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Social Evolution in Jürgen Habermas: Towards a Weak Anthropological Naturalism between Kant and Darwin

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Abstract

Issues concerning naturalism have increasingly become the subject of philosophical reflections involving ontological, epistemological, and even ethics affairs. The most popular topic for contemporary philosophy has been the relationship between ontological results of Darwinism and epistemology. Despite the varied circumstances of its establishment, naturalism almost always produces recommendations that reflect a worldview much “weaker” (as in the case of Habermas) than the strong one more common among scientism. There are good structural reasons for this difference. The aim of this paper is to elucidate some of distinctive social features of Habermas’s conception of the human being and its implications in the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1982). Therefore, it is shown that his anthropology takes a naturalistic and Darwinist perspective in the weak naturalism perspective. In the first part, Darwin’s legacy is analysed as a research program, and Habermas’s studies on biological anthropology are compared with the latest research in genetics and palaeontology. In the second part, we will show Habermas’s proposal to confront an epistemological dualism through a weak non-reductionist naturalism as a critique of modern metaphysics, which structures a new pragmatic realism.

KEYWORDS

anthropology, Darwin, Habermas, Kant, naturalism, realism

1 | INTRODUCTION

In *Lectures on Logic*, Immanuel Kant points out that every philosophical undertaking can be distilled to the following questions: what can I know? what ought I to do? what may I hope? —

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and finally — what is man? Fundamentally, however, we can reduce all of this to anthropology because the first three questions relate to the last one (Kant, 1992, p. 538).

Is true thatHistorically, it is true that biology was present in anthropological, ethical, and political thought. According to Dryzek and Schlosberg, most authors such as Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Burke, Malthus, or Hegel used biology mostly as metaphor, and only in the wake of Darwin's voyages on the Beagle can we can speak of a distinctive biological approach that merits description "as a true research program" (Dryzek & Schlosberg, 1995, p. 123). Early in the nineteenth century, Darwin introduced a new philosophical conception on the nature of species previously unreleased in Platonic, Aristotelian, or Lamarckian ideas. His theoretical and empirical investigations presented an alternative philosophical theory about biological evolution in the Earth as well as one about the process of descent of living beings from a common ancestor (fossil record and tree of life), thanks to the theory of descent with modification (the theory that explains that species originated from other species). At the same time, Darwin presented a theory that would explain how this evolution has taken place: the theory of evolution by natural selection (cf. Darwin, 2008). This theory, reinforced in modern synthetic theory of evolution (synthesis between theory of natural selection and genetics), would currently include disciplines such as palaeontology, systematics, morphology, physiology, ecology, ethology, or molecular biology (cf. Hey et al., 2005).

An evolutionary approach about human nature is present in the philosophy of Jürgen Habermas. What is, according to Habermas, the role of Homo sapiens in the evolutionary history of life? First, we will discuss Habermas's references to anthropology and Darwin's theory which, we defend, can only be taken seriously today in relationship with the last advances in biology, genetics, and palaeontology, as Habermas has pointed out in various works. Second, we will consider an argument invoked by Habermas about the idea of a weak naturalism between Kant and Darwin — and its relationships with epistemic realism as a critique of modern metaphysics. These ontological and epistemic conclusions help us to position Habermas in the current debate.

The aim of this paper is to elucidate Habermas's position on naturalism beyond idealism and materialist scientism. We will extensively draw upon the whole body of Habermas's work, much of which is sadly neglected in discussions of *The Theory of Communicative Action*(1982), although it illuminates many of the issues discussed there. We hope that this paper provides a convincing argument of how communicative action is possible thanks to an ontogenetic (and phylogenetic) theory of action.

2 | FROM ANTHROPOLOGY TO A THEORY OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION

2.1 | Darwin's theory of evolution as a research program

In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas emphasises that the first generation of critical theory is characterised by strong opposition to scientific thought, pragmatism, and analytical philosophy. Authors like Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse take those general tendencies that "the rationalized world contracts to a 'false totality' (Habermas, 1984, p. 368)." According to Martin Jay, Horkheimer and Adorno made this clear in several critiques of the strongly entrenched pragmatism, as well as empiriocriticism, that the authors encountered in America (Jay, 1996, p. 83). Both renounced to work in this line of analytical sensitivity and defended a philosophy of history (between Hegel and Marx), with the accumulation of speculative assumptions that entails. John Dryzek points out that the founding period of critical theory turns to a dark methodology, speculative, and unscientific that "is often dismissed (inasmuch as it is ever contemplated at all) by empirically inclined social scientists" (Dryzek, 1995a, p. 7). It is true that the sciences are increasingly interconnected with the development of productivity by way of technical progress; however, technical progress is not the only branch of science in the line of

instrumental rationality defenders from Descartes and Bacon's scientific method. This is what distinguishes the Newtonian science from the second group of considerations: Darwinian science and contemporary systems theory (as Habermas, 1984 puts it). The latter do invite us to see the science as "an organism, population, or system [that] maintains itself through demarcation from and adaptation to a changeable, hypercomplex environment" (Habermas, 1984, p. 388). Also, the classical philosophical tradition, insofar that it suggests the possibility of a worldview, has become questionable:

Philosophy can no longer refer to the whole of the world, of nature, of history, of society, in the sense of a totalizing knowledge. Theoretical surrogates for world-views have been devalued, not only by the factual advance of empirical science but even more by the reflective consciousness accompanying it. (Habermas, 1984, p. 1)

With this, a philosophical thought aimed at consciousness has withdrawn self-critically behind itself; it has become metaphilosophy (Dryzek, 1990a; Habermas, 1984; Rorty, 1979). In this line, Habermas's philosophy approximates the reconstructive science associated with figures such as Noam Chomsky, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Jean Piaget (Habermas, 1975, 1984, 2007). He also talks about "the organic foundations of the lifeworld" in ecological terms that make us drastically aware of "the tangible destruction of the urban environment; the despoliation of the countryside through housing developments, industrialization, and pollution" (Habermas, 1987, p. 394). His references to ethological behaviour in chimpanzees (Habermas, 1998, pp. 311–312; 2017) do not mean that they have been careless; they should rather be understood as references to the behavioural manifestations or the use of propositions in which only the communicative use of propositionally differentiated language is proper to socio-cultural form of life in *Homo sapiens*.¹ These examples, among others, are supported by naturalistic explanations. Here the philosophical results could be indirectly verified by scientific knowledge, as Habermas defended in a several books.

There is every reason to affirm that Habermas accepted these naturalistic points in the past — specifically in his reconstruction of historical materialism (cf. Habermas, 1975, 1979) — as well as in later books until the recent ones (cf. Habermas, 2017). Philosophical anthropology is the common thread that unites a Habermas first interested in these topics as a student in Bonn with the last works of naturalistic roots. This interest was the reason why Habermas contributed an article on "Philosophical Anthropology" to Alwin Diemer and Ivo Frenzel's philosophical dictionary in 1958, arguing against Arnold Gehlen's anthropology that human's nature has become historical and is shaped by culture too (Habermas, 1958), a criticism that he continued to develop (Habermas, 1970). At the same time, when he took up Max Horkheimer's chair in Frankfurt, he offered different courses on the problems of a philosophical anthropology in the period of 1966–1967. The idea of the congruence between Kant's epistemology and Darwin's evolutionary theory was emerging, trying to explain the particular organic status of humans within the evolution of the species. This anthropological vision, given half a century ago when Habermas began his academic career, continues to this day.

For example, in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, drawing on Darwin, he talks about how the conditions of instrumental action "arose contingently in the natural evolution of the human species" (Habermas, 1971, p. 35). In this way, as he remarks, "Darwin synthesis through social labour presupposes the evolution of nature to the human stage." Thus, he affirms, that "without the particular physical equipment of the hominids, the 'process of material exchange' could never have assumed the form of labour at the human level. ... Humans begin to distinguish

¹In the discussion of communicative possibilities encompassing human and natural systems, John S. Dryzek has taken for granted the communicative competence of humans and sought analogues in nature in terms of non-linguistic communication (Dryzek, 1990b, 1995b). This precondition for communicative action can be applied in abiotic and biotic terms (Romero & Dryzek, 2021).

themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step that is conditioned by their bodily organization” (Habermas, 1971, p. 41 et seq.). The first state of affairs of which to take note is therefore the organisation of these hominids and the relation it sets up between them and the rest of nature, as he points out in “Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism” (Habermas, 1975, 1979).

This anthropological idea is present in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, when he affirms that “according to the basic assumptions of Darwinian biology and of contemporary systems theory, an organism, population, or system maintains itself through demarcation from and adaptation to a changeable, hypercomplex environment” (Habermas, 1984, p. 388). This coevolutionary perspective between human adaptation and nature has been further conceptualised by Habermas as embedding three integrated systems: physical, biological, and socio-cultural (1984, p. 250 et seq.), as he later will analyse on the relationships between the humans and the ecology of the ecosystems and the risks (Habermas, 1987, pp. 250–256, 394), in the main in light of the problems of “late capitalism” in the ecological and the anthropological balance (Habermas, 1992a, pp. 41–44). In others, Habermas specifies this methodological position as a “weak naturalism,” as we will see in the following pages (Habermas, 1992b, 2003a, 2003b, 2007, 2008). Finally, to explain the origin to moral consciousness with genetics (Piaget) and the theory of moral development (Kohlberg), as well as the origin of language drawing on Chomsky, Habermas defends this naturalistic vision in other works (Habermas, 1998, pp. 311–312; 2007, p. 33 et seq., p. 116 et seq.; 2017, p. 75 et seq.).

The relationship between nature, culture, language, and communicative action over the past several thousands of years are the specific traits of *Homo sapiens* (from hominization to humanization), and the culture is the essence of what *Homo* can produce through the use of tools and language (Habermas, 1975, 1979). In his work on knowledge and human interests (1971), he gave his “anthropological epistemology” its definitive shape in the line opened by Karl-Otto Apel of a transformation of philosophy (Apel, 1980). Both pointed towards a theory of epistemic interests that was supposed to return the hermeneutics to a metaphysically stern role. However, Habermas would later admit that the book’s attempt to derive epistemological interests from the conditions of the self-constitution of the human species was a dead end because the idea of the pragmatic presuppositions of action aimed at reaching mutual understanding independently of the transcendental conditions of knowledge according to the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 2003a, p. 6). But despite this epistemological issue, *Knowledge and Human Interests* answered the basic questions of theoretical philosophy in terms of a weak naturalism and a transcendental-pragmatic epistemological realism. The way was open to analyse in terms of communicative action and the “linguistic turn.”

As we can see, naturalism is a fact in Habermas from his first writings in the 1960s and 1970s of the twentieth century to the present day. This methodology, sometimes forgotten or omitted by his critics, is presented in the “internal logic” of his work in ontological and epistemological terms, as we point out. In this case, Habermas contents itself with the basic background assumption that the biological endowment and the socio-cultural way of life of *Homo sapiens* have an organic and biological origin and can in principle be explained in terms of evolutionary theory, drawing on Darwin. What does this mean? Before presenting the Habermasian theoretical position regarding the anthropology of *Homo sapiens* within the evolutionary scale and the philosophical consequences of naturalism that he defends since the 1960s and 1970s of the twentieth century, we present three theories that are at the basis of modern biology assumed indirectly by Habermas: cell theory, the theory of evolution by natural selection, and the chromosome theory of inheritance (cf. Cela-Conde & Ayala, 2007; Freeman et al., 2019). These three theories, respectively, address three questions to the knowledge of living beings: what are organisms made of? where do they come from? how is hereditary formation that is transmitted from one generation to the next? In summary, they lead us to understand that the cell is the basic structural unit of organisms; every cell comes from a previous cell; and the species are related by common ancestors that changed over time by natural selection.

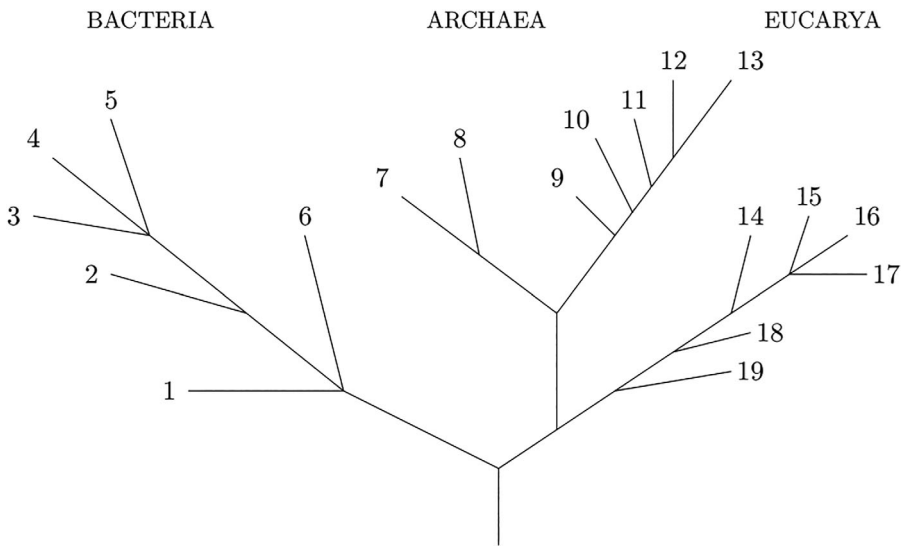


FIGURE 1 The tree of life

One of the fundamental characteristics of the theory of evolution is the process of divergence between species and the formation of new ones called speciation, leading to the idea that living beings descend from a common ancestor, as Habermas defends since the 1960s and 1970s of the twentieth century when he was already talking about Darwin and biological anthropology. Today, the evolution of all living organisms, or of a subset of them, can be represented as a tree drawing on Darwin, with branches that divide into two or more as time progresses, which represent the splitting of species (Darwin, 2008, p. 90). Such trees are called *phylogenies*. Their branches represent evolving lineages, some of which eventually die out, whereas others persist in themselves or in their derived lineages down to the present time. Evolutionary trees are hypotheses that seek to reconstruct the evolutionary history of different living beings.

Although Habermas does not speak of these trees in his works, even assuming these scientific results there exist several methods for constructing evolutionary trees today that help support his naturalistic view. Thanks to the advances of RNA sequences and other genetic data, phylogeny is easy to figure out.² The mechanisms to preserve and transmit hereditary instructions (evolutionary processes) depend on the replication of the genetic information encoded in the DNA molecules (deoxyribonucleic acid) found in the chromosomes of the organism.³ For example, in sexual reproduction in humans and other organisms, genes are randomly combined during reductional division (the first cell division in meiosis, the process by which germ cells are formed), resulting in an independent distribution of the hereditary characters that will constitute its genotype (set of genes in the chromosomes of an organism), as Habermas himself points out with biological terminology (see among others, Habermas, 2003b, p. 13).

These advances in molecular biology help divide the Darwin's tree not into plants and animals, or even prokaryotes and eukaryotes — depending on the cells — but into three main

²*Ribonucleic acid* (RNA) is a polymeric molecule essential in various biological roles in coding, decoding, regulation, and expression of genes. Cellular organisms use messenger RNA to convey genetic information using the nitrogenous bases of guanine (G), uracil (U), adenine (A), and cytosine (C), that directs synthesis of specific proteins (see Freeman et al., 2019).

³*Deoxyribonucleic acid* (DNA) is a molecule composed of two polynucleotide chains that coil around each other to form a double helix carrying genetic instructions for the development, functioning, growth, and reproduction of all known organisms (cf. Watson & Crick, 1953). Each nucleotide is composed of one of four nitrogen nucleobases as cytosine (C), guanine (G), adenine (A), or thymine (T), a sugar called *deoxyribose*, and a phosphate group. The nucleotides are joined to one another in a chain by covalent bonds. The sequence of these chemicals reactions determines the message carried by the DNA of the chromosomes (see Freeman et al., 2019).

groups or domains according to the classic division of Bacteria, Archaea, and Eucarya (cf. Woese et al., 1990), as illustrated in Figure 1.⁴

According to Cela-Conde and Ayala, different species may exhibit features that are similar in appearance, structure, or function (Cf. Cela-Conde & Ayala, 2007, p. 25). For example, the legs of dogs resemble the legs of leopards; bats and birds use wings for flying; and humans and chimpanzees have similar hands and faces, so that we should also take into consideration the genetic similarity between both species, as Habermas points out in several cases (Habermas, 1998, pp. 311–312; 2017, p. 75 et seq.). Darwin himself considered natural selection in terms of the differential survival and reproduction of individuals due to differences in phenotype (Darwin, 2008, p. 64). It is a key mechanism of evolution — the change in the heritable traits characteristic of a population over generations. More significant for Stephen Jay Gould was the influence of Darwin in terms of population dynamics that “has given us a new set of parameters for assessing adaptation” (Jay Gould, 1977, p. 290). Today, the genetic vision (cf. Ayala, 2005) describes naturally occurring genetic differences among individuals.

Although Habermas does not provide much information on the form that explanations take in terms of genetic mechanisms, he suggests that we should think of them as explanations in anthropological terms to explain the *Homo sapiens*’ form of life and its adaptation (Habermas, 1975, 1979, 2003a). This adaptation, let us not forget, responds to a changeable and hypercomplex environment as embedding three integrated systems: the physical, the biological, and the socio-cultural (Habermas, 1984, p. 250 et seq.). Each system, or structure, although it depends to exist on the elements that compose it, is not reducible to them because it acquires new properties that cannot be explained on the grounds of those simple parts of the element. The structure also becomes an element for a new structure. Self-assembly begins from the physical level to the point where structures acquire more complex functions and of a different order to give rise to a new biological level, and thus the continuum advances until it reaches the socio-cultural level (Habermas, 1979). Such a broader interpretation seems plausible, and if we interpret in this way, Habermas’s argument about social evolution still stands.

2.2 | The origin and evolution of *Homo sapiens*: Phylogenesis and social theory

The above reading on the relation between Darwinism, naturalism, genetics, and anthropology is confirmed by several passages in *Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism* and elsewhere in which Habermas discusses quality of naturalism (see, e.g., Habermas, 2003a, pp. 22–30). Already at the time of *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas proposes an alternative analysis beyond the first generation of the critical theory drawing on naturalism of Darwin and the Marx’s historical materialism (cf. Habermas, 1971, pp. 40–42), an idea that he defends once again in *Truth and Justification* (2003a, p. 22 et seq.). By the time of his reconstruction of historical materialism (Habermas, 1975) and the idea of history as evolution (Habermas, 1979), the claim is given an ontogenetic foundation between labour and language. Labour is only accessible in terms of “instrumental rationality,” whereas language is interpersonally accessible in terms of “communicative rationality,” as Habermas points out (cf. Habermas, 1975, 1979). This anthropological idea helps him to present the concepts of “instrumental rationality” and “communicative rationality” that he synthesises in “The Theory of Communicative Action” (Habermas, 1984, 1987). This anthropological and ontological legacy in his communicative and social theory is indebted to the first papers, among others.

⁴Numbers indicate the different kingdoms within the domains. For example, 14 corresponds to the kingdom of the *Animalia* or 16 to the kingdom of the *Plantae* (the common kingdoms).

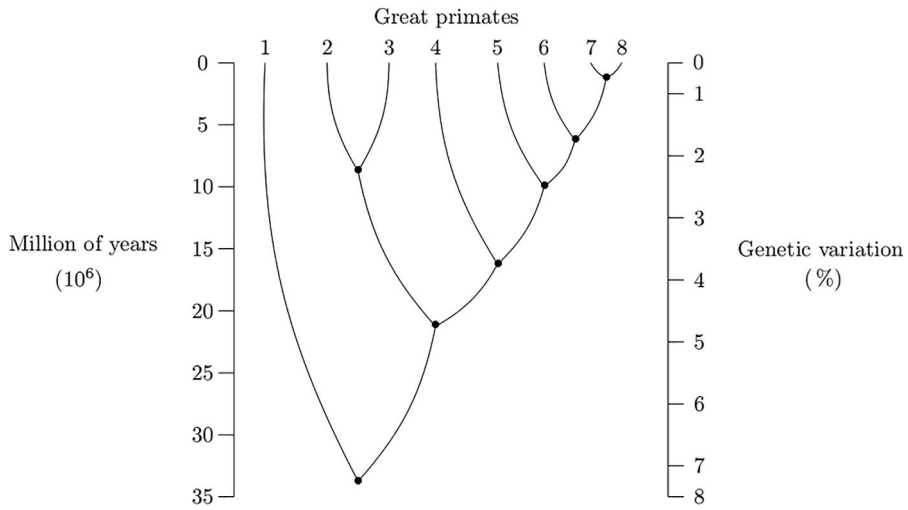


FIGURE 2 Primate phylogenetic relationships

The notion of social interaction increasingly tended to give way to that of communication, one of the most salient practices in human history. If that is the case, classic Marxism has an epistemological problem that Habermasian anthropology does not. According to Perry Anderson, the starting point of Habermas's distinctive position was the argument that "whereas hominids practised labour with tools," revealing it as a pre-human activity, "Homo sapiens as a species was characterized by the innovation on language and the family" (Anderson, 1984, p. 61). Here, a significant question is whether this Marxian concept of social labour sufficiently determines the form or reproduction of human life. In his review of Marx's notion of labour, he confirms that production is not merely the instrumental actions of a single individual but more the cooperation of several individuals in which communication is also presupposed. Labour and language extend too deeply into the scale of evolution. This is the period of hominization, the pre-humanization.

If we consider this in the light of recent anthropological findings, it appears that the concept of social labor extends too deeply into the scale of evolution: not only Homo sapiens, but even the hominids are distinguished from other primates in that they reproduce themselves through social labor and develop an economy. This is the period of hominization: beginning with a common ancestor for both chimpanzee and man, and reaching over Homo erectus to Homo sapiens. (Habermas, 1975, p. 288)

It seems, then, that we can refer to the reproduction of human life in Homo sapiens in labour and language terms drawing on Habermas (*instrumental* and *communicative action*, respectively). According to the author, this process has lasted several million years, and it represents an important advance to knowledge of primates and great apes (even humans). Thanks to phylogenetic advances, especially from molecular technologies that allow the complete DNA sequencing of many species, Habermas's hypothesis from the 1960s and 1970s on the biological relationship between primates is confirmed. We see that approximately 7 million years ago, chimpanzees, bonobos, and the genus Homo had a common ancestor according to the phylogenesis of the great primates, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Dating analyses were run using sequencing by hybridization DNA–DNA, as selected by the preliminary analyses described since 1984 to sort the primates according to temporal distance

(millions of years) and genetic variation (%) in: Old World monkey (1), Siamang gibbon (2), common gibbon (3), orangutan (4), gorilla (5), Homo (6), bonobo (7), and chimpanzee (8) (Prüfer et al., 2012; Sibley & Ahlquist, 1984; The Chimpanzee Sequencing and Analysis Consortium, 2005).

Palaeontology indicates that morphological and the common features evidence, as well as fossil record, must be added genetic reconstruction to synthesise three ideas about three closely related species: Homo, bonobo, and chimpanzee. These ideas are:

1. Homo's DNA was separated from bonobos and chimpanzees between 5 and 7 million years ago. Bonobos and chimpanzees about 2 million years ago,
2. The three species have 25,000 identical genes, and
3. Bonobos and chimpanzees share 99.6% of their DNA, as well as 98.7% with the genus Homo.

Scientists are currently hard and fast at work seeking to ascertain the features of our genetic code that make us different from, as well as very similar to, our simian relatives. Further, we now know that different conjectures were correct about the fundamental anatomical events in human origins, namely the evolution of bipedalism, technical skills, cranial capacity, and reduction in canines (see, e.g., Cela-Conde & Ayala, 2007). These anatomical events can be interpreted as a closed feedback loop in hominization where, under the influence of culture, the organism itself changes within certain limits (Habermas, 1975, p. 288 et seq.).

For example, the reduction in canine size was a consequence of the use of weapons, but that reduction facilitated brain size through the restructuring of the cranium; further, mental development allowed devising, making, and using better weapons. Brain increases improved bipedal balance and permitted the development of language and the symbolic competence so important in Habermas following Peirce and Mead, among others. Language facilitated the transmission of culture and collective hunting using meat as food allowed further reductions in dentition size. This is a feedback model: each factor depends on the others and, at the same time, promotes them. The process involves a functional and anatomical integration in which several coordinated factors participate (Habermas, 1975; Cela-Conde & Ayala, 2007, p. 85). Among them, the language stands out as creating a shared world through narratives that inhabit our minds. Arguably, the point that Habermas and modern evolutionary theory converges at the following character trait: Homo sapiens's ability to language fashioned the mind, not the other way around. In this case, when Homo sapiens emits a "speech act," he is saying something about the world to others, either about the objective world, the social world, or the subjective or mental world (Habermas, 1984, p. 137).

This conjunction of bipedalism, technical skills, cranial capacity, and reduction in canines led Homo to adapt to the environment from Homo habilis (2.5 million years old) to Homo sapiens (0.2 million years old) according to paleontological evidence. Habermas points out that the biological determines the cultural in order of appearance (physical, biological, socio-cultural, according to his vision), but bio-cultural synthesis represents a new form of integration unprecedented in the history of life, suitable for distinguishing the mode of life of the hominids from that of the primates. Habermas summarises anthropological position as follows:

Here, among the hominids, the adult men form hunting groups which (a) dispose of weapons and tools (technology), (b) cooperate through a division of labour (cooperative organization), and (c) collectively distribute the prey (rules of distribution). (Habermas, 1975, p. 288)

The emergence of these acquisitions contributed to a re-socialisation of hominids; that is, while they not only have a complex technique both for the labour and for getting dressed, they accumulate the dead intentionally, by communicating with an articulated language, or by the present forms of primitive art. According to Habermas, only in the hominids is the primitive social structure that emerged in the order of vertebrates transcended. They break up that one-dimensional status order in which each animal has a single status in the hierarchy showing, according to ethological studies, aggressive relationships between males, sexual relationships between males and females, and social relationships between adults and youth (cf. Habermas, 1975). It seems, then, that we can refer to the reproduction of human life in *Homo sapiens* only when the labour is supplemented by kinship and language structures. Among the primates, this status system is based on a certain kind of symbolic interaction drawing on Mead (1992), but also the role system of kinship presupposes a coordinated and structured language constituting the specific domain of communicative activity as opposed to the instrumental activity of material production (cf. Habermas, 1975, 1984).

The fruition of this idea makes it clear that Marx's theory of reproduction of life is insufficient to understand the history as an evolution of societal forms (see, e.g., Habermas, 1975 and Anderson, 1984, pp. 60–64). It is true that Marx (1990) is convinced that the economic mode of the reproduction of life is specific to the human stage of development, but this first mode of reproduction is followed by a second mode of reproduction marked by language.

Again, it is fairly obvious that Habermas in many ways accepts these naturalistic points in an ontological postmetaphysical turn, thanks to language. This turn is relevant to his communicative theory, thanks to two authors: the American pragmatist Georg H. Mead in the first place, as well as, the evolutionary psychologist Michael Tomasello more recently. In his review of Mead's investigations, he confirms the role of communication in the hominization process to shape conventional language from a previous stay — the conventional origin of language (Habermas, 1975, 2008, 2017). Tomasello's advances in cerebral embryogenesis, where language is rooted in a previous pre-linguistic structure also present in primates, help Habermas to structure his communicative theory: the natural origin of language.⁵ He agrees with Tomasello that shared knowledge about objects arises out of the "we" perspective of intersubjective relations on the basis of a shared practical knowledge that is sedimented in symbolic systems (Habermas, 2008, 2013, 2017).

Michael Tomasello highlights the social-cognitive capacity (already emphasized by G. H. Mead) to perceive and understand members of the same species as intentionally acting beings achievement that separates *Homo sapiens* from its closest relatives and makes it capable of cultural development. (Habermas, 2008, p. 170-171)

And in his speech on Michael Tomasello on the occasion of the Hegel Prize in 2009, Habermas said: "What distinguishes man from the apes is a kind of communication which enables the intersubjective bundling of cognitive resources and their reworking, as well as their transmission across generations" (2013, p. 167). This pre-linguistic base (phylogenetic and ontogenetic) continues operating after the conventional language has been established. This means that Habermas's communicative theory is finally structured between a natural origin and a conventional (cultural) origin of language despite the evolutionary novelty of language in humans compared to other primates. The question of what differentiates humans from other animals, specifically *Homo sapiens* from other primates, is not proposed from the perspective of a frontier between the superior and the inferior — a position discarded from naturalism and genetic results following Figure 2 — but from the evolutionary explanation of the forms of sociocultural life in

⁵Hermann, Call, Hernández-Loreda, Hare and Tomasello show how chimpanzees, orangutans, and two-year-old children present the same cognitive abilities (see, e.g., Hermann et al., 2007).

which language is unique in humans (the language, not communication, according to Dryzek, 1990b; Romero and Dryzek, 2021).

In light of the remarks above, the argument made by Habermas can now be put in the following form (which, as far as we can see, he would accept): socio-evolutionary learning processes also respond to a social form of interaction as a self-reflection of consciousness of a genetic theory of action that responds to a specific level of physical, biological, and socio-cultural complexity (Habermas, 1975, 1979). This theory can be understood from:

1. The general structures of action (which underlie the normal situation) and the nuclear structures (which enable consensual conflict resolution), both structured by moral conscience (Piaget and Kohlberg),
2. The structures of the images of the world determining morality and law, and
3. The structures of institutionalized law and binding moral ideas.

According to Habermas, this division is present in Neolithic societies, archaic civilizations, developed premodern civilizations, and modernity, with their respective differences (transition from the Palaeolithic to the Neolithic and the appearance of the first cities and states) (cf. Habermas, 1975, 1979). These levels of social integration are present in socio-evolutionary learning processes in the sphere of moral–practical consciousness and in the law (institutional system, world view, moral beliefs from the legal system). For example, in Neolithic societies, the resolution of conflicts is according to pre-conventional criteria: assessment of the consequences of action; restitution of the former status quo, that is, compensation for damages caused (feuding law, court of arbitration); and in premodern civilizations from the standpoint of a developed, conventional morality, a system of jurisdiction to which the ruler is subject on principle, punishment for deviance from traditionally justified norms, and so forth.

Habermas admits the existence of organic-cultural learning processes not only in the dimension of technically valuable knowledge (rational action in its instrumental modality) but also from practical–moral consciousness (symbolically mediated interaction in its communicative modality). Furthermore, Habermas proposes an alternative to Luhmann’s weak explanation of evolutionary theory because it cannot answer genetic questions (Habermas, 1979, p. 23 et seq.). In this way, Habermas clarifies the relationships between evolutionary theory and history, drawing on naturalistic explanations, and proposes an alternative concept to Luhmann’s theory of evolution (Habermas, 1975, 1979). Now, what ontological, epistemological, and deontological implications does this vision have? In the next section, we will analyse the theoretical consequences of adopting a type of naturalism within the current debate, positioning Habermas in this regard.

3 | WEAK NATURALISM BETWEEN KANT AND DARWIN

3.1 | Forms of naturalism and the criticism of modern metaphysics

In the present debate, we will deal with Habermas’s original naturalism, which is covered in his anthropological theory, although we must first try to place it briefly in the current debate on this matter. Above all, it must be pointed out that there is no single form of naturalism: today, we envisage a position that consists in making all the natural life dimensions in which human life stands out significantly matching to the discoveries of the experimental sciences so that we are directed by the empiricist principle of knowing. A naturalist will show a subversion of the cognitive–theoretical principle by the empirical–practical one, adopting a descriptive scientific commitment instead of a normative one as well as putting in the foreground what the *Naturwissenschaften* study about this is a philosophical term in German the natural realm.

From a general naturalism, there would be an ontological assumption that would be broken down into a *strong* (or radical) naturalism and a *weak* (or moderate) naturalism that would more closely correspond to procedural skills. In the strong specification, one can notice a position on what could be underlined ultimately *as* natural and what could not in that sense, taking to the extreme the identification — very typical in the inherited and physicalist conception of science — of the mental states with those more elementary physical elements — or even by interpreting these states as arising from the physical although inexplicable once given (epiphenomenalism). Here, metaphysics is still in the pocket because it is not incoherent to indicate that this naturalism could serve as a loyal ally of scientism: the position on what *is* and what *is not* natural occurs within the human cultural enterprise of the empirical and quantitative division of sciences. In the second specification, also called *weak naturalism*, what set trends is not just the *ordo essendi* but the methodological research in line with the inherent provisional natural of science.⁶ One can wonder if this proposal is in accordance with the position of Ronald N. Giere (2006, 2007), which has been supporting a consideration of reality as a perspectival research shaped by evolution theory and the structural construction of theories.

For his part, Habermas's weak naturalism, which is earlier in its basic formulation than the above attempts, cannot be fully understood without considering his critique of Western metaphysics. Rather, it consists of a naturalism that explains the influence and the contemporary breach of such metaphysics. It is not possible to directly face the problem from the rivalry between ontological and methodological levels. Realising that normativity of human knowledge and action is believed to be opportune in major philosophical contemporary movements (analytical philosophy, phenomenology, Marxism, and structuralism), the German thinker have stirred up their very foundations of modernity, clearly overstepping its bounds. Habermas's post-metaphysical account takes on prominence in the linguistic-pragmatic turn, which disrupts a classical solipsistic reason that is invested, from here on out, with the character of *situatedness*.

Hence, the logocentric claim of modernity is called into question by subverting the primacy of theory, which has been predominate in the socio-political systems of the early twentieth century. This kind of naturalism can be glimpsed in the most recent historical forms that are pressing the phenomenological movement to move away from metaphysical control. Indeed, weak naturalism can be peeked at a self-multiplied and pluralized phenomenology in which subjectivity is engaged in finitude, temporality, and historicity of human life.

3.2 | An embodied/embedded naturalism

Weak naturalism, therefore, matches with Habermas's (1992b, p. 7) "anthropologically oriented phenomenology", in which the "transcendental consciousness concretizes itself in the practices of the lifeworld." A phenomenology in this other conjuncture can be distinguished as naturalistic under a weak heading because it "takes on flesh and blood in historical embodiments" (Habermas, 1992b, p. 7). This does not mean, thereby, to give up the basic intuition to reach aspects of truth with certainty and evidence. It is true that Husserlian phenomenology was performed as a critical reformulation — at its roots — of Kantian apriorical transcendentalism. In fact, Habermas acclaims a new anthropological phenomenology as necessarily naturalistic in the post-metaphysical era. It is not enough with the self-intentional correlates of a transcendental consciousness, but we should enhance this with "action, language, and the body" (Habermas, 1992b, p. 7).

⁶For any aspect of the world, seek a naturalistic rather than a super naturalistic explanation. It is a virtue of a methodological stance that its adoption does not even seem to require an a priori justification. Commitment to the method can be somewhat justified by appeal to past successes at finding naturalistic explanations" (Giere, 2007, p. 23).

In this sense, it is noteworthy, as we have already seen, that this naturalism takes back the embodied and pragmatic basis to a solipsistic metaphysics of the primacy of theoretical reason. Should we then suggest that the German thinker proposes to us an anthropological social applicability of a renewed post-metaphysical phenomenology? In any case, what he does is about neither an abstract nor a meaningless effort. Hence, it is highly advisable that phenomenology and anthropology do not clash when having significant naturalistic clues for their socialised integration. Weak, profoundly post-metaphysical naturalism can help in “so many attempts to re-embed an abstractly exalted reason in its contexts and to situate it in its proper domains of operation” (Habermas, 1992b, p. 7). We then can presume that in this naturalistic procedure we are trying to *normalise* the consideration of our personal and common reason as afforded in “the interrelationships that have been established in the name of a philosophy of praxis between phenomenology and Marxism” (Habermas, 1992b, p. 8).

By saying that something natural coincides with normality, we are referring to everyday life in a similar way that John Worrall underlined the aspiration of a reason that distinguishes beforehand what is normal from what is not. Worrall wanted to portray the more general naturalistic position in which naturalists defend “the view that human beings are normal inhabitants of the world” (Worrall, 1999, p. 340). This implies that a weak naturalist, although not adopting a direct position on being — in contrast to the strong ontological version — will avoid “theories that attribute any special status to human minds ... [and does] not place minds outside the natural realm” (Worrall, 1999, p. 340). This claim has a big effect on naturalised epistemology. *Nihil in mente quod prius non fuerit in sensu* (there is nothing in the mind that is not first in sensation) was the scholastic slogan that Quine intended for the different types of naturalism. Nothing is given in the mind without first having passed through the senses, which should not deviate in the naturalistic fallacy by which the ontological is enclosed in the experimental, subordinating in such a way the unconditional conditions of the transcendental to the empirical ones.⁷ Therefore, naturalism in its different forms endorses the aforementioned medieval adage by which our contemporaries seek to overcome the transcendental–empirical gap that has awakened the current debate about the mind–body problem.

In continuity with the description of Habermas’s weak naturalism, we are urged to point out that, unlike the nineteenth-century philosophical romanticism and later Heideggerian tenets, we are not “free from the justificatory burdens of rational speech and discursive thought,” because we are not allowed “to have privileged access to the truth” (Habermas, 2003a, p. 25). This was traditionally due to the linkage between the strong concept of theory and the idea of a proficient thinking in encompassing the whole. Here the reader may appreciate that Habermas’s version is unintelligible without previously understanding how he rips into modern *logocentrism*, proposing to researchers a relevant promotion of a new-fangled post-metaphysical naturalism. Why do we affirm this? Modern metaphysics has been becoming rigid in support of a totalizing reason, both in the magnification of its theoretical and argumentative constructs and in defending a privileged access to its *extraordinary* nature and operations.

In contrast, naturalists advocate to make ordinary what rationalist metaphysicians have shortened in a pure reason separated from empirical sciences: the goal of a general naturalist will be then to consider the extraordinary quality of what occurs as if it were ordinary by providing scientific rigour and empirical meticulousness to speculative reason. According to Habermas, phenomenology is not the only lucky winner of the prerogatives of this reason but also the Wittgenstein analytical philosophy of linguistic games; Marxism (and left Hegelianism) as a theory that totalizes all the socio-political facts; and structuralism, which uncovers the supra-individual rules of human behaviour. However, Habermas, as a good eclectic philosopher, draws from these systems in order to articulate his personal criticism of Western metaphysics.

⁷According to this author, “[T]he most notable norm of naturalised epistemology actually coincides with that of traditional epistemology. It is simply the watchword of empiricism: nihil in mente quod non prius in sensu” (Quine, 1990, p. 19).

3.3 | Between thinking and matter: Towards a new anthropological naturalism

As Husserl accomplished in phenomenology, the opposition between metaphysics and naturalism has been accentuated by Henrich (1986) polemicizing on Habermas personal naturalism. In contrast, Habermas suggests that is intellectually healthier to think that there may be a legitimate potential between transcendental philosophy and life sciences, by which we can ponder “transcendental consciousness as ‘embodied’ in language, action, or the body, and to ‘situate’ reason in society and history” (Habermas, 1992b, p. 19). But this history, which lies behind the Kantian inflation and independence of the *transzendente Apperzeption*, should also make part of the evolutionary history of the *phylum*, namely of the species in terms of adaptation and natural selection. An evolutionary conception of history and the communicative action, as mutually specified, leads us to reject ontological dualism between an a priori world of thinking and the dynamic world of matter.

Unlike the duplication of the study of the natural, as we still discover in Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), into one “based on grounds of experience (which) can be called *empirical*; (and another one) insofar as it sets forth its teachings simply from a priori principles [which] can be called pure philosophy,” moral should be thought just as a “material philosophy” as contrasting to a purely “formal philosophy” (Kant, 2006, p. 1). The categorical imperative, which especially sets the norms of moral action excels with an extrinsic philosophical doctrine with respect to a unitary conception of human nature in which Kant is caught between a form of naturalism and a form of idealism.

Consequently, it is not very difficult to recognise in this thinker that “the dualism of the two worlds did not prevent Kant from establishing a coherent image of the world” (Andaluz Romanillos, 2015, p. 136) precisely regarding the possibility, which can be found in the *Critique of Judgement*, of a *final end* of the existence of the world as *extrinsically* congruent to a human being whose anthropological constitution is currently preferred to be understood as both transcendental and empirical. Habermas’s reflection on human nature trials not only his own deontological moral philosophy, which has many resemblances in common with Kant’s extrinsic formal doctrines, but more precisely his own social evolution theory. How the defiance is overcome? Thanks to the socialisation of communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1987), the *monological* morality, which is often attributed to a formalist Kant, profoundly transforms into a *dialogical* morality grounded in an embodied/embedded and innerworldly rationality: what matters now is not the instrumental usage of a solipsistic reason but a communicative and transdisciplinary pragmatic practice of reason. Therefore, Habermas do not undermine but threatens human morality through an original non-reductionist naturalism contended, as we are showing, in his social evolution theory.

Particularly from *The Theory of Communicative Action*, and before that time as well, Habermas saw the necessity of engaging himself in a thoughtful dialogue that transmutes the disagreement, and even the antagonism between logocentrism and biocentrism. In social human evolution, it is not monologue but dialogue and cooperation between different members of the species in their environment that serves as the wide-ranging development of their own intelligence and moral sense. If our natural evolution as *Sapiens*, and the rest of preceding species, had been assembled based solely on a monologue removed from the common interests of the group, a widespread error or faulty moral action would have endangered the survival of our species. For Habermas, thinking social evolution serves as a linking theoretical framework for an integration of epistemology and morality, as in Cusas’s *coincidentia oppositorum* for supporting a major consideration of reality.

Later, in *Truth and Justification*, neither the Enlightenment aporetic dualism nor the *idealistic fallacy*, which Habermas imputes to Heidegger, is fully satisfactory given that, as it is conceived, “the transcendental difference between the world and what is innerworldly as an ontological difference between Being and beings” makes “the prevailing understanding of Being dependent on the a priori meaning of a given form of linguistic world disclosure” (Habermas, 2003a, p. 25). That is

why this author endorses what he calls *weak or soft* naturalism (cf. Habermas, 2008, p. 153), which comes between two contraposed positions.

On the one hand, Habermas criticises *hard or strong naturalists* wanting to *naturalise* the mind, will, freedom — and even morality — on the basis of a *biosociologist* point of view in which social human action is interpreted as ensuing from an extrapolated theory of the biological systems and its elemental material changes (reductionist approach). These are those working especially in social systems theory (i.e., Niklas Luhmann), along with the neurobiological and neuroscientific fields framed in a confrontational neurophilosophy (i.e., Paul and Patricia Churchland). In these positions, we are convened to think that human mind is nothing ontologically different but is a set of biochemical reactions arising from the brain such that our action in society coincides with the causal contingency of the “the processes of complexity-reduction” (Habermas, 1979, p. 24) pertaining to biosocial systems, merely regarded as a boundary between them and its environment and based on the most rudimentary material components (Luhmann, 1976, 1993). Critics distinguish this version of reductionist in Luhmann’s works even in what is related to the moral realm:

Luhmann took the reduction of complexity to be the main function of social systems, of which he distinguished several types. A key type of social systems is function systems, such as politics, economy, law, and science, whose coexistence constitutes the regime of functional differentiation as a key feature of modernity (...). implication of this systems-theoretic vision is that the task of social integration no longer falls on morality but is instead assumed by function systems structurally coupled to each other. Consequently, Luhmann (1993, p. 368 et seq.) believed that moral communication in the modern society tends to be dysfunctional and conflict-provoking and suggested to place the task of moral theory in “warning against morality.” (Luhmann, 1993, p. 90) (Valentinov & Pies, 2017, pp. 632–633)

Nevertheless, and questioning Luhmann’s assimilation of complexity-reduction as pertinent to the most complex levels of human culture, we absolutely do not exclude that Habermas mainly agrees at least with one of the most significant neurophilosophical assumptions, under which, even in moral action (against Luhmann), “it is most unlikely that we can devise an adequate theory of the mind-brain without knowing in great detail about the structure and organization of nervous systems” (Churchland, 1986, p. 482). In contrast, communicative action and its moral character is irreducible just to one factor or component of its long and intricate evolution across species. Habermas is not at all on the sidelines of this objective but provides its own weak theoretical framework for thinking the human being. On the other hand, we find idealists, or identity thinkers, who spouse philosophical positions that are dramatically decoupled from science (Heidegger and Heinrich, as we have noticed). Let us read again Heidegger’s *What Is Called Thinking?*, which was published in Heidegger, 1954, in order to substantiate our explanation with a minimum of acceptance:

Science does not think. This is a shocking statement. Let the statement be shocking, even though we immediately add the supplementary statement that nonetheless science always and in its own fashion has to do with thinking. [T]here is no bridge here, only the leap. (Heidegger, 1968, p. 8)

Without building bridges between different disciplines but raising rigid walls, only an isolated metaphysical philosophy can constitute the advantaged way to properly think about science. On the opposite side of what we have quoted in Heidegger, Habermas, as we have been examining in *History and Evolution* (1979), wants to weave a path between these two extremes subscribing a *non-reductionist naturalism* which does justice to dialogical rationality depending

on the type of naturalism the author adopts. Rather, science not only helps us to think with resolution nature but to think better and deeply our complex communicative action, although not doing so just in a one-sided way. For this purpose, a new Darwinian focus would be very useful for the detailed commitments of a weak naturalism of the human. Darwinian Habermas, not being a dogmatic reductionist, places himself in the antipodes of the two extremes that we have stated:

On this assumption, the continuity of a natural history that we can conceive at least on an analogy with Darwinian evolution, though we cannot form a theoretically satisfying concept of it, can ensure the unity of a universe to which human beings belong as natural creatures. This enables us to bridge the epistemic gap between nature as objectified by the natural sciences and a culture that we always already intuitively understand because it is intersubjectively shared. (Habermas, 2008, p. 166 et seq.)

Habermas not only polemizes against post-modernism, as is often said, but rather is committed to the natural sciences by assuming a new anthropological theory from a revisited Darwinian approach. According to his weak naturalism, human being and its complex communicative action should also be ontogenetically understood from the perspective of the body, which has been formed not only through the specific evolution but “the contingent process of human fertilization that results from what is now an unforeseeable combination of two different sets of chromosomes” (Habermas, 2003b, p. 13). It is critical to not losing sight of this natural history belonging to our embodiment, for “our life histories are made from a material that we can ‘make our own’” (Habermas, 2003b, p. 13). We naturally are a body but one that we have as our own in the personal, communicative, and social *Zentrum* that everyone experiences in a pragmatic distributed way. Both the specific evolution and the development of human being in the communicative action are normative as Habermas affirms, going with the need for natural laws — and the different degrees of chance in evolution — with the human freedom to communicate.

The author’s naturalistic proposal is halfway between the evolving nature that we are and the contextual endowment that we give ourselves in communication: the *ontological assumption* is supported by an *epistemological–transcendental* assumption, which is incomprehensible without theorising on communicative action. In this sense, and going even further, we would agree with Habermas that, in our everyday communication practices, “we should find an answer to the question of how Kant can be reconciled with Darwin” (Habermas, 1992b, p. 20). As we carefully read in *Truth and Justification*, this is not just another scientific or even a solipsistic version of naturalism but a pragmatist proposal in which transcendentalism comes onto the natural stage without being simply eliminated:

The classical pragmatists already wanted to reconcile Kant with Darwin. According to G. H. Mead and John Dewey, the detranscendentalized conditions of problem-solving behaviour are embodied in practices. These practices are characteristic of our sociocultural forms of life, which have evolved naturally. But then the problem has to be formulated in a way that is compatible with this naturalist perspective. (Habermas, 2003a, pp. 9–10)

The natural realm and the practical realm complement each other. Hence, Habermas’s weak naturalism cannot be identified with a common weak naturalism with hidden presuppositions still those of an ontological reductionism, which inevitably leads us to a recurring dualism that leaves both the body and the qualitatively higher emergence of thought in a weird intellectual indeterminacy. We then should not be suspicious, as the anti-Marxist and anti-evolutionist ideologies often are, of the pragmatist embodiment that canalises communicative action;

naturalism cannot be delinked from the lifeworld as a whole. All partitioning or opposition between the self that transcends nature when communicating and its own ontogenetic and phylogenetic history may be considered as culturally dependent and methodologically biased. As for Kantians and Darwinists, the problem lies in the too extrinsic interpretations that they often achieve in their different worldviews, when, for instance, they dismiss the historically relative presuppositions from which they reflect. In this respect, Habermas remains faithful to critical theory outlines:

It seems to me that it has been clear since Marx that the normative content of modernity can be taken up and preserved even and especially under materialistic premises. “Nature in itself” does not coincide with objectivated nature. What Marx has in mind is the emergence in natural history of the sociocultural form of life of *Homo sapiens*. (Habermas, 1992b, pp. 19–20)

This is a fairly eloquent display of the kind of weak naturalism we advocate in this paper: Habermas reconstructs Marx’s historical materialism at its sources by providing the latest state of evolutionary research. In a similar way to how Kantians and Darwinists still debate in our epoch, there has been a historical tendency towards opposing two traditional Spinozist terms: *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. As nature in its maximum power and holistic dynamic interrelation, *natura naturans* prevails over (in a methodological way) *natura naturata* as its external and objective expression. For his part, Habermas’s weak naturalism will maintain a reciprocity between these two traditional conceptions of nature, although he keeps on emphasising the dialectical tension of both terms. A post-metaphysical thinking cannot go back to the fusion or confusion (metaphysical time after time?) of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.

Moreover, we cannot ignore the fact that there is a strong influence of later Schelling in Habermas, to whom he had dedicated *Das Absolute und die Geschichte*; his inaugural doctoral dissertation in Habermas, 1954, along with the fifth chapter of his renowned book *Theorie und Praxis* (cf. Habermas, 1963). Thus, everyday nature (*natura naturata*) is subtracted from all eternity; thus, it can be related to the same dramatic “retraction of God” from the historical evolution. This problematizes, and paradoxically consents, a naturalistic philosophy of the world. All identity, and even all dialectics as Hegel alleged, makes us to mix *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* epistemological levels and, additionally, prevents a properly naturalistic interpretation of the world. Schelling was neither a Spinoza-like monist nor a strong ontological naturalist; he was, *stricto sensu*, an epistemological dualist who paved the way for the status and autonomy of both levels by *radically* separating theory and praxis into two domains of anthropological discourse. In mature Schelling, positive philosophy and philosophy revelation, as its original background, are not amalgamated but profoundly interrelated each other.

As a result of this, Habermas reveals a hidden — but in no way a strong — materialist naturalism in Schelling’s thought such that Marc Maesschalk rightly interpreted that this philosopher “plays somehow as a pivot between German idealism and the Marxist tradition” (Maesschalk, 1989, p. 639). As could not be otherwise, Schelling also acts as a kind of harness in Habermas’s naturalism. The evolution and constitution of human nature is real and existent because it is a fact that humans are not exempted from dealing with facticity, as Hegelians aimed to point out shielding themselves behind the *Wissenschaft der Logik* (1986). Rather, the Absolute has to retract himself in order to be himself so that history can only come about in the radical separation from the Absolute. As a paradox, against the odds, the autonomy of human research lies in the radical retraction of God from the world. The radicalness of this epistemological separation is what Habermas wants to level out from his communicative theory converted into anthropology, in which theory and praxis, *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*,

even benefiting from their own autonomy, are interwoven as inseparable in *Lebenswelt* (*lifeworld*). Here it is, unequivocally, the Habermas's anthropological background that backs up his weak or soft naturalism.

3.4 | Challenging strong naturalism even more: The lifeworld in the latest Habermas

The greatest difficulty of a strong ontological naturalism has to do with only accepting as valid what we extract from the *natura naturata*, dislodging this nature (exposed to objectification) from the totality of natural dynamic and evolving relations. Can we only constitute our mental products as *ob-jectum*, that is, as what is put out there in order to be intuited, apprehended, judged and reasoned. Is this metaphysical and logocentric again? Specialists in this extreme narrowed version of naturalism, such as Thomas Sukopp, warn about the risk of reductionism, providing that “strong naturalism asserts that the distinction between nature and a realm over or beyond nature is preposterous” (Sukopp, 2007, p. 79).

In fact, “‘World,’ ‘cosmos’ or ‘universe’ include every actually existing ‘thing’” (Sukopp, 2007, p. 79), which brings this argument to fore by returning over and over to the disdained metaphysical discourse. It is well established that Kant sought to overcome this objectification without adequately succeeding in each of his three *Kritik* and in his philosophical foundation of morality. In the preface of the *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*, he claimed that “all rational cognition is either *material* and concerned with some object, or *formal* and occupied only with the form of the understanding and of reason itself and with the universal rules of thinking in general, without distinction of objects” (Kant, 2006, p. 1). Is the material *or* the formal what we shall choose in a sort of an eternal Manichaeism?

Because we are not neutral and distant observers of a meaning-bearing extrinsic reality, young and mature Habermas underlines our role as engaged participants in communicative action. Contrary to a “view from nowhere” (Bryant, 1995, p. 117), Habermas thinks the difference and the relation (cf. Dreyer, 1998) between the observer (third person perspective) and the participant (first person perspective) as a way to deal with both biosociologism and strong naturalism. In the first volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, he began to work on the concept of *comprehension* (*Verstehen*) as integrating first and third person perspectives in scientific methodological research:

The problem of *Verstehen* is of methodological importance in the humanities and social sciences primarily because the scientist cannot gain access to a symbolically prestructured reality through observation alone, and because understanding meaning [*Sinnverstehen*] cannot be methodologically brought under control in the same way as can observation in the course of experimentation. (Habermas, 1984, p. 108)

Thereby, and mostly in *The theory of communicative action II*, the author gets round the Husserlian subject of a *lifeworld* by conceptualising it as the irreducible scope for a different naturalism and realism which could be valid for nearly matching up different scientific methodologies. In recent *Postmetaphysical Thinking II*, Habermas casts doubt on this, especially on “the new debate over naturalism [which] calls to mind the aspects under which philosophy, as a scientifically imbued discursive understanding of ourselves and the world, differs from the objectifying sciences” (Habermas, 2017, p. vii). Does this mean that we must refuse objective knowledge in a post-secular era, giving up science for philosophy?

Rather, it is the scientific procedure of doing science what should be carefully examined. We have several doubts concerning the refusal to consider the *avant tout* of the communicative

constitution of objectively known things since, in fact, “lifeworld as a component of the objective world enjoys a kind of ‘ontological primacy’ over the respective current background consciousness of the individual involved” (Habermas, 2017, p. 8). All different kinds of objective knowledge depend on this worldly primacy “because the performatively present life processes — that is, experiences, interpersonal relations and beliefs — presuppose the bodily organism, the intersubjectively shared practices and the traditions in which the experiencing, acting and speaking subjects ‘always’ find themselves” (Habermas, 2017, p. 8).

A polarisation between a subject level as opposed to an object level just would distort, through the “inside-outside” misleading in the study of the mental (Varela & Shear, 1999, p. 1), the broader complexity of anthropological action. It is very striking that Luhmann, even reading Maturana and Varela’s works in neurobiology and being literally inspired by their autopoietic theory, severely differs from both authors, especially from Varela’s latest “neurophenomenology as a methodological remedy” for the hard problem of consciousness (cf. Varela, 1996). Conversely, Luhmann declared an uncluttered reductionism in his comprehension of human sociality and morality. In contrast, things are reversed by a weak anthropological theory, thanks to which Varela, going with other remarkable partners as Gallagher, led a decided *phenomenological turn* in cognitive neurosciences (cf. Mejía Fernández, 2017, 2019). For Varela and for Habermas as well, “meanings — whether embodied in actions, institutions, products of labour, words, networks or cooperation, or documents — can be made accessible only from the inside” (Habermas, 1984, p. 112). Indeed, from a non-reductionist naturalism, which can even get the *dialogical* adjective, the participant, being always in debt to the lifeworld, cannot be depersonalised and denaturalized as a detached logocentric observer. In his latest remarks, Habermas claims that the lifeworld, as amalgamated in the communicative action, sustains *from the inside* an anthropological naturalism in accordance with a non-reduced human being, which is inseparable from this same world of human life: “[W]e cannot detach ourselves from the lifeworld which is present in the background and forms the horizon within which we adopt an intentional orientation to something ‘in the world’” (Habermas, 2017, p. 8).

Weak naturalism consists of a non-fundamentalist recognition of human complexity, and it can still count “on this deeper anthropological level — namely, that of our understanding of ourselves as species beings” (Habermas, 2017, p. 126). The post-secular consciousness, embedded in the lifeworld, closely resembles Kant, who was truly hostile to fundamentalism regarding the autarchy of nature and contrary to a separate ideation from data as advocated by a highly disputed theology. In other words, the ontological naturalism that neither Kant nor Habermas accepts (still alive in the most recent scientific positions and in religious fundamentalism) fails to adequately distinguish between the world of life, the objective world, and the everyday world. Habermas’s anthropological philosophy, in pursuit of an original weak naturalism, is open to give way to religion and science dialogue without having to exacerbate the various fundamentalist avatars of our time. If religion certainly refers, by a symbolic-ritual way, to the most archaic domain of the lifeworld, science adjusts its discourse as rigorously as possible to the objective world that it is described and theorised. Human action is then naturally undetachable from a lifeworld structuring experience and going beyond the inside-outside epistemological, deontological, and ontological contest. In other words, lifeworld structures and precedes social action in a post-metaphysical and post-empiricist manner. For Habermas, whoever observes is primordially an interpretant and participant in the lifeworld (Habermas, 1984, 1987).

Thus, we also agree with Habermas’s naturalism of the first version of *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, where “the emergence in natural history of the sociocultural form of life of *Homo sapiens*, [...] goes beyond physically objectified *natura naturata* to conceptually include, as it were, a piece of *natura naturans*” (Habermas, 1992b, p. 20). In this kind of non-reductionist monism (or a *dialogical* non-reductionism, as we suggest), which is also baptised “epistemological dualism,” is optimal to contest the most belligerent scientism. Habermas “tries to combine his dualism, as performed from an epistemological perspective, with a non-scientific

naturalistic monism, which is included in the expression ‘soft naturalism’ or ‘weak naturalism’” (Andaluz Romanillos, 2015, p. 129), as we can browse in his writings on truth, justification, and determinism. *Natura naturata*, which the theory of evolution seeks to explain by natural selection in its adaptive mechanisms (Darwin’s evolutionary theory as a research program), may be co-thought in the relativity and dynamism regarding the evolving *natura naturans*. This marries the second version of *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, taking into account the lifeworld where all communicative action is sheltered through a non-reductionist and participating standpoint. Indeed, one can read a description of Habermas’s soft naturalism in his book *Between Naturalism and Religion* (2008):

I advocate a nonscientistic or “soft” naturalism. On this conception, just those states of affairs are “real” that can be represented in true statements. But reality is not exhausted by the totality of scientific statements that count as true according to current empirical scientific standards. (Habermas, 2008, p. 153)

But it is well known that the objective data that empirical sciences construct do not make sense without the free communicative action validating this objectification in the lifeworld, so that Habermas alerts on an important thing: in his soft naturalism it is no required to discard the empirical character of what we say but “this form of radical naturalism [that] devalues all types of statements that cannot be traced back to empirical observations, statements of laws, or causal explanation” (Habermas, 2008, p. 141). Hence, the *natura naturans* do not break apart. According to weak or soft naturalism, the full communicative stage of the empirical sciences plunges into the lifeworld in a way that human sciences are much more than something to be reduced, or much less absorbed, by the empirical observation. Pragmatics and phenomenology as “non-reductionist” approaches, which are undoubtedly human (cf. Gallagher, 2010), can be once again of great interest for the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the wide range of transdisciplinary sciences, seeking to explain how hominids have evolved over millennia. Habermas is highly critical towards those sciences missed from all this subjective and intersubjective communicative and participating potential, showing a much more pragmatist and phenomenological style than expected in a *Frankfurter Schule* critic:

The fact that the language games tailored to the mental and the physical cannot be reduced to one another raises the interesting question as to whether we must regard the world from both perspectives simultaneously if we are to be able to learn something about it. Clearly, the observer perspective, to which the empiricist perspective limits us, must be combined with that of participants in communicative and social practices in order to give socialized subjects like us cognitive access to the world. (Habermas, 2008, p. 168)

4 | CONCLUSION

The extremely long hominization process is intrinsically linked to the complex humanization process that, from the linguistic stance, actually organises, structures, and gives meaning to our phylogenetic history. Eudald Carbonell, anthropologist and co-director of the famous prehistoric site in Atapuerca, Spain, has pointed out on numerous occasions that hominization and humanization are two sides of the same coin (Carbonell & Hortolà, 2013). It is guaranteed to assert that without hominization there could be no humanization all over the process of human singularity in its evolving substratum and, vice versa, without humanization there can be no critical awareness of ourselves from the philosophical perspective of who we are, what and how we know, and where we are going.

It would be unwise to underestimate the theoretical consequences of a non-reductionist naturalism without drawing on the adoption of modern biology as a research program related to anthropology. A reductionist evolutionary *brainism* or *biosociologism* against a closed-minded philosophical *theorism* is not rationally workable according to this broader view. For that reason, it seems unavoidable to set up the kind of *sociality* we have been looking for in order to picture a weak anthropological theory: “It is my thesis that a theory of social evolution that does not deny itself through unnecessary explanatory renunciations cannot be developed solely within the framework of social-scientific functionalism” (Habermas, 1979, p. 31). The communicative social quality that we have been pursuing in the present research is thus associated with something as important but historically and culturally more complex, as synaptic nervous connections just obeying a measurable system according to Luhmann’s contingency causality and survival functions that perpetuate our species (Luhmann, 1976, 1993).

Habermas’s weak naturalism is rationally stronger than it looks like, providing that “only *socialized* brains, linked up with a cultural milieu, become bearers of those highly accelerated, cumulative learning processes that have become uncoupled from the genetic mechanism of natural evolution” (Habermas, 2008, p. 172). On that basis, we have tried to place in the current debate a little discussed topic by Habermas scholars, such as the author’s own naturalistic vision on social human being, that is, his anthropological theory which unavoidably influences on Universal Pragmatics focused on *linguistic communication* (cf. Dryzek, 1990b). This kind of Universal Pragmatics, exemplified by a naturalistic theory of communicative action and a theory of rationality as well, constitutes the very foundations of both a post-metaphysical and a post-empiricist social theory that Habermas has indeed applied not only to ethics and epistemology but also to political and democracy theories.

After all, Habermas’s weak and even dialogical naturalism, which has been contended in this paper, assumes that the moral rules and the objective data that sciences elaborate makes no longer sense apart from the participating and communicative human action that validates the moral *deontification* and epistemological *objectification* in the *milieu* of an irreducible lifeworld; either through empirical, logical, transcendental, or linguistic conceptual analysis. By Habermas one means either the well-known Habermas of the theory of communicative action or the lesser known later Habermas who tries to hold the dialogical non-reductionist line against postmodernism. Much has been vulgarised from the reading of an unclarified anti-postmodern Habermas. Rather, the reader will have found something more interesting in these pages: an even lesser-known Habermas influenced by Kant and Darwin from his beginnings as a philosopher to his most recent works *in dialogue* (here is the keyword) with the new sciences of social evolution. This may be the novelty and, as it is humbly hoped, the substantial contribution of this paper.

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