



Habermas on *bildung*. Publicity, discourse, and politics [Habermas sobre *bildung* - publicidad, discurso y política]

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Introduction

The question of *Bildung* is normally taken to be unimportant to Jürgen Habermas. I will argue that this is a mistake. Since his very first writings he has been preoccupied with *Bildung*, and this is still the case, although in his philosophical development it was at certain stage crucial both to criticize and to distance himself from the ideal of *Bildung*.¹

Taking a look at the mature political philosophy of Habermas as it is presented in *Between Facts and Norms*, as a whole it is an argument for democracy. To back up the argument we get Habermas' idea of deliberate politics, in which public opinion and civil society are to play a prominent role in relation to the formal power structures. Habermas emphasizes at great length the significance of formation, both as opinion- and will formation and later as political formation. A very important point is of course that this formation must be communicative, discursive, and thus deliberative (Habermas 1992: 396). It is therefore the political formation can become "reasonable", not just as individual motivation, but also at the social level (1992: 411).

In spite of the importance Habermas himself obviously attributes to this theme in two of the core chapters in *Between Facts and Norms*, chapter VII and VIII, the question of formation as *Bildung* is most often thought to be uninteresting in relation to the

¹ The German term *Bildung* is very difficult to translate adequately into English. *Bildung* is a specific kind of mental formation, and the word can signify both the process of what in the US would be called liberal education, and the normative goal for such an education, namely to acquire *Bildung* or to end up as an educated person. The work presented here has its origins in research done in Danish, which is now formulated in English, and since *Bildung* in Danish have an almost direct equivalent, namely *dannelse*, I have originally not gone much into the translation problems. These problems cannot be ignored when dealing with this matter in English, but for now I have restricted myself to a simple technical solution. In what follows I have thus used the German term, whenever there was any possibilities of misunderstandings.



systematic discussions and concerns in Habermas philosophy. In the otherwise very comprehensive *Habermas Handbook* (Brunkhorst, Kreide & Lafont 2009) the concept of *Bildung* is not included in the list of core concepts, and in the thematic entries there is hardly anything indicating an interest in formation, neither in relation to ethics, politics, or education. Neither the impressive four volume collection of studies in the thought of Habermas (Rasmussen & Swindal 2002) apparently contains any systematic discussion of his relation to *Bildung*. This paper aims to displace some of the commonplaces in the understanding of Habermas' thinking that are responsible for these omissions.

The argument is thus that *Bildung* has occupied Habermas from the earliest writings. In these writings he criticizes the idea of being educated as an expression of innate abilities and emphasizes instead the significance of the social conditions of the upbringing. This is the subject of the first section (1st). The second section provides a fuller presentation of the ideology-critical analysis of *Bildung* found in Habermas's first masterpiece from 1962, the doctoral thesis on *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. The basic critique is that the ideal of individual *Bildung* is too tightly connected to economic and political dominance, but still the ideal contains some truth (2nd).

The third section maps his relatively sparse comments regarding *Bildung* in the subsequent decades. Significant here is *Knowledge and Human Interest* from 1968 (second edition 1973), where he works himself out of the philosophy of consciousness framework towards the *Theory of Communicative Action*, published in 1981. Approaching reality through the philosophy of consciousness, where the starting point is a subject's first-person relation to an object, is for Habermas basically erroneous in practical philosophy. Instead one should employ a collective intersubjective perspective, that is, a subject-subject interaction perspective. This becomes the communicative approach, which in the subsequent years becomes the framework of Habermas' discussion of *Bildung*, both in relation to philosophical ethics – discourse



ethics – and in more specific discussions, such as what is the role of the university in modern society (3rd).

Finally just a few words on the political philosophy and the philosophy of law, which Habermas presents in *Between Facts and Norms*, where he once again allows *Bildung* to have a positive normative significance, but now in a collective communicative perspective (4th).

1. Formation is social, not inborn

For the young Habermas in the 1960'ies the expression *Bildung* refers primarily to the ideal of a classic liberal education, as we know it today from the Northern European *Gymnasium* and the humanities at universities all over the world. To be an educated person means to be a human being, who reflects about where we are coming from, who we are, and which possibilities we have as human beings (Habermas 1959: 48 f). Such a reflection presupposes a great deal of knowledge of history, language and fine arts, of literature, drama, pictorial art, of symbolic language, analogies and allegories, analysis of artistic forms of expression, and of the references typically employed in creative activities. As Habermas remarks, today to be an educated person can very well be mistaken for the quiz-ideal of being “well informed” (Habermas 1957: 31).

For Habermas, however, what is important is that such knowledge is an expression of interest in those specific aspects of reality. It is because of such an engaged interest that one enters into discussions about these matters and acquires the knowledge required to understand what is at stake. To be an educated person it does not suffice just to be acquainted with or informed about such matters. To be educated means that one strives to achieve knowledge of the established culture as our second nature. An educated person wants to know, what people actually have created, and this gives an improved understanding of, what human beings might possible aspire to. Because of this the ideal of being educated – *Bildung* – transcends what is merely a matter of fine arts or of high culture.



An important question in this context is of course, how this interest in arts and culture – as well as the ideal of being educated – arises in an individual human being. Apart from these objective matters what is interesting is also, why such areas become valuable in a subjective perspective. Habermas criticizes sharply the idea that innate talents are the main explanatory factor. According to Habermas one can distinguish between two different ways to manage one's life: One can chose to take the shortest cut to profession, work and income, but one can also chose to take a "detour" around "the scholarly cultivation of the world" (Habermas 1961: 59). What is important here is that it is this detour that most often gives a person access to the upper strata of society. It is therefore important to know, how and why this choice happens.

The theory of the talented child justify that those, who reach the top are also those who deserve to reach the top. They are simply the gifted ones. On the basis of American sociological investigations, however, Habermas can argue that intelligence correlates with motivation, and that the "capacity for education [*Bildung*]" actually can be developed in primary school, if suitable "stimuli for education" (Habermas 1961: 79) are encountered. What ultimately matters is thus neither the inborn talents of the individual child nor just the social heritage provided by the parents. What is crucial is the specific culture of education or the "subculture" (Habermas 1961: 78), within which the child grows up. Habermas can refer directly to an American project from the 1950'ies, which deliberately provided a fruitful "climate of education [*Bildung*]" in schools for low income families. On these schools intensive didactic instruction was offered, and outside school the children could experience movies, theater, museums, libraries etc. Tutors were supervising, and the result was a marked increase in the "will to education" and "the capacity to education" (Habermas 1961: 80) among these children from the lower classes.

2. The bourgeois ideal of liberal education [*Bildung*] is ideology, but not just ideology

The ideal of *Bildung* is as mentioned closely linked to the curriculum of the *Gymnasium* and of the humanities at the universities, and just as these institutions have their histories, this is also the case of the ideal itself. Habermas can therefore investigate the



ideal of general or liberal education as a historical phenomenon, which plays a special cultural, social and political role. Historically *Bildung* is the specific form of education, which expresses the ideas of the Northern European and in particular the German bourgeoisie in the 18th and 19th century about the ideal human life. It is the societal dynamics connected to these ideas that Habermas focus' on in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Being educated in this context manifests itself as a crucial element in the liberal ideology of the bourgeoisie, since the idea of *Bildung* functions as a legitimation for the private property of the bourgeoisie as well as their general economic and political power in the public sphere.

The framework for Habermas' analysis is an investigation of the genesis and development of the public sphere, the idea of such a public sphere and the effective ideological logic working within this sphere. Habermas initially conceives of the public sphere as a "sphere" for private persons, which are gathered as an "audience" (Habermas 1962: 42). The public sphere is therefore in the first place attached to fine arts and culture, that is, theater, literature, concerts, and museums, and here the audience is respectively spectators, readers, listeners and visitors (1962: 54-56). As audience one can get experiences of a kind, which are private, but nevertheless transcends what might be considered intimate. Even though such experiences are private, they are of a kind, about which there can be public conversation. In the second place Habermas therefore determines the bourgeois public sphere as "a place to practice public reasoning", which contributes to "the process of self-realization of the private bourgeois citizens in relation to the genuine experiences of their new privatehood" (1962: 44). Most clearly distinguished as a process of education is reading, which as an activity requires private seclusion, but where the character of the content can nevertheless be of general interest and as such the point of departure for further public reasoning.

Before the emergence of the specific bourgeois public sphere there were already a humanist-aristocratic public sphere established by the nobility and at the court. This kind of public sphere can be called "representative" (1962: 44), and within it arts,



culture and entertainment were the objects of experience, reflection and public reasoning. It is this courteously-noble public sphere and its “elegant world” (1962: 44), which is continued by the bourgeois public sphere and transformed into its specific institutions, that is, the coffee shops, the salons and the dinner parties (1962: 45, 48 f). It is in these institutions one encounters public reasoning, although at first only in the form of conversations about arts and culture. Habermas puts a lot of emphasis on the fact that the literary public sphere to a large extent was constituted by fiction, i.e. literature, poetry and drama. It was thus in the coffee shops and the salons, one conversed vividly about theater plays, novels and short stories. This fictive universe, however, creates a consciousness about the human psyche, and it further forms that psychological knowledge, which is the foundation of both the general idea of the specific human being and of the *Bildung*, one has to go through in order to realize ones potential as such a human being. As audience in relations to works of art one is thus educated to be able to reason about “the universal” as it is manifested in “literature and art” as well as in “philosophy” (1962: 52).

As a material condition for the formation of the bourgeois public sphere Habermas calls attention to the importance of the emerging capitalism. It thus contributes with the commodification of cultural goods, which means that these goods can be offered to and demanded at a market. These processes brings us theaters with plays or shows, to which one can buy tickets, just as publishers are offering a wide range of printed material, apart from books also papers, weeklies, and monthly journals, where articles are mixed with letters to the editor. The commodity form brings the discussion about “the universal” out of merely verbal contexts, whereby they can escape the interpretation monopolies of the church and the state. Commodification thus makes discussions about the universal universally accessible. The audience is now in principle always incomplete as a public sphere consisting of an infinite mass of readers, listeners and spectators. Culture and art are no longer merely for a small privileged “clique”, although they still presuppose material and mental resources, or – with an expression that Habermas is really fond of – “*Besitz und Bildung*”, “property and education” (1962: 53, 75, 115 ff).



Among these cultural commodities are specialized journals, which contribute to raising the level of cultural and artistic critique (1962: 56 f). Compared to the specialized juridical verdict cultural and artistic verdicts still maintain a character of being “somewhat amateurish” (1962: 58), but it is here we find the origin of today’s highly specialized and qualified criticism of literature, art, theater etc. Habermas’ point is that the development of criticism in the journals of that age is essential for the transformation of the audience to become a public sphere, who for the first time gets access to reasoning about universal questions. The criticism thus makes them both enlightened and educated, both as citizens and human beings, and this further gives them the opportunity to grasp themselves as part of a more comprehensive enlightenment process.

According to Habermas in the first place the bourgeois public sphere gets its institutional anchorage in a division of the private sphere in the intimate and the representative. This division manifests itself in the home of the private bourgeois citizen, where the private living room is transformed into a salon, in which one can arrange different kinds of parties. And this kind of representative socializing is thought of as contributing to the public good (1962: 63). It is from this originally literary public sphere of the salons that the bourgeois public sphere is formed as a *political* public sphere. In contrast to the antique and republican public spheres, which transmit the public opinion of common affairs from society to the state, the bourgeois public sphere directs itself towards the “civil society” (1962: 70). It thereby contests the idea of the absolute sovereignty of the monarch. Instead we get the idea of popular sovereignty, i.e. that the law – e.g. by Montesquieu and Locke – ultimately must refer to the people. The law has to express the will of the people and must be in accordance with “the nature of the things”. Laws have to be robust rules of reason of a certain duration. It is neither sufficient that the ruler just issues decrees, nor that he constantly and consistently demonstrates his power (1962: 71).

Departing from the discussions in the artistic and cultural public sphere about the human psyche and morality, one can within the bourgeois public sphere imagine an



organization of society beyond the state, namely the kind of self-organization, which is presupposed in the idea of civil society. With its focus on generality, reason and universality the literary public sphere thus paves the way for the demands of the political public sphere concerning legislation. Equality before the law rests on an idea of equality among educated persons, whose subjectivity has been realized for each individually as “mere human beings”. This is according to Habermas the living core in those “fixed clichés”, which are made up by the “bourgeois-revolutionary propaganda formula about ‘equality’ and ‘freedom’” (1962: 72). The idea is that it is *Bildung* that qualifies the public opinion as more than just opinions (1962: 115).

Within a critique of ideology such as Habermas’ this is of course not the final word. *Bildung* is closely connected to *Besitz* – i.e. property – since cultural and artistic as well as political education requires material resources. The public sphere is the place for the education to reason and authority (*Mündigkeit*), but access to this public sphere is still a privilege (1962: 330). *Bildung* presupposes education and this is possible for only few in Europe in the 18th and 19th century. With Hegel Habermas can therefore emphasize that the material inequality results in unequal “intellectual and moral education” (1962: 145). With Marx Habermas can further make it obvious that the bourgeois public sphere juxtaposes *bourgeois*, *citoyen* and *l’homme*, i.e. proprietor, citizen and human being, and that is the characteristics of the former that determines the idea of the latter. In the real bourgeois society there is an enormous material inequality. Since property is a criterion for the participation in that kind of societal life, which develops the qualities considered simply human, the consequence is that citizens and especially human beings become a minority in the real bourgeois society. In other words: It is a fiction that everybody has the same chances to – with industry, cleverness and good luck – get access to property, education and thereby reason and political influence (1962: 152).

With Habermas’ understanding of the mutuality of the relation between publicity and privacy, this general ideology-critical point is sharpened even more. Publicity demands a private life. In particular reading requires privacy, and Habermas considers reading a



precondition for the reasoning and the distance, which characterize the *Bildung* of the public sphere to universality (1962: 192). Nevertheless Habermas wants to maintain that “the bourgeois culture was not just ideology” (1962: 193). It has an element (*Moment*) of truth, although this could not be realized under the material conditions of that age. That does not mean, however, that the bourgeois culture developed afterwards has improved. On the contrary, for Habermas there has been a decay in the bourgeois culture since then. Much of what used to be public reasoning about arts and culture has today developed into just cultural consumption.

The early capitalism could with the commodity form distribute cultural goods, where the universal content was in contradiction with that form, and this became crucial for the creation of the educated cultural public sphere. In late capitalism what happens is rather a destruction of the public sphere, namely through the production and distribution of pure entertainment destined to passive consumption by an audience of people with only little education (1962: 199). Where reading in its private seclusion educates to the distance of authority, which makes it possible to say “no”, modern mass media enchant “the consciousness of the consuming audience” (1962: 205 f). Where *Bildung* in the bourgeois public sphere gave promises of reason and universality, the modern world of mass media does not leave much hope for the realization of human autonomy.

3. *Bildung* is a core concept in the philosophy of consciousness, but it can be reconstructed communicatively

With such an ideology-critical analysis Habermas’ relation to the normative ideal of *Bildung* is at best ambivalent. It is therefore no wonder that *Bildung* in his writings of the subsequent years only plays a minor role, and even in the descriptive sense one notices a remarkable absence of the word *Bildung*. In 1964 Habermas argues for a change in the *Forschungs- und Bildungspolitik* – i.e. the education and research politics – of what was then the German Federal Republic. His point is simple: If one wants to avoid that the development of science and technology will be accompanied by the emergence of a technocracy, then one has to enlighten the political public sphere to be



able to understand and discuss research, science and technology, and that requires raising the level of education – *Bildung* – in society at large (1964: 135). *Bildung* is thus mentioned, but no details are provided as to what this actually means, i.e. what such a public education should consist in. Apparently he now prefers to argue his points in terms of publicity, dialogue, understanding etc. (1964: 134 ff). The word *Bildung* is thus used, but only sporadic and descriptively. The classical normative ideal of *Bildung* Habermas seems to have left for good.

This seems to be the pattern also in the writings of the following years; actually the tendency might even be said to become more pronounced, since he apparently refrains from using the word even in its descriptive sense, also in cases where the context would have suggested otherwise. In the first part of *Knowledge and Human Interest* we get a remarkably clear reconstruction of the conceptual logic behind Hegel's understanding of *Bildung*, i.e. the critique of the classical theory of knowledge and the development through this critique of Hegel's own concept of experience. With a classic quotation Habermas even emphasizes precisely, how Hegel connects the idea of *Bildung* conceptually to the experience of consciousness (Habermas 1973: 22; Hegel 1807: 67). For Hegel it is very explicit that it is by departing from the experience of consciousness through negation and sublation that one can conceive of the development of consciousness to self-consciousness, reason and spirit as *Bildung*. Nevertheless, in Habermas' reconstruction of this Hegelian logic he consistently uses the less normatively laden and much more psychologized word "*Bildungsprozesse*", i.e. processes of formation (1973: 25-30). The point is probably that with the psychological vocabulary Habermas obtains an objectification of consciousness, which contribute to creating a distance to the classical philosophy of consciousness, where the idea of the *Bildung* of the subject is fundamental.

Habermas' reflections following Marx point in the same direction. For Marx human beings conceive of themselves in terms of work, and as species they create themselves through production and reproduction (Habermas 1973: 55). From Marx Habermas takes over the idea that human beings themselves create the distance to animals, when



they “produce their own means for subsistence” (1973: 55). When Habermas thus speaks of “processes of formation [*Bildung*]” in this context, the focus is rather on the material “act of self-creation” of “the species” through societal “domination of nature” and “the struggle of the social classes” (1973: 75 f) than on the *Bildung* of the consciousness of a single or universal subject. Thus objectified the process of formation depends on “the contingent conditions of subjective as well as the objective nature”, first of all on “the ‘metabolism’ of a communicatively acting” human being with its surroundings. What is determining this process is “a materialistic reinterpretation of the interest of reason introduced by idealism: the emancipatory interest” (1973: 259), as Habermas famously calls it.

In *The Theory of Communicative Action* one might think that Habermas with the ideal of a life-world threatened by the system would draw on the normative idea of *Bildung*. And this might actually be the case, although as Habermas presents his case, it is mostly done implicitly, indirectly and negatively. The life-world is constituted by a symbolic reproduction of the norms for our cultural and social life through linguistic interaction, and as it is well known Habermas speaks of colonization, when this reproduction is disturbed by the steering media of the system, i.e. power and money. In the positive determination of the normative concepts of communicative action and life-world Habermas does not make use of the expression of *Bildung*. However, when he has to give examples of the actual threats of the systems colonization of the life-world, suddenly he emphasizes the importance of *Bildung* in the classical normative sense.

Habermas thus claims that the modern world is characterized by an increasing bureaucratization and juridification of those spheres in the life-world that were formerly just informal. As examples he analyses in particular the family and the school (Habermas 1981a: II, 540), and here suddenly *Bildung* is allowed to play its traditional role. Habermas makes clear that the modern juridification of the life-world is ambivalent, since it at the same time both expands the possibilities of interventions by the authorities and increases the protection by law of each individual. What is interesting here, however, is that Habermas in a subordinate clause remarks that “the



process of formation in families and schools, which happens through communicative action” (1981a: II, 542) must be made able to continue functioning independently of the juridical regulation. Even more explicit he is, when he criticizes the “economical imperative of the system”, which juxtaposes “the school system” with a “system of occupation”. Here he transcends the formerly obtained objectivation and emphasizes “the fundamental right to *Bildung*” (1981a: II, 545).

In Habermas’ perspective of communicative action the late modern society is characterized by a multiplicity of value communities, which can be justified ethically. It was because of the positive recognition of this as a fact that Karl-Otto Apel (Apel 1967/72) and later Habermas consciously developed a formal discourse ethics. Nevertheless Habermas again and again emphasizes that this formalism contributes to a moral will formation (*Willensbildung*) by inviting all possibly affected by a possible action to communication about it in the form of argumentation and discussion. Discourse ethics aims at developing a “proceduralism”, because it is possible through argumentation to develop a “discursive will formation” (Habermas 1983a: 133). Habermas insists that a “reasonable will formation” requires argumentation in relation to validity criteria aiming at consensus. It is not about a “dialogue [...] as a group dynamic means to enhance the competence of empathy” (Habermas 1986a: 301). Participation in a practical discourse makes possible a “will formation full of insight” (Habermas 1986a: 312), and discourse ethics thus aims at the development of “cognitive structures”, even though it will not determine “the content of the moral verdicts”. On the cognitive level, which the psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg calls the “post-conventional level” (Habermas 1983a: 135), Habermas thinks that one can demand “universality in the sense of including all those affected” (Habermas 1983a: 133). In Habermas’ continued discussion with developmental psychology he develops the objectifying language even more. It is now said that “the one growing up” reflectively can be said to understand “his [or her] own moral development as a learning process” (1983a: 136), that is, not as *Bildung*, nor as consciousness-raising.



Still *Bildung* lures in the background, and this becomes more obvious, when Habermas discuss the role of the university in the modern society. Within science *Bildung* has traditionally – at least in Northern Europe – played an important role. The classical ideal of the Humboldt University is based upon the idea that *Bildung*, science and formal education goes hand in hand, and that there is no principled contradiction between scientific specialization and general education, i.e. *Bildung*. Habermas recognizes that in a modern complex society characterized by pluralism and a highly developed division of labor scientific specialization is also necessary. For Habermas, however, it is important to argue that one must not, with a post-modern ideal of liberal education, give up the demand to know the truth, and this is where the idea *Bildung* becomes relevant. For Habermas it is the task of philosophy to maintain the internal connection between truth and education (*Bildung*) (Habermas 1981b: 21), just as it must emphasize that there is no sharp distinction between “science and the philosophical promise of *Bildung*” (1981b: 22). Philosophy must take it upon itself to keep reminding about the importance of the life-world in its entirety and thereby stimulate increased interaction between the different value- and validity-spheres of the life-world, i.e. between the cognitive-instrumental, the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive (Habermas 1983: 27).

Here Habermas presupposes the traditional ideal of general or liberal education (*allgemeine Bildung*) as an integrated part of higher education and science. The problem is, as already emphasized by the young Habermas, that science no longer is as it was in the age of Humboldt. In those days there was so much speculation in science that it almost was equal to philosophy, but this is not the case anymore. The philosophical beliefs that originally created the idea of science are thus “no longer fitting in relation to the empirical-analytical procedures” (1963: 105). The question of *Bildung* is still connected to science, but because science has developed as it has – theoretically as well as practically – the question can no longer simply be answered by science itself (1963: 114). Habermas is also skeptical about the finest products of the classical German universities, the “apolitical” academics, “the mandarins of science”. Self-consciously they pose “educational elitist (*Bildungselitäre*) demands of something higher” (1986b:



33), but the experience with Nazism has clearly to Habermas demonstrated, how such an “educated bourgeoisie” easily let itself be corrupted (1986b: 46). The problem is that the prize for the academic freedom guaranteed by the state was political abstinence, and it is not clear, how such abstinence can be united with ideals of enlightenment and emancipation (Habermas 1986c: 710).

For Habermas the ideal of the modern university can therefore no longer be determined by the spiritual, artistic and historical *Bildung* of the single individual human being. Nevertheless the idea of the university contains a “utopian surplus”, which has “a critical potential” (1986c: 711), and as such it is worth preserving. He therefore turns against the reduction of science to just technology and profession. Instead he wants to emphasize those “learning processes”, which students and scientists are subjected to, when they at the university are confronted with not only different specializations, but also the demands of different functions. In all of these contexts they have to justify their views through impartial argumentation. Habermas thus wants to argue that in such a complicated world “general education, cultural tradition and reasonable will formation in the political public sphere” becomes “a matter of life and death for science itself” (1986c: 707). For every scientist it holds that “no matter if one appear to be alone in the library, by the desk, in the laboratory, one’s learning processes are inescapably an integrated part of a public community of communication together with other scientist” (1986c: 716). Science is for Habermas nourished by “the stimulating and productive power of discursive disputes”, which are brought forward by the promises of “the surprising argument” (1986c: 716).

Science, however, is not just part of its own public sphere; it contributes also to learning processes in the greater public sphere through lectures and seminars, which are in principle characterized by being publicly accessible. To Habermas universities are thus very important for the political public sphere of the society. Modern democracy does not depend on the spiritual formation of individual consciousnesses, but on a successful collective “political opinion- and will formation”. This is today typically mediated through parties and other mobilizing organizations (1962: 248), and in such contexts



Realpolitik, pragmatics and compromises of course play a significant role. Nevertheless, one can still put up demands about discursive validity, and this is partly because universities maintain the ideal norms for theoretical as well as practical discourses. Thanks to the scientific public sphere the *Bildung* in the political public sphere can therefore be enlightening and striving for reason.

4. Finish. A democracy must aim at collective opinion- and will-formation to autonomy

From the very beginning the young Habermas was thus critical about *Bildung* as an ideology in the most classical sense. *Bildung* as an ideal was a thought, which pretended to be universally valid, but in reality proved to be very particular and covering precisely those class differences, which the ideal legitimized. What proves the untruth of *Bildung* as an ideal is the factual social inequality in the capitalist order of society realized by the bourgeois class. For the mature Habermas it is crucial to rethink critical theory in a communicative perspective, which transcends traditional philosophy of consciousness, and the idea of *Bildung* is as mentioned maybe one of the most characteristic figures of this approach to philosophy. However, as we have seen, *Bildung* can be understood in several ways, namely both in an individual almost psychological sense, a social societal sense and even in a general sense covering the human species. Equally one can talk about *Bildung* of the opinion and the will, privately as well as publicly, consciously as well as discursively, individually as well as collectively, morally as well as politically – and in Habermas' work there is a development in the use of *Bildung* from those first mentioned to those last mentioned.

With the idea of communicative action Habermas expands the perspective from the merely subjective and singular to an inter-subjectively communicating collectivity. The starting point is the moral ideal of Kant about the autonomy of the good will, i.e. the will – as a creature acting out of reason – to subject yourself to a universal law as was it your own law. It is this will that elevates us from what is merely local, valuable and ethical to the moral universality. In the ethics of discourse this amounts to saying that a norm is valid, if it is met with approval by everybody, who is involved and who could possibly be thought to participate in a practical discourse (Habermas 1983a: 132). The problem



occurs when we have to go from the principled, ideal and just imagined Other to “the Other as someone in reality confronting us” (Habermas 1988: 116). This brings us to “pragmatic discourses”, which “refer to the necessity of compromises”, and it is for Habermas precisely at this point, we get the “transition from morality to law”. One cannot therefore just upscale the individual will formation to the collective level. The collective will formation is confronted with the problem that there has to be established an “understanding between parties, whose wills and interests are clashing” (1988: 117).

This problem is the point of departure for the principal political work of Habermas, *Between facts and Norms* (Habermas 1992). It is in this work that Habermas finally unfolds that *Moment* of truth in *Bildung* and the bourgeois public sphere, which was the reason that he would not just denounce those ideas as exclusively ideological. The ideal of *Bildung* is now given a form more in keeping with Habermas conception of the times, namely as collective and political. Departing from the classical republican ideals he develops the idea of deliberative politics, where the public opinion and will formation through argumentative discourse as well as pragmatic compromises will continue to push modern society in the direction of enlightenment, reason and justice. From the very earliest ideology-critical writings to the mature political philosophy *Bildung* has thus played an essential role for Habermas; it is therefore surprising that his work is only rarely discussed in these terms. This paper is meant as a contribution to filling this gap.²

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Litterature

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