Towards the Therapeutic and the Political; Giddens, Habermas and a Theory of the Agent

Leslie Aubrey Fabre

Primary Teachers Certificate, Bechet Training College (Rep. of South Africa).
Higher Primary Teachers Certificate, Hewat Training College (Rep. of South Africa).
Bachelor of Arts (Hons), University of South Africa.
Master of Arts (Hons) Preliminary, University of New England.

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Abstract

It is the argument of this thesis that:
(i) when Giddens and Habermas shifted away from the agent they left that agent without the conceptual provision that would enable it to respond to their therapeutic and political concerns about modernity, and
(ii) the transformative and healing capacity of the agent can be restored via a synthesis and development of their ideas, and in a manner that allows for the addressing of their emancipatory concerns.

I demonstrate that Giddens's and Habermas's attempts to reconstruct the project of modernity are biased in favour of metatheory and sensitising concepts; that they therefore disconnect the transformative and healing agent from systems in everyday life; and that this disconnection is an unintended outcome of the immanent logic of each project. When the agent is excluded conceptually as a significant participant, then the whole project of emancipation is put in jeopardy. Nevertheless, I also show that each theory has the latent capacity both to re-connect the empirical agent and to clarify the social processes and mechanisms that integrate the agent with interaction and system. Using Bhaskar's critical naturalism as a supporting philosophical resource, I propose a synthesis of concepts from structuration theory and communicative rationality for overcoming their deficiencies in relation to pragmatic agency and emancipation.

The realist model of the nature and process of agency that I explore here, or Knowledgeability-Communicative Competence theory, seeks to understand structures and mechanisms that underpin interaction in the social life of late modernity. It seeks to hypothesis the mutually interpretive steps that direct interaction (more particularly moral/ethical action) and their optional outcomes. This suggested model of the transforming and healing agent(s) is claimed to be more enabling of therapeutic and political interventions in late modern or 'risk' society.

Certificate

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature

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