The Theory of Communicative Action offers nothing less than a systematic reconstruction of the theoretical foundations and framework of critical social theory. These critical essays on Jurgen Habermas's major contribution to sociological theory, The Theory of Communicative Action, provide an indispensable guide for anyone trying to grasp that large, difficult, and important work. The editors' introduction traces the history of the reception of the work and identifies the main themes on which discussion has focused: a concept of communicative rationality; a theory of action based on distinguishing communicative from instrumental reason; a two-level concept of society that integrates lifeworld and system paradigms; and a critical theory of modernity meant to diagnose the sociopathologies of contemporary society. Axel Honneth is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Berlin. Hans Joas is Professor of Sociology at the Free University, Berlin. Contributors: Jeffrey Alexander, Johann P. Arnason, Johannes Berger, Gunter Dux, Jurgen Habermas, Hans Joas, Hans-Peter Kruger, Thomas McCarthy, Herbert Schnadelbach, Martin Seel, Charles Taylor.


The core of this book is a set of five lectures delivered by Habermas at Princeton in 1971 under the title 'Reflections on the Linguistic Foundation of Sociology'. These lectures offer a preliminary view of what would become The Theory of Communicative Action, and they form an excellent introduction to Habermas's ideas about communication and society.
They lay out the general parameters of Habermas's project in an accessible way, and situate his work in relation to other theories of society, particularly those of Edmund Husserl, Wilfrid Sellars, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Two additional essays elaborating the themes of the lectures are also included in this volume. 'Intentions, Conventions, and Linguistic Interactions' is an essay in the philosophy of action that focuses on the validity of social norms and examines the conceptual connections between rules, conventions, norm-governed action, and intentionality. 'Reflections on Communicative Pathology' addresses the question of deviant processes of socialization and contains an analysis of the formal conditions of systematically distorted communication. This book was designed as a companion to On the Pragmatics of Communication (1998), which took pieces from Habermas's later work to create a systematic introduction to his theory of formal pragmatics.

A major contribution to contemporary social theory. Not only does it provide a compelling critique of some of the main perspectives in 20th century philosophy and social science, but it also presents a systematic synthesis of the many themes which have preoccupied Habermas for thirty years. -- Times Literary Supplement

This volume brings together Habermas's key writings on language and communication. Including some classic texts as well as new material which is published here for the first time, this book is a detailed and up-to-date introduction to Habermas's formal pragmatics, which is a vital aspect of his social theory. Written from 1976 to 1996, the essays show the extent to which formal pragmatics underpins Habermas's theory of communicative action. They are presented in chronological order, so that the reader can trace developments and revisions in Habermas's thought. The volume includes a critical discussion of Searle's theory of meaning, and Richard Rorty's neopragmatism. It concludes with Habermas's recent defence of his theory of communicative action, in which he reaffirms his view that interpretative understanding inescapably involves evaluation. This book will be an indispensable text for students and academics who want a clear and accessible introduction to the development of Habermas's theory of communication and its relation to his broader social and political theory.

Volume I examines the concept of rationality and its relation to problems of social action, intersubjective communication and social-historical change. Habermas develops a series of powerful arguments on controversial issues such as cultural relativism, the nature of Verstehen and the inseparability of interpretation and critique. In addition to clarifying the normative foundations of critical social theory, this prepares the way for a creative appropriation of Webster's theory of rationalization and its Marxist reception by Lukács, Horkheimer and Adorno.

In this book Joseph Heath brings Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action into dialogue with the most sophisticated articulation of the instrumental conception of practical rationality—modern rational choice theory. Heath
begins with an overview of Habermas's action theory and his critique of decision and game theory. He then offers an alternative to Habermas's use of speech act theory to explain social order and outlines a multidimensional theory of rational action that includes norm-governed action as a specific type. In the second part of the book Heath discusses the more philosophical dimension of Habermas's conception of practical rationality. He criticizes Habermas's attempt to introduce a universalization principle governing moral discourse, as well as his criteria for distinguishing between moral and ethical problems. Heath offers an alternative account of the level of convergence exhibited by moral argumentation, drawing on game-theoretic models to specify the burden of proof that the theory of communicative action and discourse must assume.


This study offers a systematic reconstruction of the theoretical foundations and framework of critical social theory. It is Habermas' "magnum opus", and it is regarded as one of the most important works of modern social thought. In this second and final volume of the work, Habermas examines the relations between action concepts and systems theory and elaborates a framework for analyzing the developmental tendencies of modern societies. He discusses in detail the work of Marx, Durkheim, G.H. Mead and Talcott Parsons, among others. By distinguishing between social systems and what he calls the "life-world", Habermas is able to analyze the ways in which the development of social systems impinges upon the symbolic and subjective dimensions of social life, resulting in the kind of crises, conflicts and protest movements which are characteristic of advanced capitalist societies in the late-20th century.

Here, for the first time in English, is volume one of Jurgen Habermas's long-awaited magnum opus: The Theory of Communicative Action. This pathbreaking work is guided by three interrelated concerns: (1) to develop a concept of communicative rationality that is no longer tied to the subjective and individualistic premises of modern social and political theory; (2) to construct a two-level concept of society that integrates the 'lifeworld' and 'system' paradigms; and (3) to sketch out a critical theory of modernity that explains its sociopathologies in a new way. Habermas approaches these tasks through a combination of conceptual analyses, systematic reflections, and critical reconstructions of such predecessors as Marx and Weber, Durkheim and Mead, Horkheimer and Adorno, Schutz and Parsons. Reason and the Rationalization of Society develops a sociological theory of action that stresses not its means-ends or teleological aspect, but the need to coordinate action socially via communication. In the introductory chapter Habermas sets out a powerful series of arguments on such foundational issues as cultural and historical relativism, the methodology of Verstehen, the inseparabilty of interpretation from critique. In addition to clarifying the normative foundations of critical social inquiry, this sets the stage for a systematic appropriation of Weber's theory of rationalization and its Marxist reception by Lukacs,
Horkheimer and Adorno. This is an important book for degree students of philosophy, sociology and related subjects. Juergen Habermas opens Volume 2 with a brilliant reinterpretation of Mead and Durkheim and then develops his own approach to society, combining two hitherto competing paradigms, "system" and "lifeworld." The strength of this combination is then demonstrated in a detailed critique of Parsons's theory of social systems. Concluding with a critical reconstruction of the Weberan and Marxian treatment of modernity and its discontents, Habermas sets a new agenda for the critical theory of contemporary society. The combination of historical and theoretical sweep, analytical acumen and synthetic power, imagination and engagement mark this as one of the great works of twentieth-century social theory.


This overview of Habermas' work explores the way in which his theories have developed and changed, leading to an exposition of his more complex ideas and theories. His theory of communicative action is analysed, as are key themes, and how they inter-relate.

Twee lezingen uit 2004 over de relatie tussen de seculiere samenleving en religie, door de Duitse filosoof Habermas en Joseph Ratzinger, de latere paus Benedictus XVI.

In this important book Habermas develops his views on a range of moral and ethical issues. Drawing on his theory of communicative action, Habermas elaborates an original conception of 'discourse ethics', seeking to reconstruct a moral point of view from which normative claims can be impartially judged. Habermas connects communicative ethics to the theory of social action via an examination of research in the social psychology of moral and interpersonal development. He aims to show that our basic moral intuitions spring from something deeper and more universal than contingent features of our tradition, namely from normative presuppositions of social interaction that belong to the repertoire of competent agents in any society. Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action confronts directly a variety of difficult and controversial problems which are at the centre of current debates in philosophy and social and political theory.

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