The Public Sphere and Information Ethics

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0. Introduction

- The relationship between the concept of the public sphere and ICT – and the ethics of the latter
- Different aspects of paper:
- 0.1. On Jürgen Habermas
- 0.2. Early formulation of the public sphere
- 0.3. The concept of communicative reason
- 0.4. Recent statement
- 0.5. Critical conclusion

1. Habermas biography II

- In 2004 Habermas (b. 1929) said his most NB issue are:
- 1.1. The public sphere as the space for reasoned communicative exchange
- 1.2. Conceptual triad: public space, discourse, and reason [information here]
- In his development some important aspects:
- Physical handicap
- Experience of World War II and Holocaust
- Democraticization & liberalization of Germ. postwar soc.
- Influence of CT (he became Adorno's assistent in 1956)
- His own appropriation of Critical Theory

2. The public sphere I

- *Structural Transformation of the public Sphere* (1962)
- Historical and normative study of public sphere
- 2.1. Historical argument
- Feudal society without public sphere
- Modern bourgeois public sphere change of powers
- Public/private and public (civil society) as space of reasoning in tension with the state
- Institutions: press, art criticism, coffee houses for best argument
- These discussions carried over to political discussion
- Parliament (court) here obvious forum of state and public

2. Public Sphere II

- 2.2. The normative ideal of the public sphere
- Discussions disregard status, prestige, and power
- Rational argumentation (critique) sole arbiter of issue
- Public sphere seen as a universal auditorium
- In this process the state stays in touch with the public
- Also new laws, idea of person, rights, property [info.]
- Philosophers here: Kant (indiv freedom); Hegel (civil soc vs state); Marx (state and ruling class); Mill/Tocqueville (civil society and educated classes)
- BUT, this lasted for short moment: fiction of market/indiv.
- Structural change in capitalism since last part of 1800's

2. The Public Sphere III

- 2.3. Decline public sphere (late 19th) consumer
- Liberal competing capitalism transformed in monopolistic capitalism of cartels and protectionism
- Public opinion/argumentation undermined by interests
- Even parliaments helpless, *Re-feudalization* of PS
- Bureaucratic/economic interests such as: advertising, marketing and public relations, social engineering
- Here the whole enlightened project runs in danger
- Danger of culture industry, mass media without criticism
- De-politicisation of PS (like Horkheimer e.a.), but with qualifications

3. Theory of Comm. Reason I

- *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981):
- 2.1. Universal pragmatics & theory of argument
- Validity .... (truth, truthfulness, rightness) (intelligibility)
- Three worlds (objective, social, subjective)
- Lang. function (cognitive, interactive, expressive)
- Action theory (teleological, normative, dramaturgical) (communicative action)
- 2.2. Theory of social rationalization
- Distinction between *lifeworld / system*
- 2.3. Theory of modernity; 2.4. Ethics/politics/religion

3. Theory of Comm. Reason II

- 2.5. Discourse ethics
- Act through forceless force better argument/discourse
- 2.5.1. Critical way of approaching practical questions through rational discourse and consensus
- 2.5.2. Four requirements for a DE: a) Deontological ethics, not teleological; b) is cognitivist, thus similar to science; c) formal ethics rather than substantive; d) Universal ethics against ethnocentrism
- 2.5.3. Rational consensus implicit. Norms right/wrong
- Discourse principle (D) universalization principle (U)
- 2.5.4. Pragmatic, ethical, and moral questions

4. Recent work on the public sphere I

- 4.1. Three normative models of democracy
- a) liberal; b) republican; c) deliberative
- Delib. model for epistem. function of discourse, rather than rational choice (liberal) or pol. ethos (republican)
- Delib. pol. about dem. process: a) publicity/ transparency for delib.; b) inclusion/equal opportunity for particip.; c) justified presumption for reasonable outcomes
- H. considers 3 case studies truth-tracking potential pol.d.
- From group to mass media: a) Lack of face-to-face communication; b) lack of a speaker/addressee; c) Media's selectivity and shaping of messages; d) the political and social power of agendas

4. Recent work on the public sphere II

- 4.2. The structure of mass-communication and the formation of considered public opinions
- Centre (strong publics) vs periphery (weak publics)
- Centre: parliaments, courts, admin. Agencies & gov.
- Public opinion between these actors
- How now *considered* public opinion
- Political system must have an open flank to the civil society if it wants to retain its legitimacy
- Not enough that media professionals report on issues, but necessary to provide space to (rationally) deliberate / argue about them for *considered public opinions*

4. Recent work on the public sphere III

- 4.3. Pathologies of political communication
- Two requirements for deliber. politics under threat are:
- 4.3.1. Independence of a self-regulated media system
- Incomplete different. of media syst. from environments
- Examples in Italy, USA; specialized interest groups
- 4.3.2. Right kind of relationship between self-regulated media system and civil society
- Soc. deprivation/cultural exclusion of citizens lead to selective access to/and uneven particip. in med. comm.
- The colonialization of the public sphere by market imperatives, lead to a peculiar paralysis of civil society

5. Critical conclusion I

- 5.1. First liberal, system and Marxist critiques in Germ.
- 5.2. Reason in the public sphere
- Movement away from historical-normative position to normative one. Critical-hermeneutical model of P.S.?
- 5.3. Idealization of the Publ. Sphere (Thomassen 2010)
- Position of women in public sphere and public/private
- Only one public sphere not many (as he later accepts)
- 5.4. H's pessimism about contemporary P. Sph.
- Influence of Hork./Adorno, let him miss potential P. Sph.
- No discussion of social movements, weak/strong publics

5. Critical conclusion II

- 5.5. Public sphere and multilingualism and multicultural societies?
- 5.6. Public Sphere in Practice: Students
- Here about voice for students, but not fetishism of action
- Actionism without publ. deliberation leads to irrationalism
- Rules and debates about it. Demonstrate non-violent
- Learn through trial and error

5. Sources

- Duvenage 2007
- Thomassen 2010
- And others …