

M.A. Sociology, Semester IV, Paper 1

Unit I – Jurgen Habermas

Topic - Classification of Knowledge

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In his book- On the logic of social Science, which was published in the year 1967, Habermas challenged the existing division of labour between the sciences and humanities. His main concern was to challenge the hegemony of empirical-analytical conceptions of social sciences. He tries to establish that science is only one type of knowledge and it exists to meet only one set of human interests and needs. He classifies basic human knowledge in three major types and tries to relate them to different human interests and needs which they fulfill.

According to Habermas there are three basic types of knowledge :-

- (1) Empirical / Analytical knowledge
- (2) Hermenutic – Historical knowledge
- (3) Critical knowledge

(1) **Empirical - Analytical knowledge** : those types of knowledge which are concerned with the understanding of the laws, which govern the material world.

(2) **Hermenutic – Historical knowledge** : Those types of knowledge which is devoted to practical understandings of social life ; understanding of the meaning; especially through interpretation of historical texts.

(3) **Critical knowledge** : The knowledge which is devoted to uncovering

conditions of constraints and domination.

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These three types of knowledge are related to three different types of human interests i.e.

(1) **Technical interest** : Technical control of natural environment so that means of existence can be reproduce ; material survival and social reproduction is possible.

(2) **Practical interest** : Practical interest in understanding of situations; interpretation of others subjective state ; meanings of situations.

(3) **Emancipatory interest** : Interest in human freedom ; freedom from unnecessary domination ; freedom for growth and improvement.

Its the above three human interests which create, three types of knowledge. The human interest in material production produces sciences or empirical knowledge; the human interest to understand the meanings of situations leads to hermenutic historical knowledge; And finally its the interest in human freedom that develops Critical knowledge.

Thus according to Habermas all the three types of knowledge are necessary and equally important as they fulfill different human interests. The growing tendency in Capitalism was to give importance only to scientific knowledge .

(1) Habermas tries to challenge this hegemony of empirical- analytical knowledge.

(2) He tries to revise the Weberian thesis of rationalization in such a way that it

dictates a renewed emphasis on hermenutics.

(3) Habermas by presenting this typology tries to give – Critical theory (Knowledge) a firm conceptual basis from which- a critique of society may be launched.

Habermas's depiction of relations between Types of knowledge, interest, needs and Media are presented as below given chart :



**FIGURE 9-1** Types of Knowledge, Interests, Media (and Functional Needs)

<i>Functional Needs</i>	<i>Interests</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Media</i>
Material survival and social reproduction generates pressures for:	technical control of environment, which leads to the development of:	empirical/analytic knowledge, which is achieved through:	work.
Continuity of social relations generates pressures for:	practical understanding through interpretations of others' subjective states, which leads to development of:	hermeneutic and historical knowledge, which is achieved through:	language.
Desires for utopian fulfillment generates pressures for:	emancipation from unnecessary domination, which leads to development of:	critical theory, which is achieved through:	authority.

### References

- 1- The Structure of Sociological Theory by Jonathan H. Turner 2001, Rawat Publication. Jaipur.
- 2- Dictionary of Critical Theory by David Macey 2000, Penguin books.uk
- 3- Jurgen Habermas Key concept by Barbara Fultner 2011, Rawat Publication. Jaipur.