ABSTRACT. Habermas' theory of practical rationality is a significant theoretical attempt to preserve both rationality and democracy at the level of political decision making that transcends both technocratic and decisionistic theories of rationality. Habermas' theory of rationality accords with his epistemological, sociological, psychological, and linguistic premises. His theory, however, overlooks the interactions between instrumental action and symbolic interaction, the relevance of professional knowledge of facts for the choice of ends, the conflict between the norms of efficiency and democracy, and the duality of subject and object in historical formation. The rational interest in reproduction of free communication, however, can be used to reformulate Habermas' theory of rationality.

The notion of rational action is a familiar concept in economics and sociological theory. Rational action is usually characterized by the choice of the most efficient means for the attainment of a given end.1 The immediate problem with this definition is that it leaves the question of the ends undecided and undefined. Consequently two types of rationality have been distinguished from one another. Instrumental rationality refers to the rationality of means, while practical rationality deals with the rationality of ends. With the exception of some hermeneutical-historicist writers,2 there is a general agreement on the part of theorists to define instrumental rationality on the basis of the logic of efficiency and the use of scientific knowledge. It is the question of practical rationality, however, which is subject to diverse interpretations and formulations. According to "decisionistic theory" practical issues are neither rational nor irrational.3 Instead they are merely "non-rational".4 For "technocratic theory", on the contrary, practical rationality is reduced to instrumental rationality.5 Habermas' theory of practical rationality is a significant attempt for a new synthesis of decisionistic and technocratic theories.6 In this paper I locate Habermas' theory of rationality within the context of his critical system and examine some of the limitations of his theory. The concluding section of the paper will try new lines of potential reformulation of the theory of practical rationality.

A. HABERMAS' CRITICAL CONSENSUS THEORY OF PRACTICAL RATIONALITY

Habermas' definition of practical rationality follows the Kantian theory of ethics and politics. For Kant, moral issues do not belong to the particularistic realm of sentiments. Instead, moral questions are subject to rational judgment. Contrary to the technocratic theorists, Kant's logic of practical rationality is not reducible to the logic of instrumental rationality. In Kantian philosophy this point is emphasized by a sharp distinction between "theoretical" and "practical" reason. While the former deals with the world of phenomena, the latter is applicable to the kingdom of ends and noumenal realm of things-in-themselves. Habermas' theory of rationality is a synthesis of decisionistic and technocratic theories. According to Habermas, when the choice of practical questions is involved, there can exist no expertise or professionalism. The rational choice of ends and values is achieved through democratic participation and voting by all the interested individual participants. Rational political choice is precisely the consensus-outcome of this democratic voting process. This consensus, however, is only a true consensus if there exists an "ideal speech situation", i.e., a situation in which all the political alternatives have equal chance to speak to the public. Public critical debate and free communication are the formal preconditions of practical rationality. In such a genuine democratic situation, consensual policies are rational political choices. This implies that there exist no possibilities of a priori definition or prediction of the rational practical alternatives independent from, and prior to, the debate and voting of the individual participants. Practical rationality is defined by Habermas in a methodological but not substantive manner.

B. RATIONALITY AND CRITIQUE IN HABERMASIAN CRITICAL THEORY

Habermas' theory of practical rationality is an appealing theoretical construct with strong humanitarian and democratic premises. My criticisms of Habermas' theory are not intended to challenge the humanistic and democratic elements of his theory. Instead, my critique is directed at the sociological and political feasibility of his vision of