

KARL-OTTO APEL'S DISCOURSE ETHICS

Ramon C. Reyes

ABSTRACT:

Karl-Otto Apel proposes to ground morality by starting from the fundamental fact of language, or more concretely, the language community, the community of communication and discourse. According to him, the forgetfulness of this linguistic fact has been the main shortcoming of all past philosophical moral theories, leading each one of them unwittingly to a sort of *monological* or introspective type of thought, oblivious of the implications of the communal language with which, and in which, they, however, all had to philosophize. As a result, they all ended up with a kind of particular morality limited by the confines of their *monological* thinking.

Taking due cognizance of this “linguistic turn” in the history of philosophy, Apel then starts from this linguistic fact, this community of language and discourse of which each human being is a member. Reflecting upon the transcendental conditions of possibility of this community of discourse, Apel finds the four *universal validity claims* that he borrows from J. Habermas: meaning, truthfulness, truth, and normative correctness. In other words, any person living in any community of language or discourse (and that would mean every human being) is inescapably governed by norms of meaning and truth and intersubjective validation. It is this fourth presupposition, the need to seek intersubjective validation or normative correctness, that leads to the foundation of morality. More concretely, anyone who speaks or argues in principle seeks validation from the community, the community of persons. He cannot but take into consideration the views and positions of others in the community. And there is the foundation and ground of morality – respect of the community of persons — the transcendental condition of possibility of the community of language and discourse.

This paper, however, has some reservations regarding this argument that to speak or to argue or to act meaningfully necessarily leads to the respect of the community of persons, thus presuming the unity of theoretical and practical reason. Taking the cue from Kant, the author believes that theoretical reason, premised on the one *I Think*, may lead one to consider others as intellectual partners in the search for truth and coherence, but not necessarily as persons in the moral sense or ends in themselves. For that we would have to take a different starting point as shown by Kant.

In 1996, Karl-Otto Apel published his *Selected Essays – Volume Two: Ethics and the Theory of Rationality*.¹ As he himself states in the preface, the book is a collection of his essays that deal with the “transcendental-pragmatic foundation of communicative or discourse ethics.” On the other hand, the editor of the book writes in his introduction that this volume “focuses on the elaboration of a practical philosophy. . . in terms of a theory of discourse ethics or communicative ethics.” This paper, then, will present the basic ideas of Karl-Otto Apel regarding discourse ethics, based on this book. First, we shall see Apel’s critique of previous moral theories. Second, there will be a general overview of Apel’s idea of a discourse ethics. Third, we shall see more specifically the steps by which Apel seeks to ground ethics. Fourth, we shall see the formulation of the fundamental moral norm of discourse ethics and its eventual application. Finally, there will be a critique of Apel’s basic argument in support of discourse ethics.

The question of the foundation of ethics remains an important philosophical problem even today. Considering, for example, the political turmoil we had just been through, we remember how opposition political parties and citizens’ groups were protesting that the then president of the Philippines, Joseph Estrada, had lost all moral and legal bases to remain in his position in view of all

the transgressions he had committed, as they continued to be uncovered in the public hearings, and, later, in the impeachment proceedings. On the other hand, the president would retort that he had been elected by a sizable sector of the electorate, and that they elected him, even as they knew him the way he was and had always been. Hence, such accusations against him of irregularities and immorality, continued Estrada, could not be anything more than the judgments of the rich and the upper class based on their aristocratic standards, while he himself presumably subscribed to the moral norms and standards of the poorer class who had elected him and who, even now, continued to support him.

Is morality then simply a matter of convention based on society or on social class? But is not morality a matter of universal obligation incumbent on all, as was thought to be once upon a time? But, if so, how could such a universal morality be possibly justified today when it seems to be more and more the trend to say that morality is a private matter, or at best something determined by the conventions and idiosyncrasies of a particular group or class?

CRITIQUE OF PREVIOUS MORAL THEORIES

On this important question regarding the ground or foundation of morality, Karl-Otto Apel feels that moral philosophy has failed, until now, to provide a satisfactory answer. The teleological theory, for example, as first proposed by Aristotle, fails to provide an adequate answer, because, according to Apel, the *ἀνάγνῃ* or *ὁἀείδῃ* as conceived by Aristotle turns out to be the good or self-actualization of the individual or of a particular *ἄλλῃ* or community, and not of the universal humanity. Hence, Aristotle eventually found it necessary to exclude from his *ὁἀείδῃ* the slaves, and, also probably, the women and the non-Greeks. On the other hand, the deontological theory, as proposed by Kant, does not seem to make the grade either. According to Apel, Kant's categorical imperative, which commands the individual to act only on that maxim through which he can at the same time will that it should become a universal law, turns out to be not universal enough after all. Too closely tied up with the conventions of his society and age, Kant ended up with a rather limited universality rule, as manifest in the examples he gave of the application of this rule. Contract and Convention theories of morality did not fare any better, since such attempts had difficulty showing why contracts and conventions should continue to be followed, especially in situations where the self-interest of the individual would seem to dictate that one should act otherwise.

In the contemporary situation, Apel points out, experimental science has succeeded in arrogating unto itself the whole notion of universality and objectivity. As a result, morality has come to be considered as purely idiosyncratic, a matter of personal opinion and feelings. Meanwhile, the world is becoming more and more of a global village, pressed to act more and more as one entity due to the emergence of such concerns as nuclear armaments, economic globalization, and ecological anomalies of world-wide repercussions. More than ever, there seems to be a need of founding a morality that would go beyond the confines of one's group or culture so as to embrace all of humanity.

In general, Apel says that the fundamental defect of all the past moral theories is that they have all been *monological*. In other words, they have all been the result of the ruminations of the individual, solitary thinker reflecting upon morality. They have all neglected to take cognizance of what is nonetheless an inescapable fact, namely, that their solitary reflections could only have taken place within the context of language and discourse, thus within the linguistic community. All our thoughts and reflections, even those of the solitary philosopher, can only occur in, and through, a communal language. Hence, all our thoughts and reflections are virtually, if not actually, dialogue and argumentation. It is this fundamental forgetfulness of the linguistic conditions of their philosophizing that, for Apel, is the root of the failure of all past moral theoreticians to provide adequate grounding for a universal morality. For Apel, then, it is only on condition that we start from this awareness of the linguistic condition of all our thoughts and meaningful actions that we may finally see the universal conditions and ground of all human theoretical and practical activities, and, thus, of morality.

THE IDEA OF A DISCOURSE ETHICS

Discourse Ethics then, as proposed by Apel, is a moral theory that starts from the inescapable linguistic matrix or medium of all our thoughts, reasonings, argumentations, and purposeful actions. Beginning from this all-embracing community of language and discourse, the ground of all human thinking and acting, discourse ethics proceeds to show the transcendental conditions of possibility of such a linguistic community. Eventually, it will be shown that among the presuppositions or transcendental conditions of possibility of this discursive, interacting community of language is the moral condition, in other words, the community of persons whose views and interests any responsible speaker or agent within the community will have to consider, and whose consent he will, in principle, have to seek. Furthermore, to the extent that this community of language is universal and unlimited (since the realm of meaning and truth immanent in language go beyond particular languages), then the transcendental conditions of possibility we derive would likewise be universal and unlimited. It is only by this manner of proceeding, according to Apel, that we may finally come to ground morality universally.

SPECIFIC STEPS OF GROUNDING ETHICS

Let us now retrace the explanation of Apel regarding the grounding of morality by discourse ethics. He starts with the ordinary human community, the ongoing community of language and interaction, which he calls the community of communication, the community of discussion, or the critical, transcendental community of discourse and communication.

. . . on the one hand, anyone who speaks or who simply acts meaningfully is already participating in a potential discussion; on the other hand, everyone – even the philosopher – must *consciously affirm* his participation in the transcendental language-game of the transcendental communication community at every moment of his life.²

It will be seen that for Apel, any human being, by the fact of his being human, cannot but live in some community of language or other, communicating, speaking, acting meaningfully. Apel points out that participating in such a community of communication has certain logical and eventually moral implications as a transcendental condition of possibility.

. . . one must point out that everyone, even if he merely *acts* in a *meaningful* manner – e.g., takes a decision in the face of an alternative and claims to understand himself – already implicitly presupposes the logical and moral preconditions for critical communication.³

Here, then, is the method of Apel, what he himself calls *transcendental-pragmatic* reflection – transcendental in the Kantian sense, thus, in the sense of the necessary conditions of possibility implied by discourse and argumentation; pragmatic (as differentiated from the syntactic and the semantic) in the sense that the fundamental necessary precondition of all discourse and argumentation is the community of speakers or discussants.⁴

The basic argument, then, of Apel is that any member of this community of communication and discourse, by the mere fact that he speaks or acts meaningfully, necessarily presupposes as preconditions certain rules regarding meaning and truth and justification of what he or she says or does. Such necessary preconditions cannot but eventually include ethical norms or conditions, in so far as the speaker or agent must eventually be willing and ready to justify his position vis-à-vis his interlocutors, the community of persons.

More specifically, Apel speaks of four *universal validity claims* of discourse, initially formulated by Habermas, that are the necessary presuppositions of any discussion: meaning, truth, veracity, and normative correctness of communicative acts. Thus, anyone who speaks or discusses or argues must necessarily presuppose the norms for *meaningful* or intelligible discourse. Whoever speaks must speak

in such a way that he makes sense. Then, there is the necessary presupposition of *truth*. Whoever speaks eventually proposes something or takes a position and thus, eventually, makes a truth claim. Furthermore, there is the necessary presupposition of basic *veracity* or truthfulness in the discussion. When one speaks or argues, it is assumed that he must be saying what he sees to be true. It is true that in the real world many types of discussions or negotiations begin as a game of initial negotiable positions and reciprocal calculated bluffs. But, even in such cases, the whole point or purpose of the process is to come eventually to some agreement among the bargaining parties, at which point, then, each participant eventually manifests truthfully what would be acceptable to him. A stance of permanent lying would be untenable and senseless. Finally, *normative correctness* means that he who speaks and argues seriously presumes a sense of validity that he appeals to. By his affirmation and argumentation, he is saying, in effect, that what he claims is justified, and that it has intersubjective validity; that it is in principle worthy of consensus among all reasonable discussion participants.

It will be noticed that these four presupposed validity claims are necessarily universal, according to Apel. Although it is true that all communication and discourse are grounded in some particular concrete language or other to start with, nonetheless based on an adequate concept of argumentation and discussion, the validity claims of meaning, truth, veracity, and normative correctness, by the very nature of language, necessarily go beyond sociocultural borders. To the extent that an argumentative position has been shown to have meaning, truth, veracity, and intersubjective validity, it would imply, in principle, that it bears meaning, truth, veracity, and intersubjective validity not merely for a particular group or language, but for any language, thus for everyone, for all members in an ideal unlimited communication community.⁵

Furthermore, Apel shows that these four universal validity claims have a special characteristic, namely, *performative evidence*. In other words, reflection upon the very act of discourse or argumentation reveals that these four validity claims are necessary implications, *transcendental conditions of possibility*, of the very performance or act of argumentation. Hence, anyone who would question or argue against these four validity claims would be caught in a performative self-contradiction. In effect, someone who tries to argue against these four validity claims would be saying that there is no meaning to what he says, and yet he would be saying that meaningfully; or that there is no truth to what he is saying and that would be the truth; or that he would be saying that truthfully, he is not being truthful even as he speaks; or that he would be arguing that he makes no claim to intersubjective validity, and yet his very act of arguing is inevitably an appeal for intersubjective validation of whatever he claims.⁶

Now, these four validity claims, universal, and performatively necessary, are what, according to Apel, lead us to the ethical implication of all discourse or argumentation, more specifically, the fourth validity claim – normative correctness.

Let us see what Apel himself says:

... everyone who philosophizes, and that means everyone who argues seriously, must already – at least implicitly – have recognized an ethical fundamental norm. If one is prepared to reflect on the implicit meaning of one's argumentative acts, then one must see that one already presupposes, together with the possibility of linguistic meaning and truth, that all claims to meaning and truth must in principle be resolvable through arguments – and through arguments alone – in an unlimited community of communication. That means that one has already recognized that as arguer one presupposes an ideal community of communication composed of all human beings as equally entitled partners, a community in which all differences of opinion – also those which involve practical norms – should be solved in principle only through consensual arguments . . .”⁷

Here then is the ethical implication. In the very act and performance of argumentation, the speaker or arguer virtually binds himself to justify his claims before the interlocutors, the participants of the discussion. In the act of justifying his claims, he in effect seeks intersubjective validation, in other words, he seeks what in principle would be a matter of consensus and justified agreement among the participants. In short, in the very act of arguing or speaking meaningfully, the arguer or

the speaker binds himself to respect the reasonable views of the community of persons, the community of discourse.⁸

Again, this community of discourse, Apel would point out, extends not only as far as the actual community of discourse the speaker is participating in. Rather, in so far as he makes a truth claim, he claims something to be universally true, and thus he binds himself to seek the validation and consensus not only of the actual community of discussants he is engaged with at the moment, but in principle the consensus of the universal community of all mankind, the ideal community of communication. In short, he who speaks meaningfully or argues is answerable not only to the particular group he is discussing with, but potentially to the whole community of mankind.⁹

FORMULATION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL MORAL NORM AND ITS EVENTUAL APPLICATION

Having shown how the very participation in the community of discourse leads to the recognition of the ideal universal community of humankind (to whom any speaker or arguer is, in principle, committed to justify his claim or position), in other words, having shown how the very act of discourse and argumentation by way of transcendental reflection leads to the fundamental ground of ethics, Apel then goes on to show how transcendental reflection leads beyond the grounding or founding of ethics to the formulation of moral norms as further transcendental implications of discourse and argumentation.

Proceeding from the four universal validity claims, which have been shown to be the necessary transcendental conditions of all discourse and argumentation, more specifically, from the fourth validity claim, that of normative correctness, Apel draws and formulates what he calls a transformed version of Kant's *categorical imperative*:

*Act only according to a maxim, of which you can in a thought experiment suppose that the consequences and side effects its general observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of the interests of each individually affected could be accepted without coercion by all the affected in a real discourse; if it could be executed by all those affected.*¹⁰

Apel considers this rule a transformation of Kant's *categorical imperative* in the sense that it goes beyond Kant's principle of universality to the formulation of a criterion of maxims of action and the consequences thereof. Having seen from our transcendental reflection that the transcendental presupposition of the community of dialogue and communication is the whole community of persons, whose real interests any speaker or agent is committed to respect, then the fundamental norm of morality should be not merely the notion of universality as found in Kant, but the concrete universality representing all the true legitimate needs and interests of the community of persons, individually and severally.¹¹

Nevertheless, Apel points out that discourse ethics remains purely *formal* and *procedural*. In other words, the moral norm as formulated by discourse ethics proposes no substantive or specific claims as to what one must do. Rather, it states formally that whatever one does, he must see to it that the foreseeable consequences and side effects of his action does not violate the justified interests of the individuals to be affected by the action. Thus, discourse ethics would refrain from specifying any concrete action or substantive goal. It does not assign to the philosopher or to the moral agent the task of determining by himself what he thinks would comply with the norm. Instead, discourse ethics would require procedurally a real dialogue with the individuals concerned to determine what in effect would be in respect of their justified interests. Here we see then that the norm of morality is not the mere private, *monological* notion of universality, as in Kant, but the real interests of the individuals of the community (which community in principle is the unlimited community of communication and dialogue). Furthermore, the present world we live in, according to Apel, has become so complicated and so closely interconnected and interdependent, making it impossible for the philosopher or the

moral agent, in many situations, to determine by himself without the aid of expert knowledge, the probable consequences and effects of contemplated actions.

. . . This renouncement to *substantial* pronouncement in favor of a formal-procedural principle responds to the necessity of having to validate, on the one hand, the real *necessities of all the affected* and, on the other hand, the *knowledge that today experts have at their disposal concerning the probable consequences and secondary effects* of actions or norms. . .¹²

In this sense, the moral norm as formulated by discourse ethics is intended to serve not as the concrete material norm but as the meta-norm or formal limiting condition of any and all concrete material situational norms.

. . . The ethical fundamental norm, which each arguer – and that means every serious thinking person – has necessarily recognized, thus consists in the acceptance of the meta-norm of the argumentative formation of consensus about situationally related norms. . .¹³

In other words, whatever specific norms we adopt for our action, we must see to it that the consequences and side effects of compliance with such norms will not violate the justified interests of all individuals to be affected by our action.

Beyond the problem of the formal moral norm and the procedure of developing situational norms within the boundaries set by the fundamental ethical norm, Apel brings up the question that, in our contemporary world, very often, it is not a mere matter of application of a universal or fundamental moral norm to a concrete situation. Rather, it is more often the question of finding the point of insertion of morality in a world where our interlocutors may not necessarily go by the moral norm, but instead by pragmatic or strategic principles. In other words, they may not necessarily subscribe to the principle of the ethics or the moral norm as the criterion of the maxims of their way of thinking and acting. This problem becomes especially acute should one be acting not simply on his own, but if he were, for example, in charge of a whole group. He could, for example, be the leader or the representative of a labor group negotiating with the management of a company or, perhaps, the representative of a whole nation dealing with other nations.¹⁴

In such cases, Apel would first point out that we have to avoid, on the one hand, the position of naïve utopianism, and, on the other hand, the position of pure pragmatism or that of ‘amoral realpolitik’. Here, the task is to go beyond an ‘ethics of intention’ to an ‘ethics of responsibility’.¹⁵ What we have to consider is that, first, right now there is a real world of discourse or community of communication, which is our point of departure. It is not a perfect world out there, nor is it a purely chaotic or violent world either. The problem, then, is not that of a solitary moralist struggling against a whole evil world. In a sense, the whole of humanity, by way of collective responsibility, has achieved, at this point in our history, a certain level of decency and discourse.¹⁶ The present actual world is one where there is a certain level of discourse and ethical life prevailing, and sustained by all sorts of human achievements such as customs, system of laws, constitutional guarantees, international treaties. Beyond, there is, of course, the ideal unlimited community of discourse or community, not as an existing substantive reality as it is in Plato, or as an inexorable necessary endpoint of history as it is in Hegel or in Marx, but as a necessary transcendental presupposition of the ongoing real community of discourse, as has been shown precisely by discourse ethics. The main point, then, is to recognize and to maintain this tension between the real ongoing discourse and the ideal community of discourse. To put it more concretely, what must be done first is we shall have to abide by the level of discourse existing at the moment, as provided for example by the legal system, the institutionalized negotiating or bargaining processes, and the recognized practices governing international relations. Second, there must be a constant effort to move closer and closer toward the level of the ideal community of communication. And, this is what distinguishes the moral negotiator or politician from a mere pragmatic operator. As Apel says,

. . . As a 'moral politician' in the sense prescribed by the ethic of responsibility, he is bound by a regulative principle that commands him, while strategically weighing the security-risk, to work assiduously at the long-term alteration of relationships in such a way that the regulation of conflicts by means of *discourse* and *consensus* can increasingly take the place of *strategic* regulation. . .¹⁷

The principle, therefore, is that on one hand, the present level of discourse governing human relations must be respected. Any action that would tend to regress toward a less discursive, more violent world would be wrong. On the other hand, there must be a constant progressive drive toward the ideal community of discourse and consensus. As Apel would put it,

. . . It seems to me that there resides in this demand the postulate of a necessary connection between the imperative *to preserve the existence and dignity of the human being* and the imperative of social emancipation commanding us *to progress in the task of realizing* [the truth] of humanity [for all humans]. . .¹⁸

CRITIQUE

The main difficulty of Apel's whole discourse ethics lies in the argument that the very act of speaking and arguing leads to the moral respect of the other. This is so because, presumably, to argue implies the willingness to submit to the demands of what is true and reasonable, and thus, in principle, to the demands of intersubjective validity and consensus. In other words, for discourse ethics, to argue would inevitably imply the willingness to take into consideration the position and the interests of one's interlocutors, and in this sense, to respect the other morally.

Or as Apel would say otherwise:

. . . The normative unity of theoretical and practical reason rests, I believe, on the inseparability of the four validity claims, set forth by J. Habermas, as the conditions of human speech: meaning (or intelligibility), truthfulness, truth, and rightness (in the ethical sense). The demonstrability of this inseparability rests on the *performative-propositional* double/complementary structure of mental acts as communicative speech acts. . .¹⁹

The difficulty, however, of Apel's position is that it does not seem to follow that simply because I argue reasonably, and thus take into consideration the reasonable views of the other, I, therefore, necessarily respect the other morally. In actual arguments and debates, it is not uncommon to witness people whose position and argumentation may be truly right and justified, and yet who at the same time are very mean and unkind to their interlocutors.

To argue reasonably, I do have to take into consideration the reasonable views of my interlocutors. But, does this necessarily mean I respect them in the moral sense? True, I should take them seriously as my intellectual partners in the search for truth. But, does it necessarily follow that I would also have to accept them as my moral counterparts? Or is it not rather that because I feel I owe it to myself, to my own intellectual honesty and integrity, I then take into consideration the views of the others to the extent I deem them to be valid? Otherwise, I would not be consistent and honest with my own sense of unity and truth. But, this does not necessarily mean I respect the others as persons.

Apel somehow foresaw this objection and felt he answered it by showing that there is a distinction between the *propositional* and the *performative* aspects of human speech, and that the truth claim implied in the proposition necessarily leads to the 'performative complementation' of having to justify one's claim before the members of the communication community.

This point can be clarified further if one distinguishes in terms of 'speech-act' theory between the *performative* and the *propositional* aspect of human speech. Then it becomes

evident that in the dialogue of those engaged in argument not only are value-neutral statements made about states of affairs, but also that these statements are connected, at least implicitly, with *communicative actions* – with actions that make moral claims on all members of the communication community. Each statement of fact, therefore, as one which must be logically justified, presupposes in its pragmatic deep structure a *performative* complementation such as: ‘I hereby assert, against all potential opponents, that. . .’ or ‘I hereby call upon everyone to test the following statement.’ Consequently, the performative complementation of the statements necessary in order to carry out the test is as follows: ‘I hereby dispute that A is the case’ or ‘I confirm that A is the case.’ Following our heuristic approach, it is at this level of intersubjective communication about the meaning and validity of statements and not before, at the level of substantive intellectual operations, that an ethics is presupposed.²⁰

Nonetheless, the question remains whether this community involved in the ‘deep pragmatic structure’, this community before which any statement of fact must be ‘logically justified’, is necessarily a community of ends, a community of persons, or could it not remain perhaps merely a community of intellects? In the process of argumentation, do we necessarily move on from the level of the intellectual to that of the ethical, rather than remain simply on the level of ‘substantive intellectual operations’? In seeking intersubjective validation for my claims, am I necessarily led to morally respect the others, and not simply to consider seriously the intellectual merits of their counterclaims and positions?

In a little side dispute he had with his friend Habermas regarding the issue of ‘decisionism’, Apel seemed to admit this hiatus between theoretical and practical reason. Here he spoke of the ‘indispensable function of goodwill’. He said that our very identity as human beings ‘lies in our being an addressee of an ethical ought’. Thus, he seemed to grant the difference between the ‘implicitly acknowledged normative precondition for the possibility of arguing’ within the community of argumentation on one hand and on the other hand, the possibility of a ‘voluntary affirmation’ or ‘voluntary denial’ of the normative conditions of the possibility of our very identity as human beings. However, in the end, he would say that there is one continuous movement between these two stages. It is simply a matter of ‘voluntary re-confirmation of what we indeed must have already implicitly acknowledged as the normative precondition for the possibility of arguing (and, furthermore, of acting meaningfully)’, ‘the question of *committing oneself to the realization of the norms of reason*.’²¹

Here, perhaps, lies the point of Kant, who distinguished between theoretical and practical reason; thus, between theoretical and moral discourse. For Kant, as far as theoretical reason is concerned, there is only one common set of principles and categories of coherence and objectivity, at the root of which there is one *I Think* common to all, one transcendental unity of apperception. What is implied then in theoretical discourse is not so much the moral respect for others, but, rather, a fundamental sense of consistency and coherence with oneself as this transcendental unity of apperception, this one *I Think* common to all. On the other hand, as far as practical reason or moral discourse is concerned, at the root of it is not a transcendental unity of apperception, or the *I Think*, which would tend to reduce the other as mere theoretical or intellectual partner, but something else, some assumption or postulate, such as the *kingdom of ends*, a community of persons, recognized as ends in themselves. Following Kant’s line of thought, we come then to the ground and foundation of morality not by starting from theoretical discourse, which could lead us only to the one *I Think*. Rather, we would have to take as a point of departure what is from the very beginning a specifically moral discourse, from which we could then derive as transcendental condition the community of ends, the community of *freedoms*.

Going back then to Apel’s discourse ethics, it would seem that to find the ground and foundation of morality, we will have to start not just from any community of discourse or communication. Following Kant, who considered practical reason not as a mere extension of theoretical reason, but as distinct, based on some ‘rational fact’ or experience of the *categorical imperative*, we might have to start from what is from the very beginning already understood as a moral discourse, one which would be a different language-game, an expression of a different form of life. Hence, this would be a discourse not of argumentation and truth and validation, but one

where, beyond the anonymity of truth and the commonality of the *I Think*, I am addressed and recognized by the other in my person. And, reciprocally, this address would constitute a call and a demand for me to respond, to recognize the other, likewise, as a person.

ENDNOTES

¹ Karl-Otto Apel, *Karl-Otto Apel: Selected Essays, Volume II, Ethics and the Theory of Rationality*, edited and introduced by Eduardo Mendieta, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996.

² *The a priori of the Communication Community and the Foundations of Ethics: The Problem of a Rational Foundation of Ethics in the Scientific Age* in *op. cit.*, 42.

³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴ As Apel says, “It is precisely this procedural principle – not more, not less – which lets itself be grounded transcendental-pragmatically: reflecting on the normative conditions of the possibility of earnest argumentation (=thinking), conditions that we necessarily acknowledge . . . ,” *Limits of Discourse Ethics? An Attempt at a Provisional Assessment*, in *op. cit.*, 196.

⁵ *Limits of Discourse Ethics? An Attempt at a Provisional Assessment*, in *op. cit.*, 196-97.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 198-99.

⁷ *The Conditio Humana as an Ethical Problem*, in *op. cit.*, 177. See also *Limits of Discourse Ethics? An Attempt at a Provisional Assessment*, in *op. cit.*, 195.

⁸ Apel expresses this point more sharply perhaps in another passage: “Since all linguistic utterances and, moreover, all meaningful human actions and physical expressions (in so far as they can be verbalized) involve ‘claims’ (in German *Ansprüche*) and hence can be regarded as potential arguments, the basic norm of mutual recognition by the participants in the discussion potentially implies that of the ‘recognition’ of all human beings as ‘persons’ in Hegel’s sense. In other words, all beings who are capable of linguistic communication must be recognized as persons since in all their actions and utterances they are potential participants in a discussion, and the unlimited justification of thought cannot dispense with any participant, nor with any of his potential contributions to a discussion. In my view, this demand for the mutual *recognition of persons as the subjects of logical argument*, and not merely the logically correct use of intellect, justifies the use of the phrase ‘ethics of logic.’” *The A Priori of the Communication Community and the Foundations of Ethics: The Problem of a Rational Foundation of Ethics in the Scientific Age*, in *op. cit.*, 29

⁹ *Limits of Discourse Ethics? An Attempt at a Provisional Assessment*, *op. cit.*, 197. See also *The A Priori of the Communication Community and the Foundations of Ethics*, in *op. cit.*, 44.

¹⁰ *Limits of Discourse Ethics? An Attempt at a Provisional Assessment*, in *op. cit.*, 206.

¹¹ . . . discourse ethics can satisfy the essential requirement of an ethics of responsibility for consequences by virtue of the *transformation itself of the Kantian principle of universalization*, transformation which comes out of its own presuppositions; and we are once again forced to make explicit the procedural moral principle always already accepted when seriously arguing. That is, we are required to make it explicit in connection with the discussion on the responsibility for consequences. It comes about, on the one hand, that – in analogy to the *formalistic* and *deontological* ethics of Kant – we can not justify (and therefore, prescribe) *a priori* specific institutional norms of the substantial ethicicity, in the Hegelian sense, nor specific definitions of the perfect life, nor the greater happiness for all individuals, but only a *procedural form of deliberation and decision* concerning such ‘substantial questions’; precisely according to the requirements of *practical discourses*, in which the following would be taken into account: 1) the interests of all the affected and 2) the probable consequences and effects of following hypothetically proposed norms. From this it comes that, on the other hand, the *formal discourse ethics* – in contrast to the *formal-monological* Kantian ethics – also immediately provides the principle for an ethics of responsibility of the *mediation between the formal principle of universalization and the justification of material and situational norms*. Discourse ethics is in the situation to do so because – in contrast to Kant – it does not impose on the isolated individual the task of discovering through a thought experiment which practical maxims are to be assumed as the foundation for the universal laws for all humans (with which the individual, in the best of cases, could represent to himself the interests of everyone else according to a

conventional interpretation). On the contrary, it invites the individual from the very beginning to participate in real discourses in which the best possible agreements concerning real interests and the optimal empirical orientation on the consequences and effects of following norms may be reached. . . . Ibid., 205-206.

¹² Ibid., 195-96.

¹³ *The Condition Humana as an Ethical Problem*, in *op. cit.*, 177.

¹⁴ *Limits of Discourse Ethics? An Attempt at a Provisional Assessment*, in *op. cit.*, 207-08.

¹⁵ Ibid., 194.

¹⁶ . . . The previously mentioned objection concerning the impotence of the individual in the face of the unforeseeable consequences of our collective actions . . . loses its pertinence if, and only if, one comes to realize that the decisive point is by no means that the individual *alone* ought to assume responsibility for the future. Indeed, the point is only that even as he reads the morning newspaper the individual should think how he, according to his own competencies and abilities, can *take part in organizing collective responsibility*. This organization of collective responsibility through the participation of individuals in appropriate, practically relevant discourses is, as a matter of fact, always already in process on level of legislation to that of establishing a kindergarten or to that of a pensioner composing a letter to the editor of a newspaper.” *Macroethics, Responsibility for the Future, and the Crisis of Technological Society: Reflections on Hans Jonas*, in *op. cit.*, 238-39.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 245-46. See also *Limits of Discourse Ethics? An Attempt at a Provisional Assessment*, in *op. cit.*, 212-14.

¹⁸ *Macroethics, Responsibility for the Future, and the Crisis of Technological Society: Reflections on Han Jonas*, in *op. cit.*, 244.

¹⁹ *The Conditio Humana as an Ethical Problem*, in *op. cit.*, Note. 8, 190.

²⁰ *The A Priori of the Communication Community and the Foundations of Ethics: The Problem of a Rational Foundation of Ethics in the Scientific Age*, in *op. cit.*, 29.

²¹ “I must, therefore, also reject as a misunderstanding Habermas’ remark. . . that my insistence upon a *conscious (voluntary) affirmation (re-confirmation)* of one’s membership in the community of argumentation amounts to preserving a ‘residual stance of decisionism.’ I believe that this assessment rests on a confusion of the question of *replacing the fundamental grounding of norms by decision* – a position that, in fact, should be called ‘decisionism’ – with the question of *committing oneself to the realization of the norms of reason*. Whereas Popper (and most analytical philosophers, including even Paul Lorenzen) seem to fall victim to this confusion by giving in to decisionism – i.e., by overlooking the possibility of grounding norms by transcendental-pragmatic reflection – Habermas seems to fall into the opposite extreme of overlooking the indispensable function of goodwill for putting into force, so to speak, the norms of reason in ourselves. I completely agree with Habermas’ claim that ‘the fundamental error of methodological solipsism lies in the assumption of the possibility not only of purely monological *thought*, but also of purely monological *action*’. . . Nevertheless, I must insist on the possibility, in principle, of our *voluntary denial* of – I would say – the *normative conditions of the possibility* of our very identity as human beings. Without conceiving of this possibility, and hence also of the necessity of an ‘existential act’ of ‘voluntary re-confirmation’ of what we indeed must have already implicitly acknowledged as the normative precondition for the possibility of arguing (and, furthermore, of acting meaningfully), I could not conceive of the human dignity that lies in our being an addressee of an ethical ‘ought’.” Ibid., Note 104, 60-1.