

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



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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.

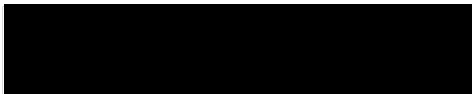
I demonstrate that Giddens's and Habermas's attempts to reconstruct the project of modernity are biased in favour of metatheory and sensitising concepts; that they therefore disconnect the transformative and healing agent from systems in everyday life; and that this disconnection is an unintended outcome 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 hypothesise 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.

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the author.

Signature

Acknowledgements

This thesis is a testimony to the selfless dedication of my wife Desrae who orchestrated the conditions necessary for its fruition. It has been 'hammered out on the big table' with the guidance and tenacity of Peter Lucich whom I have come to view as the best teacher that I know. Uma Pandey, as one of my initial supervisors, guided my training and development with the wisdom of an astute mentor and friend. Steven Thiele, who replaced Uma due to retirement, brought a new level of clarity to my understanding of my project. Any merit in this thesis would draw directly from the pedagogy of these three scholars.

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