodernist views that challenge the ideal of communication free from domination. The methodological approaches used are literature review and qualitative analysis of the main philosophical works of the Frankfurt School and Habermas, as well as discourse analysis to understand the relationship between knowledge and power in society. Thus, Habermas's critical theory epistemology offers a relevant framework for understanding the dynamics of power and knowledge in modern societies, as well as its implications for law, media, and education. Other implications include the development of responsive public policies and intercultural dialogue to strengthen cooperation. Ultimately, this study offers both theoretical insights into critical theory's epistemology and practical guidance for its application, contributing to a more just and democratic society..

Keyword : Epistemology of Critical Theory, Jürgen Habermas, Communicative Rationality, Public Space, Discourse Theory

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INTRODUCTION

Talking about the epistemology of critical theory, we first know about epistemology. Epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, is a field of philosophy that examines the characteristics, origins, and limits of knowledge (Code, 2020; Kusch, 2021). The study of epistemology is essential to understand how humans acquire knowledge, how that knowledge is validated, and the obstacles that may arise in achieving valid knowledge. In writing about epistemology, it is very important to understand the background of the main debates, such as the relationship between experience and reason, the challenges of skepticism, the influence of language on knowledge, and the role of power in the formation of knowledge (Fricker, 2015; Medina, 2018; Mills, 2021). In addition, with the advancement of science and social theory, epistemology has evolved into a critical tool used to analyze how knowledge is formed, disseminated, and utilized in society (Audi, 2015).

One of the central issues in epistemology is the debate on empiricism and rationalism as written by Robert Audi, (2011) in his book entitled *Epistemology: A contemporary introduction to the theory of knowledge*, he explains that the debate has a great impact on the development of modern theories of knowledge. Empiricism plays a role in the development of science based on observation and experimentation, while rationalism provides the basis for deductive methods and logical reasoning.

Thinkers such as David Hume and John Locke emphasized that experience is important in acquiring knowledge (Hume, 2007), while René Descartes and Immanuel Kant prioritized the role of reason and innate concepts.

Not only debates about empiricism and rationalism, epistemology also discusses skepticism. The epistemology of this skepticism emphasizes doubts about the certainty of knowledge. Skepticism questions whether we know something for sure, or whether our knowledge is always overshadowed by uncertainty. Rene Descartes, (2008) in his book *Meditations on First Philosophy* tried to face the challenge of skepticism, he sought an undeniable foundation of knowledge, which Descartes later found in his very famous phrase "Cogito, ergo sum" (I think, then I exist). Skepticism has a role as a means of filtering philosophical thinking and testing the validity of the assumptions we hold about the world. However, this also raises questions about the limits that humans can reach in acquiring knowledge.

In the development of epistemology in the philosophy of language and postmodernity also gave birth to a debate about the relativism of knowledge, there are two philosophers who gave views on this, namely Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michel Foucault. Ludwig Wittgenstein, (2009) in his book *Philosophical Investigations* explains how knowledge is formed, he emphasizes that knowledge is built through language and culture, as well as being influenced by social and historical contexts. Meanwhile, Michel Foucault, (2002) in his work *Archaeology of Knowledge* that social structures affect what is recognized as valid "knowledge". This view shows that knowledge is not always neutral or objective, but rather influenced by linguistic, cultural, and social contexts. This perspective challenges the universal and absolute concept of knowledge, and emphasizes the importance of understanding knowledge in its social context.

In the context of science, the epistemology of knowledge from Karl Raymond Popper has a role with the concept of Falsifiability (falsified) which is used as a criterion in an effort to distinguish between scientific and non-scientific knowledge. Sir Karl Raymond Popper, (1968) in his work *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* stated that a good scientific theory is one that can be tested and has the potential to be refuted. Through his statement, Popper rejects the traditional view that the development of science occurs through the collection of evidence that supports theories. This approach shifts the focus of scientific epistemology from the search for absolute truth to the attempt to find errors or weaknesses in existing theories, thus encouraging the development of knowledge that is more dynamic and adaptive to change.

Meanwhile, critical theory in the philosophy of science is an approach that not only seeks to describe or understand the world objectively, but also aims to criticize and change social injustice. Critical Theory is a philosophical and sociological approach that focuses on understanding, criticizing, and transforming society by highlighting injustices in social, economic, and political aspects. Critical Theory thinkers, such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse of the Frankfurt School tradition. Max Horkheimer, (2002) in his work *Traditional and Critical Theory* said that it is important to understand the relationship between knowledge and ideology in maintaining the existing power structure. He argues that science cannot be separated from its social context and must involve criticism of injustice. Through his writings Horkheimer tried to distinguish between traditional theories, which tend to be descriptive and less critical, and critical theories, which focus on efforts to change society.

Horkheimer & Adorno, (2002) through their writings in a book entitled *Dialectic of Enlightenment* criticizes modern rationality which, although it aims to liberate human beings, often serves to strengthen control and domination. They emphasize that popular culture and mass media

serve to preserve dominant ideologies, thereby inhibiting individuals from thinking critically and questioning the status quo. Herbert Marcuse, (2007) argues that modern society creates pseudo-needs that hinder critical thinking and resistance efforts. He stated that technology and consumer culture are used to control individuals and limit their potential in critical thinking. Marcuse supported radical thought as a tool to achieve freedom. Meanwhile, Jürgen Habermas as the last generation of critical theory from the Frankfurt school, Habermas developed a communication theory that highlights the importance of dialogue as a way to achieve understanding and agreement in society. Jürgen Habermas, (2003) in his work *The Theory of Communicative Action* He emphasized that communication can function as a means of liberation and social change, while fighting for the values of democracy and participation.

Thus, Critical Theory in the philosophical view of experts serves as a tool to analyze and change unjust social structures, as well as encourage individuals to think critically and actively participate in social change. Finally, it is to understand the epistemology of critical theory, which is a field of philosophy that aims to uncover the relationship between knowledge and power, as well as how social structures affect the formation of knowledge. When writing about the epistemology of critical theory, it is important to understand the historical, philosophical, and social backgrounds that influenced the development of these theories. Critical Theory Epistemology challenges the dominant positivist approach in science, by emphasizing the importance of radical criticism for understanding the relationship between knowledge and power. In this context, knowledge is seen as a tool for social transformation and liberation, not just as a reflection of existing reality. In particular, this paper focuses on discussing how the epistemology of critical theory from the last generation of the Frankfurt school of Jürgen Habermas and the author also sees the application of critical theory in civic education.

METHOD

The approach used in this article includes a literature study and qualitative analysis of the major philosophical works of the Frankfurt School and Jürgen Habermas. Literature studies are conducted to collect and analyze a variety of relevant sources, including books, articles, and academic journals that discuss the thought of Jürgen Habermas as well as the contributions of other thinkers of the Frankfurt School. Through this approach, the author can understand the historical context and development of thought in critical theory, as well as how these ideas interact with each other and contribute to the understanding of epistemology.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Profile Jürgen Habermas

1. Background Jürgen Habermas,

Before discussing further about the thought of Jürgen Habermas, it would be good to first discuss the life profile of this German philosopher. Jürgen Habermas was born on June 18, 1929 in Düsseldorf, Germany. Habermas grew up during Nazi rule, which influenced his views on politics, democracy, and the role of ideology in society. Based on references that the author reads such as Fultner, (2014) in his work on Jürgen Habermas: Key concepts, he explains how the background of Jürgen Habermas, he explains that after World War II, Habermas began his education at various universities in Germany, such as in Göttingen, Zurich, and in Bonn. Habermas completed his S3 studies with a dissertation on the philosopher Friedrich Schelling in 1954. After completing his studies, Habermas continued his career as a journalist and research assistant, before eventually joining the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research) in Frankfurt in the late 1950s. It was here that he began to interact with thinkers from the

Frankfurt School, including Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who profoundly influenced his intellectual outlook (Finlayson, 2005).

2. Role in the Frankfurt School

Jürgen Habermas is often referred to as the second generation of the Frankfurt School, although he developed a different approach from his predecessors. Unlike Adorno and Horkheimer who had a pessimistic view of the potential of the Enlightenment and rationality, Habermas saw communicative rationality as the key to creating a more democratic and free society. Habermas rejected the pessimistic views of Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which they regarded the Enlightenment and rationality as tools of oppression. Alternatively, Habermas argues that rationality, if applied in an ideal communication context, can serve to achieve an emancipatory consensus.

3. Major Works and Philosophical Contributions

Jürgen Habermas is best known for his various contributions to philosophy and social theory, which include communication theory, public space, and criticism of modern capitalism. Here are some of his important works and contributions.

(a) Public Space Theory

One of the best and phenomenal works of Jürgen Habermas is his theory of public space. In his book *"The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere"*, Habermas, (1991) examines the changes in public space in European history. In the 18th century, public spaces served as an arena where citizens could gather to discuss rational political and social issues without interference from the state or economic powers. However, Habermas argues that in the era of modern capitalism, this public space is increasingly eroded by the commercialization of the media and corporate influence. The concept of public space put forward by Habermas has had a major impact on the study of media and democracy, and has become the basis for analyzing the formation of public opinion in modern society. He argues that to achieve a healthy democracy, public spaces that are open and unaffected by economic or political manipulation are needed.

(b) Communicative Action Theory

Through the greatest work of Jürgen Habermas, (1991) as in his book entitled *The Theory of Communicative Action*, we are introduced to the concept of communicative rationality. He distinguishes between instrumental rationality, which is used to achieve practical goals, and communicative rationality, which emphasizes the importance of dialogue and mutual understanding. According to Habermas, communicative rationality allows individuals to communicate openly and reach agreement in the absence of dominance. As David Held, (2008) explains in his book entitled *Models of Democracy* he states that Habermas believes that communication that is not influenced by power or hidden interests can produce a more democratic and just society.

(c) Discourse Theory and Deliberative Democracy

One of Habermas's main contributions was the idea of deliberative democracy, which emerged in works such as *"Between Facts and Norms"*. Habermas, (1997) explained that deliberative democracy is a model in which decisions are made through a rational and inclusive public discourse process. In this model, all interested parties participate in a dialogue based on rational arguments, with the aim of reaching a morally recognized consensus. Through his writings, Habermas believes that deliberative democracy provides an alternative to liberal democracy which is often dominated by dominant economic and political forces. This model is more responsive to the needs and interests of citizens through active participation in the decision-making process.

4. Influence and Criticism

Habermas was one of the most influential German philosophers of the 20th and early 21st centuries. His thinking has had a significant impact in various fields, including political philosophy, sociology, media studies, and law and democratic theory. Habermas also criticized modernity and the development of capitalist society. As explained by Rainer Forst, (2001) in "The Rule of Reasons," Habermas emphasized that instrumental rationality can alienate individuals from more authentic social relationships. However, his thoughts also received criticism. Some critics have argued that he is overly optimistic in assessing the potential for rationality and communication, and tends to ignore the power and inequality that often arise in everyday interactions. For example, Michel Foucault argued that power is spread out in discursive practices and cannot always be controlled through dialogue or consensus. In addition, Habermas also faced criticism related to his views on modernity. He views modernity as an unfinished project and still has the potential for emancipation. On the other hand, postmodernist thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard reject this view and argue that grand narratives such as "emancipation" or "rationality" should be questioned in the context of postmodern pluralism.

5. Awards and Achievements

Habermas has received numerous international awards for his contributions to philosophy and social theory. Some of the important awards as explained by Christian Fuchs, (2014) various awards such as, Friedrich Schiller Prize (1974), Theodor W. Adorno Award (1980), Erasmus Prize (2013), Kluge Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities (2015). Habermas also received honorary degrees from various universities around the world, including Yale University, Northwestern University, and Université catholique de Louvain.

6. The Relevance of Habermas's Thought Today

Habermas's thinking remains relevant today, especially in the face of the challenges of modern democracy. His theory of public space is used to understand how mass media and social media shape public opinion, as well as how economic and political power influence political discourse. The deliberative democratic model also plays an important role in improving the political decision-making process to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of the community. Habermas continues to be one of the leading figures advocating for the importance of rationality, dialogue, and participation in modern political life.

History of Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School

Critical Theory is a philosophical and sociological approach that develops from the context of complex historical and intellectual thought, especially related to the emergence of the Frankfurt School. This approach aims to evaluate and critique social structures, particularly in relation to capitalism, authoritarianism, and culture, using a multidisciplinary perspective. Below is a detailed description of the history of Critical Theory.

1. Beginnings and Background

Critical Theory has its roots in the intellectual contributions of the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research) founded at the University of Frankfurt in 1923. Thinkers from the Frankfurt School, including Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, and Jürgen Habermas, sought to integrate Marx's theory with a multidisciplinary approach to analyze and critique modern society, capitalism, and the culture that formed within it. Since 1930, the institute has been led by Max Horkheimer who directed his focus to interdisciplinary studies involving philosophy, sociology, economics, and psychology. Horkheimer, along with his colleagues such as Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Erich Fromm, sought to understand why the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, predicted by Marx, did not take place in Western Europe and the United States, and why capitalism continued to survive in the face of widespread discontent.

2. Main Characteristics of Critical Theory

Frankfurt's Critical Theory differs from traditional Marxism in that it not only focuses on political economy and class relations, but also extends its analysis to the realms of culture, psychology, and ideology. This theory mainly focuses on how ideology and social forces shape domination, control, and oppression, especially through popular culture and the institutions that exist in capitalist societies. Critical Theory is not descriptive, but normative and aims for emancipation. The thinkers of the Frankfurt School argue that the main goal of this theory is to liberate individuals from various forms of oppression, both material and mental. Critical Theory is fundamentally an attempt to understand how modern social structures create dominance, but more importantly to drive social change through critical awareness. Its multidisciplinary characteristics, criticism of capitalism and popular culture, rejection of economic determinism, and emancipatory aims, set it apart from traditional social theories. This theory offers a framework for critiquing and changing social conditions to be more just and free from oppression. The main characteristics of this critical theory are based on the writings of the leaders of the Frankfurt School as follows.

(a) Multidisciplinary

Based on the writings of Max Horkheimer, (2002) Traditional and critical theory in Critical theory critical theory rejects a one-dimensional approach to understanding social reality. Frankfurt School thinkers, such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, brought together philosophy, sociology, psychology, and economics in their analysis. With this approach, Critical Theory is able to explore not only economic and political aspects, but also the cultural and psychological factors that influence the formation of society.

(b) Rejection of Economic Determinism

Through the writings of Herbert Marcuse, (2007) entitled *One Dimensional Man* and the writings of Jürgen Habermas, (1991) entitled *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the writings reveal the difference with orthodox Marxism which emphasizes economic factors as the main determinants of social change, critical theory extends their analysis to the realms of ideology, culture, and psychology. Through their work, Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas argue that social change is not only influenced by class relations or economic factors, but also by the role of culture and ideology in shaping the consciousness of individuals and society.

(c) Criticism of Capitalist Society and Popular Culture

Critical Theory criticizes capitalism not only on the basis of economic exploitation, but also for its ability to create systems of domination through popular culture. Horkheimer & Adorno, (2002) in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* introduced the concept of "cultural industry," which shows how mass culture is controlled to shape people's consciousness to accept the status quo, thus undermining the potential for revolutionary change.

(d) Emancipatory Goals

Critical Theory not only aims to understand social structures, but also seeks to liberate individuals from various forms of oppression, both physical, material, and mental. Thinkers from the Frankfurt School, such as Herbert Marcuse, (2023) in his book entitled *eros and civilization* and Erich Fromm, (2013) in his book *Escape from freedom* argue that social change is necessary to support individual freedom and autonomy.

(e) Criticism of Instrumental Rationality

Critical Theory emphasizes the dominance of instrumental rationality (rationality that focuses on efficiency and practical goals) in modern capitalist society. Still in his writing on the *Dialectic of enlightenment* Horkheimer & Adorno, (2002) criticized that this rationality is often used to control

and oppress people, instead of liberating them. Such rationality has lost the critical and reflective aspects that are essential to achieving the goal of emancipation.

(f) Criticism Ideology

As Louis Althusser, (2014) wrote on the reproduction of capitalism: Ideology and ideological state apparatuses said that one of the main concerns of Critical Theory is how ideology functions to maintain the power structure. In this context, ideology is not only considered a wrong thought, but also a way for capitalist societies to create consensus through culture, education, and the media. This ensures that individuals accept the existing social order as something natural and unavoidable.

(g) Critical Reflection and Alteration of Consciousness

Critical Theory encourages individuals to do critical reflection on existing social conditions. The thinkers of the Frankfurt School believe that through critical reflection, people can realize how they are oppressed by the prevailing social, cultural, and economic systems, thus raising awareness of the need for social change.

3. Development of Critical Theory in the Frankfurt School

(a) Early development of Critical Theory

In its early stages, the Frankfurt School emphasized criticism of capitalism, especially in relation to how the capitalist economic system causes social injustice. They argue that capitalism is not only oppressive in the economic sphere, but also culturally and ideologically, which is then referred to as "cultural theory". Cultural industries, such as mass media, film, and music, are considered to turn culture into commodities, where works of art and entertainment are mass-produced to support social dominance. Max Horkheimer, (2002) in his essay Traditional and Critical Theory introduces the concept of critical theory. Horkheimer stated in his essay that traditional theory generally focuses only on the explanation of social phenomena, while Critical Theory aims to criticize social conditions with the intention of changing them. According to him, this theory must uncover hidden power structures and find ways to liberate individuals from various forms of oppression. Horkheimer also articulated the difference between traditional theory (which observes the world from a distance) and critical theory (which aims to change the world). He emphasized the importance of critical reflection on capitalism, bureaucracy, and rationalization that oppressed human freedom.

(b) Post-World War II Development

(c) After World War II, the Frankfurt School underwent a change in its theoretical focus. They began to direct their criticism at broader aspects of modern society, such as the dominance of technology, bureaucratization, and the role of mass media in controlling public consciousness. Together with Theodor Adorno, Horkheimer wrote "Dialectic of Enlightenment" (1944), an important work that criticized how the Western Enlightenment, which was supposed to bring freedom, turned into a tool of oppression and control. In this work, they also introduced the concept of cultural industrialization, which explains how mass media and popular culture turn culture into commodities and manipulate individual consciousness. In his work, Horkheimer & Adorno, (2002) wrote that the rationality of enlightenment, which was initially considered as a means to achieve freedom, has instead turned into a tool of domination and oppression. They argue that instrumental rationality, which uses reason only to achieve technical or efficiency goals, has neglected ethical and moral goals.

They also emphasize how modern capitalist society creates "false needs" through consumption patterns, which ultimately alienate human beings from themselves. Herbert Marcuse, (2014), who is an

important member of the Frankfurt school, makes a significant contribution through his book *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*, expanding on that criticism by revealing how industrial societies form passive and less critical individuals, who are trapped in the logic of mass consumption and production. Marcuse criticizes modern capitalist societies that constitute 'one-dimensional' individuals, in which human desires for freedom and self-fulfillment are suppressed by consumerism and technology. According to him, capitalism not only controls economic production, but also infiltrates daily life, influencing the way people think and interact. Marcuse had a significant influence on social movements in the 1960s, including the student movement, feminism, and the anti-war movement. He also emphasized that marginalized groups have the radical potential to lead social change. Marcuse was also very influential in the student movement and social revolution of the 1960s, especially in the United States and Europe, where his work became an inspiration for the anti-war, feminism, and civil rights movements.

In this post-World War 2 development, many second-generation figures of the Frankfurt school emerged such as Walter Benjamin and Jürgen Habermas. Walter Benjamin, (2012) through his essay *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, Benjamin analyzes how the mechanical reproduction of art (through technologies such as photography and film) changes the way people interact with art. He acknowledges the potential of technology in freeing art from elite exclusivity, but also warns of the risk that reproduced art could be used as a tool of ideological control by capitalist forces. According to Benjamin, this is one of the ways in which modern capitalism influences people's consciousness, removing authentic meaning and replacing it with the consumption of commodity goods. In addition, Benjamin is also best known for his analysis of history, in which he emphasizes the importance of reclaiming marginalized historical narratives and countering the dominant narrative hegemony.

We come to the development of the Frankfurt school of the second generation represented by Jürgen Habermas. Jürgen Habermas, as the second generation of the Frankfurt School, made an important contribution with his theory of the public sphere, which is a place where rational discussions take place between citizens. Jürgen Habermas, (1991) through his work on *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas analyzes the ways in which modern capitalism undermines the public sphere, that is, the area where citizens can discuss freely and rationally social and political issues. Habermas believes that this public space is now controlled by the mass media and powerful economic interests, which manipulate public opinion.

Habermas argues that capitalism has corrupted this public space through the commercialization of media and politics. He proposed that true democracy can only be realized if there is communication free from the distortions caused by power and capitalism, which encourages rational deliberation among citizens. In addition, Habermas also criticized the first generation of the Frankfurt School for being too pessimistic in their view of modernity. While Horkheimer and Adorno viewed instrumental rationality as something that restricts human beings, Habermas believed that there was potential to harness rationality in a more emancipatory way through free communication.

Habermas' theory also evolved into a theory of communicative action, which focuses on the importance of rational communication and dialogue in creating a more inclusive and democratic social and political consensus. Jürgen Habermas, who came to be known as one of the main thinkers of the Frankfurt School, put forward a different approach in critical theory, especially with an emphasis on communication theory. Jürgen Habermas, (2003) in his book *The Theory of Communicative Action*, is more optimistic than his predecessor in the Frankfurt School, he emphasizes that rational dialogue and communication free from distortion can produce a democratic and fair consensus. However, his theory has also been criticized for being too idealistic and not paying attention to unbalanced power in communication. Habermas criticized

the dominance of instrumental rationality in modern society and proposed communicative rationality as a means to achieve freedom and justice. He believes that through rational, dialogical, and free communication from domination, humans can build a more democratic and inclusive society.

4. Debates Around Critical Theory

Since its inception, critical theory has been a hotly debated topic. One of the criticisms often leveled against this theory, especially from orthodox Marxists, is that it is considered too pessimistic and elitist, especially in the work of Horkheimer and Adorno. They are considered to be too focused on ideological oppression to ignore the potential for social resistance. As stated by Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard, criticism of critical theory arises because it relies too much on grand narratives, such as rationality and emancipation, which are considered problematic in the context of postmodernism. Foucault argues that power is not monolithic, but rather spread across various discursive practices and institutions.

Michel Foucault's criticism is related to critical theoretical thinking about distributed power, as he says "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere". Michel Foucault, (2019) in his book *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison*, argues that power is not monolithic or centralized, as is often assumed in critical theory. Instead, he shows that power is distributed across various discursive practices and institutions. Foucault explains how institutions such as prisons and schools shape and control individuals through subtle or subtle mechanisms of control.

In addition, Foucault also criticized critical theories related to knowledge that were considered neutral, he emphasized the relationship between power and knowledge. Michel Foucault in his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he explains that knowledge is never neutral; it is always related to power relations. This challenges ideas in critical theory that seek to find objective and universal truths. Michel Foucault, (2012) also criticizes the critical theory of discourse, through his work *The history of sexuality: An Introduction*, he explains how the discourse on sexuality is connected to power and knowledge, and criticizes the conventional view of the relationship between power and oppression.

Not only did Michel Foucault criticize the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, Jean-François Lyotard also criticized the critical theory through his writings. Lyotard is known for his criticism of grand narratives, which he considered to be no longer relevant in the context of postmodern society. There are two points of Lyotard's criticism, namely the rejection of the grand narrative, the concept of power, plurality and the fragmentation of knowledge. Jean-François Lyotard, (1984) in his book *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*, argues that attempts to find a universal truth or a single solution to social problems often ignore the diversity of individual experiences and viewpoints. Lyotard criticized what he called "grand narratives," which included ideas such as progress, rationalism, and emancipation. He argues that in postmodern societies, the search for a single narrative that explains the entire social reality has lost its relevance (Lyotard, 1993). Lyotard emphasizes that knowledge cannot be seen as something homogeneous, but rather consists of various discourses that contradict each other. He argues that in postmodern societies, knowledge is fragmentary and that there is no one universally accepted truth. Lyotard emphasizes that in the postmodern context, knowledge must be understood as something diverse and fragmented. He rejected the idea that there is one right way to understand reality. This leads to an emphasis on dialogue and discussion between different perspectives, as opposed to the systematic approach in critical theory. Lyotard also criticized the idea of consensus in social and political discussions. He argues that the search for consensus often ignores existing differences and injustices. According to him, it is important to acknowledge and celebrate differences rather than trying to reach an agreement that may only create the illusion of harmony. Lyotard highlights that critical theory often views the individual as an autonomous and rational subject. He argues that individuals are actually bound by the various discourses and forces that shape their identities and thoughts.

Jurgen Habermas, also faced criticism because his ideas about communicative rationality were considered too idealistic and did not take into account power differences and inequalities in communication. Foucault argued that power is distributed more complexly and cannot always be controlled through dialogue or consensus. Despite the criticism, critical theory remains relevant today in analyzing the dynamics of power, ideology, and capitalism in modern society. The contributions of the Frankfurt School have influenced many disciplines, from sociology, philosophy, to media and cultural studies. Nonetheless, critical theory remains relevant because it provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the dynamics of power, capitalism, and culture. Their thoughts on ideology, instrumental rationality, and cultural control continue to inspire academics and social activists in a variety of fields. Some critics argue that critical theory is too abstract and pessimistic, especially in viewing modern culture and society as an overarching tool of domination. Conservative critics such as Raymond Aron, (2019) in his book entitled *Main currents in sociological thought* argue that critical theory tends to be too abstract and pessimistic. He felt that this approach saw modern society as a means of total domination without paying adequate attention to the progress that had been achieved by that society. Raymond Aron, (2002) in *The opium of the intellectuals* also argues that critical theory tends to ignore the positive advances produced by modernity and capitalism, such as the improvement of living standards and technological advances. Criticizing critical theory as it is considered to ignore many of the advances achieved through modernity and capitalism, such as rising living standards, technological advances, and individual freedom. He emphasized that many positive aspects of social development cannot be ignored.

On the other hand, radical left intellectuals such as Slavoj Zizek consider that although critical theory is important, it needs to be expanded with a more concrete approach to issues such as globalization and environmental change. Slavoj Zizek, (2008) in his work *In defense of lost causes*, he is of the view that although critical theory has succeeded in uncovering various forms of oppression and injustice, it is often unable to provide concrete revolutionary strategies. Critical theory tends to focus on critical analysis without offering a clear solution to the problem. Still in the same book, Zizek also highlights that ideology has an important role in understanding contemporary society, and there is an argument that critical theory does not pay adequate attention to the role of ideology in shaping social consciousness. Although critical theory has touched on ideology, it often does not delve enough into the way ideology functions in everyday life.

Not only that, Zizek also through his work also criticizes critical theory. For example, his critique of the negative view of modernity, Slavoj Zizek, (2012) in his book entitled *The year of dreaming dangerously*, Zizek criticized the pessimistic views of the Frankfurt School thinkers on modernity and capitalism, arguing that although capitalism has a negative side, it also opens up opportunities for subversion and change. According to him, an analysis that emphasizes too much on oppression tends to ignore the potential for emancipation contained in modern society. Whereas, in his work on *Event: A philosophical journey through a concept*, Zizek criticizes the inability of critical theory to deal with paradoxes, noting that critical theory often fails to address the paradoxes that arise in modern society, such as the tension between individual freedom and social control. He encourages thinkers to confront this complexity and develop a deeper understanding and nuances of the interactions between individuals and society.

5. Relevance, Modern Criticism and the Implementation of Critical Theory in the Modern Era

The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory remains relevant for understanding the dynamics of power and oppression in contemporary society, especially in the era of globalization, digital capitalism, and social media. However, this theory is often criticized for tending to be overly pessimistic and lacking in offering concrete solutions to the problems identified. Nevertheless, Critical Theory has been adapted and developed by many scholars in various fields, such as cultural studies, feminist theory, critical race theory,

and political ecology, enriching the understanding of domination and resistance in modern society. The application of critical theory is seen in various social movements and cultural analyses today. For example, critical media studies still use the concept of the cultural industry to understand how the mass media controls public opinion and strengthens capitalist power. In addition, Habermas's theory of public space has been adopted by democracy and civil rights activists to advocate for the importance of public discussion free from manipulation. In addition, critical theory is also applied in gender studies, political ecology, and decolonial studies, highlighting how various forms of oppression such as patriarchy, racism, and imperialism are intertwined within the structure of global capitalism, as well as how critical theory can be used as a tool to counter such domination. The Frankfurt school has provided a solid intellectual foundation for criticism of modern capitalism, and despite the face of criticism, their contributions in social theory and cultural criticism remain relevant today.

Epistemology of Jurgen Habermas's Critical Theory

Jürgen Habermas's critical theory epistemology centers on the role of rationality and communication in the formation of knowledge and social life. As the second generation major philosopher of the Frankfurt School, Habermas took critical theory in a more optimistic direction than his predecessors such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. His approach rests on the idea of communicative rationality and the role of rational public discourse in achieving socially valid knowledge. The epistemology of critical theory in Jürgen Habermas's thought aims to expand the concept of rationality by releasing it from overly technical and positivist views, as well as integrating aspects of communication and social understanding. Habermas distinguishes different types of knowledge and argues that epistemology focuses not only on the way we understand the objective world, but also how we interact with others and understand society. There are several points of critical theory epistemology that Habermas understands based on the references that the author reads, namely. 1) Criticism of Traditional Epistemology: A Separation from Positivism., 2) Communicative Rationality and Public Space as a Critical Epistemology., 3) Discourse Theory and the Relationship between Facts and Normativity., 4) Emancipatory Knowledge and Criticism of Power., 5) Habermas' Epistemology in the Context of Deliberative Democracy., 6) Criticism of Habermas' Epistemology.

1. Criticism of Traditional Epistemology: A Separation from Positivism

Habermas sought to revise the views of the Frankfurt School, which was generally skeptical of rationality and the development of modernity. According to him, modernity and rationality still have emancipatory potential if we understand them correctly and apply them appropriately. Habermas began his critique of positivism, an approach to the philosophy of science that emphasizes the collection of objective and scientific facts as the only valid source of knowledge. In his book "Knowledge and Human Interests", he relates knowledge to three basic human interests: technical interests, practical interests, and emancipatory interests. These three interests produce three different forms of knowledge (Habermas, 1972).

(a) Technical Knowledge

Related to the control and manipulation of nature, this knowledge is related to natural science and technology. This knowledge is instrumental and designed to achieve efficiency through the application of techniques and experiments.

(b) Practical Knowledge

Related to social interpretation and understanding, this knowledge comes from the need for humans to communicate and interact with each other. This involves the use of language and social meaning, which are the main studies in the social sciences and humanities.

(c) Emancipatory Knowledge

This knowledge aims to liberate from various forms of domination and oppression. This knowledge is not only cognitive, but also critical, with a focus on uncovering communication distortions that arise due to power or ideology.

Habermas argues that critical theory must be able to incorporate these emancipatory interests within an epistemological framework, so that it serves not only to understand and explain the world, but also to liberate human beings from oppressive power structures. Habermas rejects the view that knowledge can be completely objective and free from the influence of human interests. According to him, knowledge always has to do with social and historical interests. This view is a fundamental critique of positivism that emphasizes only technical knowledge. Thomas McCarthy, (1981) in his book *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* revealed that for Habermas, knowledge not only serves to understand the world, but also as a tool to change it in order to achieve better social justice.

2. Communicative Rationality and Public Space as Critical Epistemology

Habermas also introduced the concept of "communicative rationality," which describes knowledge as the result of the process of social interaction through communication that is free from domination. In his book *"Theory of Communicative Action,"* Habermas states that the ideal form of communication occurs when all participants communicate equally, without pressure or coercion, and strive to reach a common understanding. He argues that knowledge and truth in society are not only obtained through empirical observation or instrumental logic (as in science and technology), but also through discourse or dialogue that is free from the domination of power.

Communicative rationality refers to the human ability to reach agreement through rational argumentation in ideal communication conditions, where each participant has an equal opportunity to speak and be heard in the absence of outside pressure. This is in contrast to instrumental rationality, which emphasizes more efficiency and control over an object or situation. Communicative rationality is the basis of Habermas's critical epistemology, as he views open dialogue as the only way to produce truly valid knowledge. Habermas, (2003) emphasizes that ideal communication creates conditions in which truth is not forced, but is obtained through a free and rational exchange of arguments.

In traditional epistemology, knowledge is considered an objective representation of the world independent of the subject. However, according to Habermas, knowledge cannot be separated from its social context. He argues that knowledge is also formed through intersubjective conditions, namely social agreement achieved through dialogue and rational communication. This view is in stark contrast to positivism, which emphasizes the scientific method as the only way to understand the world. Habermas also believes that public spaces have an important role in the epistemology of critical theory, because it is where the exchange of ideas takes place freely. In his book *"The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,"* he argues that a healthy democracy requires a public space where rational discussion can take place without the constraints of political or economic power. Habermas in his work *"Knowledge and Human Interests"* writes, "The fact that knowledge is socially conditioned, the fact that it grows out of processes of communication and interaction, is crucial. No objective knowledge exists independently of the social interests that give rise to it." (Habermas, 1972, p. 314). This quote affirms that knowledge is always related to social interests and cannot be understood in isolation from the social context and human interests.

3. Discourse Theory and the Relationship between Facts and Normativity

Critical theory epistemology Jürgen Habermas emphasizes the importance of communication and dialogue in the formation of knowledge, norms, and social legitimacy. Within this framework, Habermas developed a Discourse Theory that focuses on how society can reach consensus on legitimate norms

through an inclusive and rational deliberative process. In his book "Between Facts and Norms", Habermas expands on the concept of discourse theory to explain how law and social legitimacy are formed. He argues that laws and social norms must be produced through deliberative discourse that involves all citizens rationally (Habermas, 2009). Habermas believed that social facts and legal norms were inseparable. A rational deliberative process allows society to determine legitimate norms, which are based on agreements generated through rational arguments, rather than by dominant power. In other words, legitimate social norms are the result of open communicative interactions, in which every citizen has the opportunity to express their views equally. In his critical theory epistemology, Habermas shows that knowledge and social legitimacy are inseparable from open processes of communication and interaction. Discourse Theory provides a framework for society to reach a legitimate consensus, where norms and facts are interrelated and influence each other.

4. Emancipatory Knowledge and Criticism of Power

The critical theoretical epistemology developed by Jürgen Habermas emphasizes the relationship between knowledge, power, and social emancipation. In this case, emancipatory knowledge serves not only to understand reality, but also to change it for the welfare of society. According to Habermas, knowledge should serve as a means to liberate individuals from oppression and injustice, rather than just serving the interests of power. One of the main components in Habermas' epistemology is emancipatory knowledge, which refers to the knowledge that enables human beings to understand and overcome various forms of domination and social injustice. Habermas suggests that communicative discourse should be used to expose power structures that hinder the freedom of individuals and social groups.

Habermas distinguishes between different types of knowledge, such as instrumental knowledge and normative knowledge. Emancipatory knowledge comes from a critical understanding that allows individuals to recognize and challenge existing power structures. In his view, this knowledge grows through public discussion and democratic participation, where individuals can interact rationally to reach an agreement. Through this process of communication, individuals can break free from oppressive ideologies and hone their critical abilities. In the tradition of critical theory, Habermas views emancipatory knowledge as a tool to resist distorted power. This knowledge has to do not only with understanding the world as it is, but also with how to change unjust social conditions. In this context, Habermas, (1972) stated that critical social science must serve to liberate human beings from the domination structures that hinder individual autonomy.

Habermas also emphasizes the importance of criticizing power in the context of epistemology. He argues that power often operates through mechanisms that are invisible in social and cultural structures, so that individuals may not be aware that they are under the influence of domination. By applying the principles of fair communication, Habermas encourages individuals to question the assumptions underlying power and fight for social change. This process of criticism is an important part of emancipatory knowledge, as it helps individuals understand their social context and contributes to the formation of a more just society.

CONCLUSION

Critical Theory was born from the thoughts of Frankfurt School intellectuals who sought to critique capitalism, modernity, and cultural domination through a multidisciplinary approach. By combining philosophy, sociology, economics, and culture, they highlight how social, political, and cultural structures are intertwined in creating and maintaining power. Major figures such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Benjamin, and Habermas, offer important insights into how modern capitalism works, as well as the challenges and opportunities for social change. The epistemology of critical theory, according to

Habermas, seeks to build an understanding of knowledge that includes more than just technical aspects. He emphasized the importance of communication and social importance in the process of knowledge formation, and highlighted the emancipatory potential that emerges from knowledge that is critical of power and ideology. Habermas goes beyond the tradition of the Frankfurt School by offering a more optimistic view of modernity and rationality, proposing that dialogue and communication free from domination can bring about a more just and democratic social transformation.

Based on what has been written about the implementation and relevance of Habermas' epistemology. Habermas' epistemology has important implications in various fields, including Legal Theory, which is the concept of Habermas's discourse applied to understand how legal legitimacy is formed through deliberative processes involving public participation. Second, Media and Communication, Habermas emphasized that the media must be a space for rational public discourse. However, he also criticized how the modern media is often manipulated by political and economic forces. Finally, Education, namely Habermas, offers a critical education model that focuses on developing communication skills and democratic participation. Habermas' epistemology emphasizes the importance of open and rational communication in the formation of legitimate social knowledge, which continues to be relevant in the context of modern democracy and public space.

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