

Habermas was critical of the way the permeation of the social sciences by positivism which (among other things) suggested objective knowledge could be (in fact must be) created without any 'interest' – knowledge for knowledge's sake – and that this meant an absolute separation of 'fact' from 'value' and the dispensing of value as useless to scientific approaches.

Along with this he recognized that scientific approaches had become disengaged from philosophy. Philosophy was for the sake of striving to better humanity – towards discovering an "ideal world structure." While 'fact' was indeed separated from 'value' in philosophy it was for the sake of clarifying the connection between the two (not dispensing with one). Where 'value freedom' (the elimination of value considerations) is promoted in particular scientific approaches, then philosophy is undermined.

What is especially illuminating, I think, is the distinction Habermas draws between 3 forms of 'human interests' arguing that these interests are "knowledge-constitutive." Science he suggests deludes itself when it claims a stance of pure theory, it does not escape but rather conceals its interests ... "the ontological illusion of pure theory behind which knowledge constitutive interests become invisible." ***(These interests quite differently orient research practice, methods, and how the validity or quality of research is judged).***

The three knowledge-constitutive interests are oriented toward:

- 1) **TECHNICAL CONTROL: is the one that dominates the natural sciences (as well as certain disciplines within the social sciences)** - An interest in prediction and control – identifying universal laws – has to do with the struggle for control over the natural world. Why? To increase our physical health and security. Certainly can see how this guides engineering, science, medicine. Prediction and explanation have a relationship of symmetry. (populist understanding of research, a lot of the common language that circulates about 'research' reflects this - people get stuck on this one form). ***The validity of theories is established in the ability to predict – ultimately related to the aim to control.***
- 2) **ESTABLISHING CONSENSUS:** Dealing with the realm of the transitory where the establishment of universal laws is neither possible nor apt. This involves interpretive work. Evidence of this particular interest in **public affairs, politics**. Labor negotiations, policy-making, community organizing. The need to establish intersubjective meaning in order to move forward. Problem is that this 'knowledge interest' is more about understanding than it is about evaluation. So we "risk replacing our own assumptions uncritically with those of our informants."
- 3) **CRITICAL (mode of inquiry):** more evaluative than 'establishing consensus' - A critical approach involves the work of distinguishing between universal laws of social action (*that which is natural, inevitable*) vs. "ideologically frozen relations that could be transformed." This is about the potential for knowledge to 'empower.' In other words, examining power structures - distinguishing between natural and unnatural constraints – aiming to set off a process of self-reflection within the group suffering from constraints so that they might seek transformation. Research is validated not by its capacity to predict, but where research subjects recognize the insights generated and perhaps even pursue actions/changes in light of them.

