Habermas and the Caring Society: A Transdisciplinary Feminist Critique

AUTHORS:
Casper Lötter
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7787-1419

AFFILIATION:
Post-doctoral Research Fellow
School for Philosophy
Noordwest University

CORRESPONDENCE TO:
casperlttr@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Jürgen Habermas's rationalistic reimagining of a more compassionate society can be imaginatively defended by feminism, and one such legitimate line of criticism would be a feminist reading of this Frankfurt School-inspired project. In this contribution, therefore, I also aim to show 'how' and 'why' these efforts of Habermas's could be complemented. The former is an exploration of novel post-structuralist ideas on inclusive 'both/and' theory appropriation. I briefly outline the nuanced intellectual history of the Frankfurt School between the first and second generations, which is Habermas's seminal contribution to this tradition. Carol Gilligan's 'ethic of care,' around which a more caring, responsive society might be (re)constructed, is then applied. Against this backdrop, Lakoff's and Gerhardt's proposals for the caring society, based on investigations into the link between authoritarian parenting and capitalism, are taken into consideration. These ideas are supported with an outline of recent progress within neuroscience that demonstrates the benefits of both early emotional nurturing and an appropriate attachment paradigm. It is thus argued that feminism, as part of a richer interdisciplinary methodology, could meaningfully correct and thereafter complement Habermas's shortcomings, with post-structuralism as the methodological glue that adheres Habermas's universalistic project with feminists' emphases on specificity.

Keywords: Habermas and feminism; critique of extractive capitalism; Carol Gilligan's 'ethic of care'; the caring society; eclectic methodological context of 'both/and'

> *"One of the things about looking at the world through a feminist lens is [the awareness] that we are already in a dystopia."*
> — Leni Zumas, author of Red Clocks (2018), part of a growing canon of woman-written dystopian fiction

Introduction

Habermas's well-known suggestion for the rational reconstruction of society is not beyond criticism (as he too admits) and a feminist defence would go some way towards this objective. To this end, I aim to also show how and why Habermas's efforts towards rationalisation should be complemented. The former ('how') is an exploration of novel post-structuralist ideas on 'both/and' inclusive theory appropriation (Olivier, 2013, 2015) while the latter ('why') is justified by a critique of the dominant form of capitalism as being instrumental reason turned extractive regime. In the words of evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1989:xvi), "often the most important contribution a scientist can make is to discover a new way of seeing old theories or facts." As I aim to rethink these ideas of Habermas keeping the above in mind, I argue that these issues represent a gap in the extant knowledge on Habermas, which I intend to reduce with this contribution.

Admittedly, there happen to be many more recent versions of feminism(s), radical feminism being one of them. All feminisms, however, have in common the emancipatory

project of woman's social, economic and psychological liberation. "Its overtly political nature," suggest Warhol and Herndl (1991:x), "is perhaps the single most distinguishing feature of feminist scholarly work." Deniz Kandiyoti (1996:5-6) contends that post-structuralist notions of difference and identity have heavily influenced general feminisms, as is self-evident in the preoccupations of third-wave feminisms (a social and political movement spanning the years 1980-1990). What postcolonial feminists, for example, bring into focus, is "the specificity of Third World women's experiences" (Kandiyoti, 1996:5). Third-wave feminists' efforts to bring social diversity into their project could rightly be considered to be a necessary correction to the second wave's (considered to have spanned the years 1966-1978 [Brownmiller, 2000]) conviction of 'universal womanhood' and the political message of oppression experienced by all women across time and culture. In particular, third-wave feminisms address many critical concerns, such as a compelling need for self-reflexivity, in common with other emancipatory approaches (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006:5-6, 9), such as that of Critical Theory.

One such example of this is feminists having taken Habermas to task for failing to account for gender as a significant distorter of power relations (Meehan, 1995:1). Perhaps as a man, he is more inclined to take these power dynamics for granted and would therefore not be as sensitive to detecting and addressing them (Cohen, 1995). In her review of Caroline Perez's groundbreaking book *Invisible Women* (2019), Karen Boyle (2019) writes that the assumption of a 'default male' is so pervasive in the West that it operates on a potently visceral level:

> But one of the most powerful takeaways from Perez's book is the extent to which so much of this bias is unconscious, such that we are all infected by it. Feminism is the process of unlearning this, but it's an ongoing process, for all of us.

Indeed, as Marie Fleming (1995) argues, feminism provides insight into how the personal is political. Critical Theorists, such as Habermas, consider society to be foundationally healthy, as Durkheim suggested more than a century ago. They therefore seek to uncover 'pathologies' which could then be corrected. Such 'social ills' would obviously include the oppression and exploitation of women as second-class citizens.

By way of contrast, radical feminists consider contemporary society, based as it is on the dystopic reality and rules of patriarchy, to be inherently diseased (Benhabib, 1996), a sentiment which is reflected in this paper's opening quotation by Leni Zumas.

What is important in my view is both the overlap between Habermas, as perhaps the foremost exponent of Critical Theory's second generation, and feminisms in general, in terms of the import of care in public life (even though Habermas's central concern was with rehabilitating reason after the cynicism that beset it after World War II and the Holocaust). But third-wave feminism's concern with specificity within the uniform also resonates powerfully with post-structuralist thinking. Linking these two diverging strands of intellectual tradition together by means of post-structuralism, which privileges 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' in terms of theory development as a research methodology/reasoning, is the proposed novelty of this contribution.

I further aim to refine this valuable idea with a comprehensive critique that will employ the notion of the 'ethic of care,' both from the perspective of early childhood development as well as the advancement of the compassionate, caring society from a feminist perspective. The former relies on recent empirical findings in neurobiological research and the latter on feminist views on caring as espoused by Carol Gilligan, Martha Nussbaum and Fiona Robinson. However, as our postmodern world (a theme more fully explored below) is more complex than this intellectual binary, it is generally agreed upon that significant overlap exists between Habermas and his feminist interlocutors (Meehan, ibid.). By way of illustration, Habermas (1979:199), eloquently puts the case forward for compassion as a major driving force of Critical Theory, with the assumption that social change is a realistic goal:

> The pursuit of happiness might one day mean something different – for example, not accumulating material objects of which one disposes privately, but bringing about social relations in which mutuality predominates and satisfaction does not mean triumph of one over the repressed needs of the other.

I argue, in fact, that Habermas's openness to inclusion (note his ambitious and successful project of amalgamating analytic and continental philosophy) and his willingness to listen to other viewpoints (Benhabib, 2019; Rosenfeld, 2019) already predispose him to sympathy with feminist concerns. It is precisely this rationale on the part of Habermas that prompts me to reread him through a feminist lens (using the aforementioned 'ethic of care,' in particular).

My roadmap for this paper will first engage with the 'how' of the reconstruction of Habermas, to be followed by the 'why,' which includes a critique of extractive capitalism as instrumental reason. This discussion will then be rounded off by a consideration of Habermas's seminal contribution to Critical Theory. I will now proceed to consider problem-solving approaches within the broader postmodernist tradition. I therefore argue that a combination of both Critical Theory and post-structuralism can make for quite a profitable methodology, as will be briefly addressed below.

A post-structuralist approach to theory

Although the methodology that I employ in this contribution is Frankfurt School-style Critical Theory, I duly note Bert Olivier's (2015) proposal that in a postmodern world the "post-structuralist turn" has, methodologically speaking, a considerable advantage over the traditionalist approach of a thoroughgoing, singular theoretical lens.

Olivier explains the 'neither/nor' (or 'either/or') logic of post-structuralism with reference to Lacan's (1977) well-known three registers of meaning, namely the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. In this way, he (2015:349) calls attention to the "ontological registers from the complex intertwinement of which human subjectivity (or 'being' for that matter) can be understood."

As Lacan (1981:52-64, cited in Olivier, *op. cit.*) points out, the analysand continuously relives this traumatic experience through 'what if' or 'if only' scenarios, there being perhaps no better example of how the 'real' continues to evade human appropriation.

By using these examples of the limits of human experience as heuristic tools, Olivier's (2015) exploration of the eclectic utilisation of available theoretical offerings (as the situation requires), rather than one dominant theoretical lens, proves quite helpful. Said in another way, post-structuralism operates under the assumption of methodological and theoretical pragmatism, rather than specialistic dogmatism.

The post-structuralist technique of eclectic theory appropriation (dictated by the scholar's continuous attempts to approximate the real) is greatly similar to the Frankfurt School-style Critical Theory preference for interdisciplinary (and, as is the case with Habermas, even transdisciplinary) investigation of social problems.

In this paper, the complex problem which I address is the prospective introduction of the caring and empathetic society, an idea which feminisms share with other emancipatory approaches, as I note above, in a patriarchal world driven by the profit motive of capitalism. An important concern which figures within the tradition of Frankfurt School Critical Theory share is the value of a critique of ideology, and it is thus to a consideration of this idea to which now turn.

Ideological critique

Thompson (1990:7) aptly describes ideology as "meaning in the service of power". Ideological critique finds its expression in immanent criticism, which claims the principle of negation as its driving force. This negation is deliberately antithetical to the formation and perpetuation of ideology, which essentially creates the illusion that relations are fixed and ahistorical. Critical Theory's task, according to Horkheimer in his earlier work (quoted in Held, 1980:186, Held's translation, original source not available to me), is to reveal the ideological pretences of social institutions. He explains that "[t]he limit of what we may rightfully call ideology is always set by the present state of affairs and our knowledge. Insight into the historically conditioned [nature of a social institution as well as] its societal function [is required]."

Immanent criticism, for this reason, implies a critique of a text on its own terms in order to show up its inconsistencies, and thereby open up the possibility of radical change once it is clear that the object under scrutiny has failed the test.

Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse also considered all imminent criticism to be ideological critique, which is supposedly essential for advancing the Marxist project in Critical Theory as an exercise in emancipation (Held, 1980:187). From this discussion, the question of the efficacy of ideology critique arises, and I accordingly turn to this consideration.

The efficacy of ideological critique

Capitalism (and the technology that drives it) has demonstrably failed at making humans happy. As Gerhardt (2010) and others such as Paul Verhaeghe (2014) and Renate Salecl (2010) have so ably shown, capitalism does nothing if not substantially contribute to, as well as deliberately tap into, our misery, fear and anxiety. Again, however, there happens to not be only one form of capitalism. Meanwhile, one counterpoint to this view is that 'true' happiness lies largely in nurturing early childhood attachment and fulfilling relationships in later life – not in acquiring physical possessions. In the words of Gerhardt (2010:261), "a fully socialist position is that the social good is so important that economic power must be subordinated to it."

To this end, I consider Susan Gerhardt's aforementioned text, *The Selfish Society* (2010), and her invaluable research, key to bringing together the various threads of my overall argument, the so-called 'golden thread' that runs through this contribution. This is especially applicable to my critique of capitalism from a neurological perspective, to which I now return.

Gerhardt's vision for a caring society

By means of an analysis of the 'ethic of care' below – for the purpose of suggesting a reformulation of Habermas's appropriation of cognitive developmental models, thereby furthering his interests in communicative competencies – I argue for another possibility (*pace* the uprising of the proletariat) of dissolving the many contradictions of capitalist society, first identified by Marx. I therefore refer to Lakoff's (2002) and Gerhardt's (2010) proposals for a caring society based not on the militant potential of the workers' class (as proposed by orthodox Marxism), but rather on the quality of early emotional (as opposed to strictly cognitive) development in babies and young children.

According to Hegel, the dialectic of history consists of three moments: thesis, antithesis and synthesis (Singer 2001:99-103). The final stage (synthesis) brings about a new reality that resolves the contradiction unearthed in the antithesis. Whereas with Hegel the dialectic is understood as 'pure abstract thought' (or Idealism), Marx (1852) understands the dialectic as grounded in the material realities in which the labourer finds her/himself, namely dialectical materialism. Lucio Colletti (1979:49-51) suggests that this contrast between idealism and

materialism in Hegel's understanding of the dialectic, is present in the work of Marx, and it only required the latter and Engels to point to the resolution.

Next, Lakoff's and Gerhardt's explorations of the negative link between the origins of the selfish society (essentially the greed embedded in late capitalism) and nurturing patterns of parenting during early childhood, are considered.

Neurobiology and parenting styles

Research into neurobiology - the study of those parts or areas of the brain that determine and/or influence human behaviour, as well as the social practices that produce dominance of one/some over the other(s) – conducted by Diana Baumrind (1966) and, more recently, George Lakoff (2002), has identified two parenting patterns in the Western world that have been formed by the onset of capitalism in the eighteenth century. These parenting styles are strict, on the one hand, and nurturing, on the other. Strict parents demand obedience through pain of physical punishment or harsh reprimand, with the child's "needs for comfort unmet" in terms of parental responsiveness (Gerhardt, 2010:160-161). A nurturing parenting regime (Gerhardt, 2010:169), by contrast, is a system

> where children become responsible, self-disciplined individuals through being cared for, supported and respected. Parental authority is based on parental empathy, wisdom and willingness to engage in rational discussion – not an assertion of power.

Nurtured children perform better at moral cognition because their parent(s) resolve(s) tension by discussing the emotional impact of conflict with them at an early stage of development, as well as by being responsive to their needs (Laible & Thompson, 2000). Strictly raised children become defensive in the face of criticism, since they are used to punishment and negative feedback from caregivers (Thompson *et al*., 2006). The essential difference between the two parental styles (or at least for my purposes) is that children from a more nurturing upbringing display a greater tendency to empathise with fellow humans (and other living creatures) than children who are products of strict parenting. I would also add to the notion of permissive parenting these two parental styles. The latter style privileges neglect, in which neither care nor discipline is present, and also incorporates the more negative aspects of both caring and discipline. Based on a wealth of neurobiological research, Gerhardt (2010) argues that the parenting style to which children are subjected develops different neural pathways and affects different lobes in the child's brain.

Although not conclusive, empirical evidence (Lamm & Majdandžić, 2015) now suggests that a mirror neuron system (MNS) forms neurological pathways for empathetic behaviour and reaction in humans (Baird, Scheffer & Wilson, 2011; Corradini & Antonietti, 2013). Mirror neurons, so named because empathy requires an act of imitation or relating on the part of the onlooker (Baird *et al*., 2011:327), activate neurological pathways within the inferior frontal gyrus and inferior parietal cortex lobes of the brain, areas which strengthen and evoke empathy under certain conditions. Gerhardt (2010) contends that these conditions are predominantly created by parental styles that structure these brain patterns at an early developmental stage in childhood, in order to favour either empathy or selfishness. The issue of childhood education and upbringing is also very important from a Critical Theory perspective, since no less an intellectual than Axel Honneth deals with childhood education, drawing from Winnicot (Petherbridge, 2013). The aforegoing discussion ties in well with Honneth's theory of three modes of recognition: love, rights and respect (Honneth, 2007; Huttunen & Murphy, 2012; Loquias, 2019), all three of these being important building blocks for an attachment paradigm. The attachment paradigm, accordingly, now comes up for consideration.

The attachment paradigm

Gerhardt claims that a nurturing childhood, in which an empathic lifestyle has been continuously reinforced, leads to well-developed areas of the brain that promote nurturing and caring behaviour towards others. Her claims are supported by recent findings briefly outlined below. This so-called 'attachment paradigm,' although initially fiercely resisted, is now common cause among neurobiologists, cognitive linguists and psychologists (Gerhardt, 2010:168).

How then does this empathy manifest empirically?

Firstly, Martha Stout (2005) has demonstrated how a strict upbringing can often lead to the development of a range of personality disorders, of which the upper limit is psychopathy (namely a complete lack of empathy for others).

Secondly, youngsters exposed to a strong sense of nurturing and kindness in early childhood exhibit a different range of reactions to distress and pain than others not exposed to this parenting style. By way of example, Midlarsky and her group of researchers (2005) conducted a study of the values of a number of rescuers of Holocaust victims. The most conspicuous differences between those who helped these survivors, at great risk to themselves, and their control groups, were high levels of social responsibility and empathy for others on the part of the former. Unsurprisingly, these individuals each had secure attachments from early childhood, as well as a well-developed sense of their own agency, of responsibility and of nurturing.

Despite the obvious benefits that good nurturing during childhood has for society in general (Gerhardt, 2010:328), as demonstrated above, I am also interested in exploring how affectionately cohesive parenting may provide a solution to the inherent selfishness of the profit motive. Several studies (noted below) have emphasised the almost pathological need for physical possessions from those in need of emotional stability after living with authoritarian guardians (Cohen & Cohen, 1996; Kasser, 2002). In addition, unlike individuals who had caring upbringings, and who revelled in and were sustained by healthy, nurturing relationships, these respondents were found to be wrought with anxiety and uncertainty.

Such an understanding of human behaviour implies that a caring, empathic society, in which the pursuit of material things plays a secondary role, is possible. Capitalism, by contrast, feeds off the strict or authoritarian parenting style. I accordingly turn to an examination of this notion.

Capitalism feeds off strict (authoritarian) parenting

So far, I have attempted to make the argument that purely rationalistic values are precisely the wrong foundation upon which to build a fair and compassionate society, and if I am correct in my thinking, critical theorists may have to rethink these normative assumptions. In the words of Sue Gerhardt (2010:322),

> if people were better nurtured emotionally, would they be willing to sustain capitalism? [...] People who are well nurtured might be less interested in keeping up with fashion, buying the latest car or television, or emulating a celebrity lifestyle. They might be less obsessively concerned with expanding businesses and improving profits. And where would the food, gambling, entertainment and drugs industries be without human misery to drive them?

A caring society would be driven by values such as empathy and kindness, which are antithetical to capitalism. Therefore, feminists such as Carol Gilligan (1982) have envisioned

a different societal model than that proposed by Critical Theorists, such as Horkheimer and Habermas. Whereas the Marxists of the Frankfurt School argued for a rational reorganisation of society, based on rights and fairness, as opposed to the currently unequal and indefensible distribution of privilege and opportunity, Gilligan contends that women's moral developmental trajectories are guided by empathy and care. Regarding her debate with Kohlberg, however, Habermas concurred with the latter that Gilligan had equated procedure with substance. Yet as Seyla Benhabib (1995) explains while defending Gilligan, relational obligation and care are not matters incidental to the debate, but are truly moral on their own. As such, compassion and empathy belong to the heart of the moral debate and not to its periphery.

Habermas's neglect of the value of emotional intelligence, notably how compassion and forgiveness can promote the integration of marginalised groups into general society, certainly opens him up to criticism. Indeed, as Jodi Dean (1995) points out, the developmental path of girls is very different from that of boys, and ignoring this divergence risks the exclusion of a great number of alternative voices and valid concerns (Warnke, 1995). Neglecting such crucial considerations as, for example, the role of the unconscious within social interaction, results thus in an incomplete perspective of the goals of emancipation, ironically enough, despite Critical Theory's interdisciplinarity.

Finally, the emphasis on rationality within the context of modernity (as Habermas advocates for) "is a recipe for converting cultural differences into structural inequities" (ibid.) and must out of necessity therefore exclude non-rational 'Oriental' discourses that clash with this hegemonic narrative.

In Habermas's defence, it could be argued that a serious discussion of high-level philosophical, sociological and political ideas might not need to be open to everyone. Yet his focus on rationality makes him prone to precisely those Western-centric solutions of a sort that exclude narratives and social groups that are inconvenient for a more strictly-defined engagement with 'reason.' I proceed to explore Gerhardt's perspective and what this insight offers as a supplement to Habermas's approach (to then be connected with the feminist 'ethic of care').

An 'ethic of care'

One way to compensate for Habermas's aforementioned 'blind spots' is to incorporate insights from the feminist 'ethic of care' into the public sphere. I argue, however, that Habermas shares with certain feminists this concern for caring within public life, even though his discussions are framed according to different, almost diametrically opposite terms. Yet feminists such as Martha Nussbaum (2000) and Fiona Robinson (1999) have built on Gilligan's work, and have subsequently rejected 'rights' as guidelines for social justice, believing them to be too abstract to provide practical care for a world as full of neglect and want as our own. Based on her political reading of Benhabib's argument that a universalist-formal moral theory (in view of its claims to universality and reversibility) should be fashioned in favour of a dialogical model of moral deliberation rather than a monological model, Nancy Fraser (1986:426, 428-429) contends that an ethic of solidarity emanating from the point of view of the collective concrete other (rather than the generalised other) trumps an ethic of care as a political choice for feminism. This emphasis on 'non-universal social practices' (p. 428) would presumably lead to a degree of autonomy for members of a specific suppressed group, which would allow for achieving collective control over the interpretation and communication of their own narratives, vis-à-vis other groups. In his criticism of Kohlberg, Habermas (1990b:48) suggests that unless normative obligations (such as love, care and friendship) are institutionalised, these notions will remain within the bounds of a particular life-world and will only achieve a degree of universality if extended by normative consent to a communicative ethic. Admittedly, the specificity of divergent

female configurations means that many different collectives would benefit in various ways from this initiative (Fraser, 1986:429). To his credit, however, Habermas (1993:12-13) has attempted to respond to this question of inclusivity by arguing that

> [t]he higher-level intersubjectivity characterized by an intermeshing of the perspective of each with the perspectives of all is constituted only under the communicative presuppositions of a universal discourse in which all those possibly affected could take part and could adopt a hypothetical, argumentative stance toward the validity claims of norms and modes of action that have become problematic. This impartial standpoint overcomes the subjectivity of the individual participant's perspective without becoming disconnected from the performative attitude of the participants. The objectivity of the so-called ideal observer would impede access to the intuitive knowledge of the lifeworld.

Habermas has certainly made a great effort to factor in the need for inclusivity. For him (Habermas, 1983:73 ff.), the strength of an argument lies, perhaps paradoxically, in its `consensus-generating strength,' since the correspondence theory of truth has been disposed of in favour of the consensus theory of truth (Habermas, 1983). Despite Habermas's (2001:13, 44, 45, 79) belief in 'the authority of the better argument', feminists have been uneasy over the normative foundations of the proverbial Habermasian debate. Fiona Robinson (1999), for example, has criticised his dialogic model for its inability to advance our understanding of how societal inequality impacts truth claims. Consider, for example, the pervasive and bizarre practice of mandatory 'virginity testing' (a medieval form of victim-blaming) for complaints leading up to criminal cases of sexual assault, which is used in many countries in the Islamic world (World Health Organisation, 2018). Said differently, deeply-engrained prejudices – operating on a visceral level – will need more than just a procedurally fair model of debate to be addressed effectively. Molly Cochran (1999) has built on Robinson's insight by arguing that normative theoretical frameworks are based on the supposition of a male subject (the notorious 'default male' noted in the introduction), and thus these models cannot engage appropriately with feminist concerns regarding women's oppression. Habermas (1996:151–165, 285–286) would probably agree with this line of thinking, as he insisted on the 'principle of democracy,' as citizens must have the freedom to exercise their political autonomy in a meaningful manner.

Even though Habermas (1990a:120) has reformulated his principle of universality, saying "[f]or a [moral] norm to be valid, the consequences and side effects that its general observance can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the particular interests of each person affected must be such that all affected can accept them freely" (my italics), these assurances have not satisfied everybody. Chantal Mouffe (2005), for one, has criticised the apparent assumption in Habermas's deontological model of consensus-seeking, that it can replace the 'need' for political agitation. From a feminist perspective, political engagement cannot simply be halted in favour of waiting for a prospective 'consensus' (Chambers, 2004:219eff.). More recently, Amy Allen (2017: chapter 2, esp. 39-40) has suggested that despite Habermas's attempts to ground critical theory's normativity in a version of the history of philosophy that relies heavily on Eurocentric notions of progress, imperialism and modernity, his move to multiple modernities must fail.[1] These considerations apply especially to our (almost) universal dystopian, patriarchal context (Greer, 2002), where gender-based violence is pervasive and women are twice as likely as men to suffer from mental illness (Chesler, 2005).

---

1   Space precludes me from engaging with this issue properly, save for noting that Allen's own criticism of Habermas is suspect, in as much as a number of non-Western societies (notably China, Japan, Taiwan, Korea and Singapore) have embraced the multi-modernity paradigm, which is a direct result of the tremendous influence of Western modernity itself (Jacques, 2012).

Yet not only does Habermas's proposal for a rational reconstruction of society require revision in the light of the argument developed above (namely that an 'ethic of care' is sorely lacking in public life), but the feminist critique of rationalism greatly impacts upon Habermas's entire project. The problem is not merely reason's propensity to turn overly instrumental (the well-known concern of Horkheimer and Adorno, following Weber), as in the case of extractive capitalism, but precisely that reason inherently lacks the emotional component so vital to an empathic and compassionate society. However, again, to be fair to Habermas, this problem, being a systemic one, is not limited to his project alone.

Gerhardt (2010:311) agrees with my contention, observing that "[t]hroughout the twentieth century, even the discipline of psychology preferred to focus on cognition rather than emotion." In substantiation of this claim, she quotes leading cognitive neuroscientists (Moll *et al*., 2002), who argue that "[r]ecent theoretical developments in moral psychology, which had been dominated by rationalistic theories for centuries, have emphasized the role of emotion in models of cognitive development and behaviour." Similarly, I argue that the focus of Habermas's research into the necessary conditions for communicative competence (which is not the same as linguistic competence), explored briefly below, is both overtly rationalistic and devoid of consideration for the healing properties of emotional maturity, a situation easily remedied by the incorporation of a feminist 'ethics of care.' In this respect my criticism of Habermas is now part of the "co-operative effort to advance the argument," in his own well-known words.

Gerhardt's work, therefore, will go a long way towards creating the extra-rational parameters to determine the feasibility of Habermas's model of communicative competencies. I now turn to a consideration of Habermas's contribution to a Critical Theory-based explanation of society, as well as what his work lacks (i.e., insufficient attention to emotion).

Habermas's seminal contribution to Critical Theory

Perhaps Habermas's greatest contribution to Critical Theory is his forging of the emancipatory goal of social inquiry in a postpositivist framework, by aligning that project (the emancipatory goal of social inquiry) with the best of the intellectual (philosophical) heritage of the modern Western world. He sought to combine classical/traditional theory with the methodological meticulousness of modern science (Habermas, 1973:79). In the words of Thomas McCarthy (1978:127), I shall also "be concerned only incidentally with questions of the [chronological] development" of Habermas's work. My overview may, in fact, even appear to be circular.

I intend to briefly describe the nuance and complexity of the intellectual history of Critical Theory, with notable reference to the first and second generations' uses of the concepts of reason and ideological critique in this overview of Habermas, before engaging with Habermas's work directly. Since the subject of our analysis is Habermas, let us situate our discussion within Critical Theory in his German (Frankfurt School) tradition. David Rasmussen (1996:11) defines this as a particular intellectual orientation towards a Critical Theory of society, with an emancipatory aim and a preoccupation with the relationship between theory and praxis, which found its inspiration in the ideas of Marx and Freud. As previously mentioned, this movement can credit its contemporary reformulation to the work of Jürgen Habermas. To Rasmussen's definition one may also add that the theories of Freud and Marx were and are critically appropriated and reconstructed so as to suit the objectives of the three generations of Critical Theory. David Held (1980:177) describes the school's programme as follows: "Through continuous criticism and reconstruction the partiality of perspectives can be progressively overcome." The Frankfurt School's methodology consequently also called for both political vigilance and continuous activism in pursuing progressive social change.

Whereas Habermas has navigated and integrated a vast body of social and political theory since the early 1970s – most notably generative grammar and cognitive and moral developmental psychology (Zurn, 2010:205), as well as both analytical and continental philosophical positions (Corradetti, 2013:1-2, 7) – Horkheimer (1993) suggested an empirical model of integrated social sciences guided by critical reflection. The first generation enthusiastically advocated for interdisciplinary research in the 1930s, but in the 1940s – spurred on by the ghastly shadow of the Holocaust – Horkheimer and Adorno became deeply pessimistic about (instrumental) reason's potential for legitimising, and even enabling, oppressive and inhumane governance. This trepidation culminated in the publication of their well-known *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002 [1944], first German edition). According to Habermas, Horkheimer and Adorno became so averse to reason's destructive tendencies that Horkheimer kept the back copies of the *Zeitschrift* under lock and key in the cellar of the Institute (Honneth, 1986:95). In his attempt to rehabilitate reason's emancipatory potential, therefore, Habermas sought to distinguish between instrumental and communicative reason. While he acknowledged reason's darker side, Habermas (1984) set out to demonstrate its alternative, inter-subjective communicative value for reaching legitimate consensus (Zurn, 2010:213-214), while retaining its potential for contextual transcendence by virtue of its validity claims (Habermas, 2003:39).

This inter-subjective interpretation of impartial justification towards the potentially consensual acceptance of arguments (Habermas, 1990a:120) is based not on the correspondence or coherence model of truth (Zurn, 2010:223), but precisely on the consensus theory of truth. 'Truth', in this sense of the word, however, could be compromised by "systematic communicative distortions" (that famous Habermasian [2008] phrase). Yet Habermas largely abandoned the use of ideological critique in the late 1960s, as from the 1970s onwards he favoured Critical Theory's linguistic turn towards a theory of communicative reason. For its part, the first generation insisted on the value of ideological critique for its ability to raise consciousness as well as reveal false consciousness (Geuss, 1981:26), akin to the great popularity of CR [consciousness raising] in the second-wave feminism of the late 1960s and 1970s. I am cognizant of the fact that Benhabib and Fraser are very close Habermas allies and that Amy Allen is arguably post-third-generation, along with Martin Saar, Robin Celikates, Rahel Jaeggi and the current generation. This is important because, as Horkheimer (2002) famously argued, knowledge and its investigator are both culturally and historically conditioned. I previously explored the question of ideological critique, as well as its use in unmasking special interests, in this paper.

It is thus argued that feminism, as part of a richer interdisciplinary methodology that includes a wealth of empirical research on neurobiology, could meaningfully correct, and thereafter complement, Habermas's shortcomings. Several of the first generation (Fromm, Marcuse) engage directly with feminist theory, as do several of the third generation (Benhabib, Allen, Fraser), which rather negates the argument that feminism and Critical Theory are polar opposites. Fromm and (early) Horkheimer placed great emphasis on the role of psychological formation in their analyses of capitalism, for much the same reason as Gerhardt did. This is accordingly an important project in a world dominated by instrumental reason, notably extractive, rent-seeking capitalism, amidst a return to authoritarianism (Applebaum, 2021) due, in part, to a dearth of caring in public life.

Conclusion

In this contribution, I have argued that a gap in the extant knowledge appears to be a demonstration of how and why Habermas's extremely rationalistic proposal to reconstruct society should be complemented by other valuable perspectives. His model suffers the drawbacks often attributed to an overreliance on reason, although I am still of the view that Habermas shares a concern for caring in public life with feminists more generally. Nonetheless, my contention is that considerations of the value of emotional wisdom

(such as a feminist 'ethic of care' and Gerhardt's vision of a caring society), as well as a post-structuralist approach to interdisciplinarity, would go a long way towards defending, complementing and criticising Habermas's valuable work on a Critical Theory for a progressive society. I suggest that the novelty of this contribution lies in the use of post-structuralism's 'both/and' inclusive approach to theory appropriation, as a glue for forging a new vision of emancipation (an objective that feminists share with Habermas) between Habermas's universalist project and feminism's concern with specificity (a notion feminists share with post-structuralism).

I argue, in fact, that the feminist 'ethic of care' makes a stronger case for Habermas's commitment to a vast inter- and transdisciplinarity (Habermas having embraced both continental and analytical philosophy), since debates concerning emotional intelligence often promote the case for interdisciplinarity (and, as I have shown, certainly also trans-disciplinarity). As I noted in the introduction, Habermas's willingness to listen to other views, as well as his general sympathy for the need for inclusivity, already tilts him towards feminist concerns. Although feminist scholars are not alone in taking Habermas's Western-centric rationalism to task, I have attempted to show how this (certainly not exclusionary) feminist 'ethic of care' could greatly benefit Habermas's project if these two lines of thinking were placed side-by-side, and given the opportunity to benefit from cross-fertilisation. I conclude that in our postmodern world, confronted as it is by complex problems, such as the search for a caring, compassionate society, while being bedevilled and confounded by the oppression and exploitation of women within a profit-driven capitalist dystopia, an inter- (and even trans-) disciplinary approach cannot be dispensed with.

Both these bodies of knowledge (feminism and Critical Theory) pursue an emancipatory vision of sorts. It would be a shame if an attempt was not made to fuse their diverse, if sometimes perhaps contradictory, insights into something altogether healthier and more powerful. As it could be argued that feminism is antithetical to a strictly rationalistic, Habermasian perspective, post-structuralism's inclusive 'both/and,' rather than the traditional exclusivity of 'either/or,' thinking comes in handy. By thinking feminism and Critical Theory together, rather than as being opposite ends of a continuum, weaknesses displayed by Habermas, such as his downplaying of emotion, are corrected by this interdisciplinarity when (in)fused with a feminist counterbalance. Via this eclectic methodological context, this contribution has attempted to demonstrate that philosophy as critical inquiry can fruitfully engage with cognate areas covered by the empirical sciences, in order to reach (a) novel understanding(s) which might otherwise evade us. Whereas Habermas privileges universal application, and feminists privilege specificity, post-structuralism's great value resides in its ability to think both these moments together – a project of integrating divergent perspectives that might even be attractive to Habermas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALLEN, A. 2017. End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory. New York: Columbia University Press.

APPLEBAUM, A. 2021. Twilight of democracy: the seductive lure of authoritarianism. New York: Doubleday.

BAIRD, A.D., SCHEFFER, I.E. & WILSON, S.J. 2011. Mirror neuron system involvement in empathy: a critical look at the evidence. *Social Neuroscience*, 6(4):327-335. https://doi.org/10.1080/17470919.2010.547085.

BAUMRIND, D. 1966. Effects of authoritative parental control on child behaviour. *Child Behaviour*, 37(4):887-907. https://doi.org/10.2307/1126611.

BENHABIB, S. 1995. The debate over women and moral theory revisited. (*In* Meehan, J., *ed*. Feminists read Habermas: gendering the subject of discourse. London: Routledge. p. 181-204.)

BENHABIB, S. 1996. Critical theory and postmodernism. (*In* Rasmussen, D.M., *ed*. The handbook of critical theory. Oxford: Blackwell. p. 327-339.)

BENHABIB, S. 2019. For Jürgen Habermas on his 90th birthday. *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 17(4):1047–1049. https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/moz088.

BOONZAIER, F. & SHEFER, T. 2006. Gendered research. (*In* Boonzaier, F., *ed*. The gender of psychology. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press. p. 3-11.)

BOYLE, K. 2019. Invisible women: exposing data bias in a world designed for men – a review. *Conversation UK,* 22 March. https://theconversation.com/invisible-women-exposing-data-bias-in-a-world-designed-for-men-a-review-113693 Date of access: 25 March 2019.

BROWNMILLER, S. 2000. In our time: memoir of a revolution. London: Aurum Press.

CHAMBERS, S. 2004. The politics of critical theory. (*In* Rush, F., *ed*. The Cambridge companion to critical theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 219-247.) https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521816602.010.

CHESLER, P. 2005. Women and madness*. 2nd ed. New York: St. Martin's Press.

COCHRAN, M. 1999. Normative theory in international relations: a pragmatic approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

COHEN, J.L. 1995. Critical social theory and feminist critiques: the debate with Jürgen Habermas. (*In* Meehan, J., ed*. Feminists read Habermas: gendering the subject of discourse. London: Routledge. p. 57-90.) https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203094006.

COHEN, J. & COHEN, P. 1996. Life values and adolescent mental health. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.

COLLETTI, L. 1979. Marxism and Hegel, translation by Garner, L. London: Verso.

CORRADETTI, C.F. 2013. The Frankfurt School and critical theory. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256045695_The_Frankfurt_School_and_Critical_Theory Date of access: 4 January 2021.

CORRADINI, A. & ANTONIETTI, A. 2013. Mirror neurons and their function in cognitively understood empathy. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 22(3):1152-1161. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2013.03.003.

DAWKINS, R. 1989. The selfish gene*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

DEAN, J. 1995. Discourse in different voices. (*In* Meehan, J., *ed*. Feminists read Habermas: gendering the subject of discourse. London: Routledge. p. 205-230.) https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203094006.

FLEMING, M. 1995. Women and the 'public use of reason.' (*In* Meehan, J., *ed*. Feminists read Habermas: gendering the subject of discourse. London: Routledge. p. 117-138.) https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203094006.

FRASER, N. 1986. Toward a discourse ethic of solidarity. *Praxis International,* no. 4:425-429.

GERHARDT, S. 2010. The selfish society: how we all forgot to love one another and made money instead*. London: Simon & Schuster.

GEUSS, R. 1981. The idea of a critical theory: Habermas & the Frankfurt School. New York: Cambridge University Press.

GILLIGAN, C. 1982. In a different voice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

GREER, G. 2002. The female eunuch*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

HABERMAS, J. 1973. Theory and practice, translation by Viertel, J. Boston: Beacon Press.

HABERMAS, J. 1979. Communication and the evolution of society, translation by McCarthy, T. Boston: Beacon Press.

HABERMAS, J. 1983. Moralbewußtsein und kommunikatives Handeln. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

HABERMAS, J. 1984, 1987. [1981] The theory of communicative action, Two volumes, translation by McCarthy, T. Boston: Beacon Press.

HABERMAS, J. 1990a. [1983] Moral consciousness and communicative action, translation by Lenhardt, C. & Nicholsen, S.W. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

HABERMAS, J. 1990b. Justice and Solidarity: On the Discussion Concerning "Stage 6". (*In* Kelly, M., *ed*. Hermeneutics and Critical Theory in Ethics and Politics, translation by Nicholsen, S.W. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. p. 32-52.)

HABERMAS, J. 1993. Justification and application: remarks on discourse ethics, translation by Cronin, C.P. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

HABERMAS, J. 1996. Between facts and norms: contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy, translation by Rehg, W. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

HABERMAS, J. 2001. Kommunikatives Handeln und detranszendentalisierte Vernunft. Stuttgart: Reclam, Ditzingen.

HABERMAS, J. 2003. Truth and justification, translation by Fultner, B. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

HABERMAS, J. 2008. [1970] On systematically distorted communication. *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 13(1-4):205-218. https://doi.org/10.1080/00201747008601590.

HELD, D. 1980. Introduction to critical theory: Horkheimer to Habermas. London: Hutchinson.

HONNETH, A. 1986. Dialectics of rationalization. (*In* Dews, P., *ed*. Autonomy and solidarity: interviews with Jürgen Habermas. London: Verso Press. p. 95-97.)

HONNETH, A. 2007. Recognition as ideology. (*In* Van den Brink, B. & Owen, D., *eds*. Recognition and power: Axel Honneth and the tradition of critical social theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 323-347.) https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511498732.013.

HORKHEIMER, M. 1993. The present situation of social philosophy and the tasks of an institute for social research, translation by Hunter, G.F., Kramer, M.S. & Torpey, J. (*In* Hunter, G.F., Kramer, M.S. & Torpey, J., *eds*. Between philosophy and social science: selected early writings. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. p. 1-14.)

HORKHEIMER, M. 2002. Traditional and critical theory, translation by O'Connell, M.J. (*In* Horkheimer, M., *ed*. Critical theory: selected essays. New York: Continuum. p. 88-143.)

HORKHEIMER, M. & ADORNO, T.W. 2002. Dialectic of enlightenment, translation by Jephcott, E. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

HUTTUNEN, R. & MURPHY, M. 2012. Discourse and recognition as normative grounds for radical pedagogy: Habermasian and Honnethian ethics in the context of education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 31(2):137-152. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-012-9285-8.

JACQUES, M. 2012. When China rules the world: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order. 2nd edition. London: Penguin.

KANDIYOTI, D. 1996. Contemporary feminist scholarship and Middle East studies. (*In* Kandiyoti, D., *ed*. Gendering the Middle East: emerging perspectives. London: I.B. Tauris. p. 1-27.)

KASSER, T. 2002. The high price of materialism. Cambridge: MIT Press.

LACAN, J. 1977. *Écrits*: a selection, translation by Sheridan, A. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

LACAN, J. 1981. The four fundamental concepts of psycho-analysis. (Translation by Sheridan, A.) New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

LAIBLE, D. & THOMPSON, R. 2000. Mother-child discourse, attachment security, shared positive affect, and early conscience development. *Child Development*, 71(5):1424-1440. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00237.

LAKOFF, G. 2002. Moral politics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

LAMM, C. & MAJDANDŽIĆ, J. 2015. The role of shared neural activations, mirror neurons, and morality in empathy: a critical comment. *Neuroscience Research,* no. 90:15-24. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neures.2014.10.008.

LOQUIAS, V.J. 2019. Axel Honneth's critical pedagogy for a renewed socialist-global society. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 1(5):99-140.

MARX, K. 1852. The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm Date of access: 6 January 2016.

MCCARTHY, T. 1978. The critical theory of Jürgen Habermas. London: Hutchinson.

MEEHAN, J. 1995. Introduction. (*In* Meehan, J., *ed*. Feminists read Habermas: gendering the subject of discourse. London: Routledge. p. 1-20.) https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203094006.

MIDLARSKY, E., JONES, S.F. & CORLEY, R.P. 2005. Personality correlates of heroic rescue during the Holocaust. *Journal of Personality*, 73(4):907-934. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2005.00333.x.

MOLL, J., DE OLIVEIRA-SOUZA, R., ESLINGER, P.J., BRAMATI, I.E., MOURÃO-MIRANDA, J., ANDREIUOLO, P.A. & PESSOA, L. 2002. Neural correlates of moral sensitivity. *Journal of Neuroscience*, 22(7): 2730-2736. https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.22-07-02730.2002.

MOUFFE, C. 2005. The democratic paradox. London: Verso.

NUSSBAUM, M. 2000. Women and human development. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

OLIVIER, B. 2013. Modernism, postmodernism and poststructuralism, the difference. *Mail & Guardian,* May 24. https://thoughtleader.co.za/bertolivier/2013/05/24/modernism-postmodernism-and-poststructuralism-the-difference/ Date of access: 9 January 2018.

OLIVIER, B. 2015. The tacit influences on one's ways of teaching and doing research. *Alternation*, Special Edition, no. 16:346-371.

PETHERBRIDGE, D. 2013. The critical theory of Axel Honneth. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

PEREZ, C.C. 2019. Invisible women: data bias in a world designed for men. New York, NY: Abrams Press.

RASMUSSEN, D.M. 1996. Critical theory and philosophy. (*In* Rasmussen, D.M., ed. The handbook of critical theory. Oxford: Blackwell. p. 11-38.)

ROBINSON, F. 1999. Globalising care: ethics, feminist theory, and international relations. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

ROSENFELD, M. 2019. Habermas at 90: a personal and professional tribute. *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 17(4):1074-1077. https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/moz095.

SALECL, R. 2010. Choice. London: Profile Books.

SINGER, P. 2001. Hegel: a very short introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

STOUT, M. 2005. The sociopath next door. New York, NY: Random House.

THOMPSON, J.B. 1990. Ideology and modern culture. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

THOMPSON, R.A., MEYER, S. & MCGINLEY, M. 2006. Understanding values in relationships: the development of conscience. (*In* Killen, M. & Smetana, J., *eds*. Handbook of moral development. London: Psychology Press. p. 267-297.)

VERHAEGHE, P. 2014. What about me? The struggle for identity in a market-based society [Kindle ed.]. London: Scribe.

WARHOL, R.R. & HERNDL, D.P. 1991. About feminisms. (*In* Warhol, R.R. & Herndl, D.P., *eds*. Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. p. ix-xviii.)

WARNKE, G. 1995. Discourse ethics and feminist dilemmas of difference. (*In* Meehan, J., *ed*. Feminists read Habermas: gendering the subject of discourse. London: Routledge. p. 247-262.)

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION. 2018. United Nations agencies call for ban on virginity testing. *WHO Newsletter Health*, October 17. https://www.who.int/news/item/17-10-2018-united-nations-agencies-call-for-ban-on-virginity-testing Date of access: 8 January 2020. https://doi.org/10.1163/2210-7975_hrd-9841-20180029.

ZURN, C. 2010. Jürgen Habermas. (*In* Schrift, A., *ed*. History of continental philosophy, Volume 6: poststructuralism and critical theory: the return of master thinkers. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 197-226.)