

**FEATURE BOOK REVIEW**

*Transformation der Philosophie. Volume I, Sprachanalytik, Semiotik, Hermeneutik. Volume II, Das Apriori der Kommunikationsgemeinschaft.* By Karl-Otto Apel. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973. Pp. 378 and 446. DM 75.

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The uniqueness of Karl-Otto Apel's position within contemporary German philosophy can best be explained in the light of two matters of fact. First, to be sure, Apel's work is generally regarded as part of the collaborative effort of Jürgen Habermas and others to develop what has come to be known as a "communicative ethics." Nonetheless, his approach is more distinct and original than it might initially have seemed. In contrast to Habermas, whose career can be said to have begun under the influence of Adorno, Horkheimer, and the Frankfurt School of "critical theory," Apel started writing in the early fifties in the spirit of Heidegger's "fundamental ontology," that is to say, from a viewpoint which Adorno and his colleagues had repudiated as pious obscurantism and vaticinating jargon. A rationally tempered Heideggerianism still pervades his thought. Secondly, for more than a decade, Apel has been working on a prodigious reconstruction and critical evaluation of modern Anglo-American theories of science and philosophies of language, concentrating on such figures as Peirce, Carnap, Wittgenstein, Morris, Popper, Chomsky, Kuhn, and Searle. Thus, in spite of neo-Marxist insistence that philosophy be rooted in social life, a notion with which he sympathizes, Apel immediately strikes his foreign reader as moving intentionally and on principle within a methodological or ascetic-professional sphere.

Apel is aware of his doubly precarious connection with "critical theory." First of all, he has never been impressed by ambiguous suggestions that theory should be "rooted in praxis" in some empirical sense. Philosophers should not move out into the streets. Furthermore, he is writing in a tradition which, amusingly enough, tends to regard analytical philosophy as a kind of intellectual seismograph for the more ominous and less lucid rumblings of technologico-Benthamite civilization. That, in our age, strikes him as rootedness enough. Finally, even though Habermas has published several sharp attacks on Heidegger's hierophantic posturing and "retrogressive escapism into the immediacy of Being,"<sup>1</sup> Apel (who for his part never took Adorno's critique of ontology very seriously) has unswervingly maintained that conduct and criticism can only be rational if guided by steady and coherently justifiable norms, by standards which in turn are based upon ontologically fixed and

<sup>1</sup> J. Habermas, *Philosophisch-politische Profile* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 17.

universally human "pre-structures" not unlike those analysed in *Being and Time*.

Although these remarks provide important background for readers approaching Apel for the first time, they do not present the overt theme of *Transformation der Philosophie*, the recent two volumes which gather together the best papers he has written over the past fifteen years or so. Apel's central thesis, which I will explore in detail below, can be formulated in a preliminary fashion as follows. Moral philosophy, in a scientific age, must take the form of a "communicative ethics," an ethics built round the ideal of a future "universal consensus," established (as an ideal) through a "semiotic transformation of transcendental philosophy." Apel is convinced, in other words, that "transcendental reflection" on the concrete (practical and especially linguistic) conditions for the possibility of conventions in, for example, science and law, and of valid argumentation in general, can uncover and compel recognition of a universally binding norm: the transperspectival ideal of an uncoerced consensus reached through an open dialog of all with all. Rational thought and action, so the argument goes, necessarily involves an "ideal anticipation" both of a future consensus omnium and of the achievement of universal human autonomy and self-government implicit in such a consensus. *Transformation der Philosophie* allows us to follow the major phases in Apel's attempt to make a case for this idea.

Now although he has done lasting and versatile work in intellectual history, culminating in his book of 1963 on the idea of language in Italian humanism from Dante to Vico,<sup>2</sup> Apel has never given his energy to a dusty or merely edifying philology. At the centre of his historical reconstruction, one inevitably finds a problem-constellation which has arisen in contemporary philosophical discussion. Crucial for the historical portions of *Transformation* is his exploratory concern with the "pragmatic dimension," with those aspects of human speech which earlier and more crudely positivistic analytical philosophers of language had systematically slighted or simply ignored. By drawing on the works of Peirce and Morris, of the late Wittgenstein, Austin and Searle, on Heidegger's idea of language as the "dwelling-place of man," as well as on traditional humanistic conceptions of language (from the great Italians to Humboldt), he has been able to articulate in a differentiated and subtle manner the basic linguistic insight which underlies communicative ethics: a syntactico-semantic "system of sentences" can only be fully understood in relation to historically living "subjectivity," to what Morris called the "pragmatic dimension of signs." Reductionistically inclined philosophy tends to suppress this aspect of language and to fall back on a theory of types:

1 If we abstract from the pragmatic dimension of symbols, there can be no human subject of the reasoning process. Accordingly, there can be no reflection upon the presupposed conditions which make reasoning possible. What we do get is an infinite hierarchy of meta-languages, meta-theories, etc., containing (and concealing) the reflective competence of man as a reasoning subject.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Die Idee der Sprache in der Tradition der Humanismus von Dante bis Vico*, in *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, Volume 8 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> *Transformation der Philosophie*, II, 406.

But "pragmatics," as the locus of "reason," does not refer to unobjectifiable subjectivity in the Cartesian or Kantian sense. It refers rather to performative acts of speaking/hearing carried out within a tradition-imbued and bodily-engaged context of communicative interaction. This insight, as we shall see, lies at the source of Apel's "semiotic transformation of transcendental philosophy." The conditions for the possibility of both convention and valid argumentation, he claims, are embedded in a life-world which itself is always constituted in the relationship between ego and alter, that is to say, in the elemental twoness (at least twoness) of language-in-action. Within the pre-scientific life-world of linguistic usage, in fact, Apel discerns the auroral and foundational form of his future *consensus omnium*. All symbol-mediated interaction, he argues, has a core of agreement. A functioning language game rests on a background consensus about the truth of certain beliefs and the correctness of certain norms. Moreover, this communicative dimension cannot be dismissed as a proper object for empirical and behavioral psychology and hence as irrelevant to the logic of science; pre-scientific "agreement" is presupposed by truth-claims in all sciences, including those of psychological inquiry.

Apel gathers together the first five essays of *Transformation*, written during the late fifties, under the subtitle "Language and the Disclosure of the World." He mentions in the brief preface that they represent his most uncritically Heideggerian period, products of a time when he was simply "fascinated" by the awesome and enigmatic way language lends meaning to experience. Later, he goes on to say, he abandoned this fascination for "a more normative orientation in the sense of a transcendental justification of the validity of knowledge."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, his subsequent development has by no means been the mechanical unfolding of an existential and humanistic critique of the syntactico-semantic wasteland of early analytical linguistics. The second section of *Transformation* is dedicated to working out the special relationship which Apel sees between Heidegger and Wittgenstein; the third concentrates on the "anthropology of knowledge," that is to say, on his triadic distinction between natural science, hermeneutical understanding, and dialectical critique; and in the fourth and final part Apel attends directly to the "transcendental function of the community of argumentation." As we shall see, each of the fourteen studies collected in these sections, written for the most part during the late sixties and early seventies, contributes to the deepening of Apel's "transcendental" investigation of the "deep structure" of the pragmatic-semiotic dimension. As a whole—Apel is right—they focus on the problem of normative orientation. They aim at providing the rational foundation for a universalistic moral philosophy.

In sum, Apel's recent concern has been with the secular reworking of what were previously theology-bound principles (especially the idea of moral universality) for the purpose of constructing an immanent ethics, a criteriological theory in which transperspectival norms of conduct and intersubjectively valid canons of criticism might be rationally grounded without appeal to metaphysical transcendence or kerygmatic guarantee. He thinks he can furnish such transperspectival and intersubjectively valid norms by digging underneath conventions and valid argumentation in an anthropological or tran-

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., I, 7.

scendental search for the universal conditions of their possibility.

At the centre of Apel's inquiry into the preconditions for valid human knowledge lies what he calls the "*a priori* of bodily engagement." This concept, paralleling Habermas' idea of research-guiding "interests," is meant to establish (against the Graeco-positivist myth of pure contemplative *theoria*) an original and ineluctable connection between knowledge and actual life problems, between theory and practice. The first crucial differentiation which Apel discerns within the pragmatic life-world is a radical distinction between work and interaction. Tools and natural language represent two elemental and distinct ways of relating to reality. Science and the humanities are but the systematically and cumulatively organized forms of bodily engaged processes of knowledge already incipient in everyday life, in our ordinary manipulation of objects and in our communication with fellow men. Work involves a "bodily engaged interest" in the technical domination and control of objectified natural processes. Natural science is thus characterized both by operations performed on objects in a repeatable way by exchangeable human subjects and by the formulation of covering laws which allow for prediction and hence for control. Interaction, in contrast, involves a "bodily engaged interest" in deepening historical or situational self-awareness and in improving communication, as well as in coming to some kind of joint agreement about action-orienting aims and values. For a pure hermeneutics, these ends must be pursued according to a logic of dialog. At least initially, the methods of nomological-deductive science are quite irrelevant. In any case, Apel wants to thematize both tools and language as body-like extensions of man's primary engagement in the world, an engagement which is already evident in pre-scientific modes of life. The thermometer, he explains, can be thought of as a technical extension of man's natural bodily capacity to gauge environmental warmth. Hence, Kant was mistaken in assuming that the only logical precondition for valid physical science is the synthetic functioning of a "pure consciousness." He overlooked the indispensable intervention of physically perceptible measuring devices which, according to Apel, "translate man's questions into the language of nature."<sup>5</sup> Apel's *a priori* of the body, unlike Kant's transcendental consciousness, can itself be experienced. This is one of two reasons why it has been christened "quasi-transcendental."

Likewise, the bodily engaged *a priori* of communicative interaction is both a principle of experience and a possible object for experience. Apel locates it in the sensuously perceptible signs of ordinary language. Hence, the autonomy of the humanities, and we will return to this basic anti-positivist argument below, stems from the elemental disjunction of work and intersubjectivity which Apel discerns within the primary life-world. The fact that measuring devices are irrelevant for understanding meaning, for instance, reveals the naiveté of old-fashioned neopositivist projects for a "unified science."

The second reason for referring to the two basic cognitive configurations of man's bodily engagement as "quasi-transcendental" has to do with the theory of social evolution. Following Hegel's critique of Kant (that the transcendental ego should not be assumed as "ready made," but rather explored in its self-

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 97.

formative development), Apel admits that his knowledge-guiding "bodily engaged interests" are not eternal but have arisen in human evolution. Although work and interaction are in this sense contingent forms, they are also "necessary" in the sense of having become irreversible (*unhintergehbare*) after that qualitative fracture in evolutionary continuity which might be called the "cultural break with nature." This imaginary "moment" was signalled by the original formation of two specifically human institutions: language and socially organized labor. The necessity or irreversible character of these quasi-transcendental frameworks is guaranteed by the fact that species survival has in turn become dependent on the continuing subsistence of these two interwoven institutions.

It has been suggested that Apel's most original contribution to contemporary philosophy lies in his attempt to penetrate beneath the nominalist conventionalism of constructive semantics. Logical empiricism, to be sure, represents a theoretical advance over early logical atomism. It gradually recognized that science requires, besides logical inference and empirical information, a moment of convention which would account for the construction and interpretation of "semantical frameworks" as well as for the establishing of observational statements which can confirm or falsify hypotheses and theories. However, neopositivism construes convention as a kind of *ad hoc* and "irrational" operation. Presupposed by the rules of the semantical framework (the boundaries of "scientific *ratio*"), convention is conceived as something like the ultimately arbitrary and unjustifiable choice of a solitary researcher, a choice which precedes all rational discourse.

Apel's argument against positivism is essentially an attempt to elaborate a form of rationality which, being neither deductive nor observational, can be called communicative or dialogical. He sees it rooted in pre-scientific discourse, in colloquial intersubjectivity. As such, it provides scientific convention with its particular dimension of rationality. Apel probes below convention, he explores the elemental patterns of ordinary social interaction which first allow scientific co-investigators to come to some kind of agreement about conventions, in order to isolate a moment of criteriologically compelling universality, a rudimentary basis for all forms of future consensus and intersubjective validity. Hence the focus of his attention is the pre-scientific rationality of communication in the vernacular, a rationality which somehow guides the construction and application of semantical conventions. His interest, both in the theory of science and in linguistics, is pervasively ethical. Through a study of the pragmatic life-world, he is seeking to justify the universal claim implicit in normative arguments without any special insight into heaven.

To see the point of this argument we must begin with a contemporary problem situation. The crisis which threatens our technology-dominated world, so Apel argues, can be expressed in the following antinomy. On the one hand, the success and rapid proliferation of natural science and technology have fostered widespread acquiescence to the neopositivist principle that all rationally justifiable and intersubjectively binding knowledge is ethically neutral or value-free. For a coherent objectivism, to be sure, there is a technical *ratio* which detects the most efficient means for preestablished ends, but nothing like "practical reason" which might articulate and justify final aims and values themselves. There is no deducing an "ought" from an "is," a value

from a fact, and hence, from a scientific perspective, the answer to the question "What should our goals be?" can never be true or false. Ultimate practical problems (and this supports Apel's provocative theory that positivism and existentialism are "complementary" movements of thought) must be relegated to happenstance, emotional reaction or subjective and unjustifiable decision. Furthermore, ostensibly "value-free" ethnology appears to have demonstrated that moral norms are always relative to specific epochs and cultures, and hence cannot, on principle, be intersubjectively binding in a universal fashion.

On the other hand, science and its attendant technology, by creating thermonuclear weapon systems and promoting the industrial ravage of man's natural environment, have for the first time in history confronted the human race with the possibility of utter self-extinction. The need to resist "decisionism" and appeal to some kind of common "practical reason" has never been so great as today. In sum, "a universal and intersubjectively valid ethics of joint human responsibility seems to be both necessary and impossible."<sup>6</sup>

Behind this antinomy lies Apel's conviction that a rational ethics requires us to begin with normative truths which, even though they are neither arrived at by deduction from first principles within a unified calculus nor by empirical observation and induction from observation, are still immediately evident (*a priori einsehbar*) to anyone who thinks about them, and hence provide a sure basis for the future *consensus omnium*. These insights would be rational (intersubjectively binding) without being "scientific" in the narrow sense. One such truth might be that the human race should survive. Indeed this claim does not seem contentious. Moving beyond such irenic vagueness, Apel turns to his "anthropology of knowledge." As we have indicated, he claims to have discovered, within the infrastructure of the intersubjectively constituted life-world, the "ultimate foundation" (*Letztbegründung*) for all conventions and valid argumentation, indeed for all rational conduct and critique. This ultimate foundation provides the content for future consensus and corresponds to a third "a priori of bodily engagement," what Habermas has called the interest in emancipation from dogmatic and rigid dependence on contingently hypostatized forces. Apel believes that the normative anticipation of universal and un-coerced consensus among maturely autonomous men is implicit in every conventional agreement, and even in all valid argumentation. It is both alpha and omega, both a precondition (necessary) and a regulative ideal (normative). Apel regards communicative ethics as non-theologizing in this sense: the ideal of universal human autonomy to be realized in a consensus which itself is achieved through the coercion-free discussion of all with all, is taken to be "embedded" (as an "anticipation") within even the most elementary forms of communicative interaction, and hence at least inchoate in intellectually refined and technically sophisticated modes of thought and action. We will return to this central argument of *Transformation* below. First we must show how Apel prepares the way for his quasi-transcendental foundation of a universalistic ethics by a double critique, of positivism and of perspectival relativism.

For Apel, as we shall see, the neopositivist dream of an objectivistic and value-free "unified science" is not merely a *cauchemar*. Nonetheless,

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.

nourished by a rich German tradition of methodological studies in the "sciences of man," he does take pleasure in revealing the intellectual poverty and confusion which underlies naive positivist attempts to "reduce the subjective, intentional and mental language of the humanities to the extensional and behavioral language of things."<sup>7</sup> The primary forfeit of positivist aspirations toward a radical standardization of the "logic of science" is a strict distinction like the one Apel makes between subject-object relations and subject-subject relationships.

... if one really hopes to objectify the whole world, including the verbal behavior of men, by a language of unified science, one must, strictly speaking, cling to the *a priori* of *Methodological Solipsism*, that is: to the tacit presupposition, that one man alone could follow a rule and, for instance, practice science without having to learn the rules of a language game by communicating with other persons.<sup>8</sup>

Forms of intersubjectivity (communication and historiography) remain unintelligible as long as epistemology confines its attention to the monological and asymmetrical connection between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. By making rationality coextensive with the double operation of (1) deduction of prognostic hypotheses within a technical calculus, and (2) empirical observation or induction from observation, neopositivism suppresses that third form of rationality which can only be located in discussion. The logic of dialog, and this is the central point, cannot be reduced to the logic of inductive-deductive operations.

However, the introduction of Apel's third "*a priori* of bodily engagement" (the interest in universal human autonomy and coercion-free dialog) makes things somewhat more complex. As a matter of fact, Apel believes that the traditional distinction between explanation and understanding both goes too far and not far enough. Not far enough because it implies that hermeneutics and natural science are merely compelling or alternative methods. Hence it ignores the intersubjective understanding among co-investigators which always undergirds scientific conventions. Too far to the extent that, slipping into perspectival relativism, it forsakes the positive heritage of the Enlightenment, particularly the ideal of a rational progress in knowledge.

On the one hand, Apel intends his "semiotic anthropology" as a definitive critique of the old ockhamite myth of "language-free cognition." Intuitionism is based on an illusion to the extent that subject-object relations, as we know them, are always functions of a primary life-world which is constituted dialogically within the language-mediated interaction of ego and alter. "All knowledge in the subject-object dimension presupposes the existence of a community of communication."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Apel means to demonstrate the absurdity of neo-Leibnizian projects for a single and technically perfect language, a "universal" linguistic calculus which would be utterly purged of the vagaries, the contradictions and fuzziness of colloquial speech, and which

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

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<sup>9</sup> *Transformation der Philosophie*, II, 114.

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would hence automatically eliminate all misunderstanding. Ordinary or colloquial language, so he argues, is the medium of both self-reflection and of pre-scientific intersubjectivity. Thus, it is the inevitable and ever present basis for agreement among scientists about conventionally fixed meanings in any linguistic calculus whatsoever. Therefore, the last meta-language of science must be a natural language which involves personal pronouns like "I," "you," and "we," and hence, by expressing and reflecting upon the context of intersubjective communication, "interprets" the formalized language and makes it intelligible. Formalized-detached observation and nomological explanation of "verbal behavior" can never replace this primary participation in the intention-communicating idiom of some vernacular. Monological or scientific ratio can never abstract from this dialogical and pre-scientific "reason."

On the other hand, by emphasizing the tightly knit connection between a man's culture and his way of approaching both nature and other men, that is to say, by casting doubt on the notion of a rational and overarching progress within the "enlightened" science, the explanation-understanding distinction has contributed to the general discrediting of practical reason, to the promulgation of the positivist idea that value-statements cannot have a cognitive status. At this point Apel introduces his interpretation of Wittgenstein's perspectivalist monadology of internally incorrigible language games, an interpretation which, characteristically enough, places Wittgenstein in the context of the old German "historicist" debate. For Apel, as we might well have expected, the greatness of the *Investigations* lies in its having "concretized" Kant's transcendental conditions for the possibility of knowledge. Wittgenstein replaced the synthetic acts of a pure and solitary consciousness (which, according to the utter heterogeneity of form and content, could not itself be experienced) with something very much like Apel's pragmatic-semiotic dimension, with the interwoven complex of linguistic usage, bodily expressiveness and action-guiding norms contained in cultural worldviews. Moreover, language game theory allows for a telling reformulation of the classical explanation-understanding distinction. The "object" of hermeneutical understanding can, in principle, share the language of the knower. He is not an object but a virtual partner, not a *Gegenstand* but a *Gegenspieler*. The *a priori* need for communicative partnership signals the absolute limit of behavioral objectification.

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein's "concretely semiotic Kantianism" is ethically relativistic; it fails to satisfy Apel's demand for universal and transperspectival norms. Each language game (and this applies to Peter Winch's "ways of life" as well as to T. S. Kuhn's "scientific paradigms") is a kind of hermetic capsule, admitting no unfiltered data or game-disruptive meanings. It cannot be rationally criticized or corrected. In the three essays on "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Meaning" which make up the second part of *Transformation*, Apel introduces two key ideas from Heidegger in order to counteract a splinter relativism like that shared by Wittgenstein and the German "historicist" school. He construes the "understanding of Being" (*Seinsverständnis*) as suggesting an innately human access to universality, to a transperspectival leverage-point with whose help every man may rationally criticize any given language game. Just so, the Heideggerian tension between a man's "thrownness" in a given culture and his "project" toward yet unrealized possi-

bilities, allows Apel to thematize—against Wittgenstein's ahistorical conception of language—the diachronic dimension of rational development and change. In this connection, he mentions the critical and transformative interaction between initially “closed” language games, for example, between the Greek and Hebrew traditions within Christianity.

The social historian, so Apel argues, must strive to maintain a delicate balance between pluralistic sympathy and rational critique. He “must, in a certain sense, participate in ‘given’ language games or life forms and not just hover above them and aloofly observe”; and yet “he must also keep his critical distance from all language games or life forms and not simply sink back into any single one of them.”<sup>10</sup> He must recognize the rights of both Truth (as a criticism-fostering ideal) and versions of the truth. Now Apel believes it possible to avoid the dogmatic and paramystical implications of Heidegger's transperspectival “pre-understanding of Being” and still retain the ideal of rational corrigibility and critique. As we have already indicated, he believes he can do so by appealing to the third “bodily engaged interest” which he sees embedded in the deep structure of colloquial communication. In line with this “universal pragmatics,” Apel introduces the idea of a “transcendental language game” which, on the one hand, “is a presupposition contained within all historically given language games,” and, on the other hand, “can be regarded as a (yet) unrealized ideal.”<sup>11</sup>

His argument here is really quite simple. There can be no such thing as an utterly private or monological language. This, says Apel, is a transperspectival truth. The universality or *a priori* character of “public space” (which is to say that the “subject” of reasoning must always be at least two) stems from the inflexible structure of natural languages, all of which are constituted as media for reciprocal recognition, mutual understanding and eventual normative agreement between ego and alter. The competent speaker of a natural language must master the transformational generative rules (in Chomsky's sense) which allow him, for example, to use personal pronouns properly. Now, to use the words “I,” “you,” and “we” correctly, a speaker must recognize the correlative legitimacy of every other speaker's using these same words in more or less the same sense. To be communicatively competent, a speaker must recognize, at least tacitly, the right of all other men to be autonomous and self-governing subjects, equal in this respect to himself. Apel believes that the “rules” for pre-scientific intersubjectivity provide the germinal form of universal human solidarity and ethical unanimity. Moreover, he views Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* as progenitive of his own transcendental argument: you cannot deny the ideals of universal autonomy, open dialog, and general moral consensus without simultaneously presupposing or “anticipating” them and hence (contrafactually) affirming them. Values are not, indeed, derived from facts, but rather from acts, from living communicative activity. Thus Apel attributes to philosophy the maieutic function of convincing apparent non-believers that, to the extent that they are engaged in inevitably dialogical acts of speaking/hearing, they are already anticipating universal moral concert as essential to the good life:

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Whoever questions the possibility of legitimating moral principles already participates in discussion, and we not only can get him to "perceive" what he has "always already" accepted as a foundational principle, but also convince him that he should, through voluntary corroboration, accept this principle as the condition for the possibility [of his questioning]. Anyone who does not perceive and accept this principle, thereby excludes himself from the discussion. Not participating in discussion, however, he cannot even question the legitimacy of fundamental ethical principles. Thus it becomes meaningless for him to talk about the meaninglessness of his question and to recommend some bold fideistic choice.<sup>12</sup>

This "a priori of the argumentation community" signals the limits of decisionism. It is self-contradictory to argue in a way which breaks the primary rules of argumentation. The first "rule" of argumentation, for Apel, is that interlocutors must "anticipate" the *consensus omnium* which would follow, in the long run, from a coercion-free dialog among all autonomous men. Rooted in the infrastructure of colloquial intersubjectivity, this rule attains an imperative status which no merely homiletic principle could have. Thus, in contrast to intolerantly tolerant perspectivalism, communicative ethics makes it possible to criticize an illegitimate government or structure of domination on the basis of a "quasi-transcendental" insight into the intersubjective foundation of essential human dignity. Apel's defense of democracy against the technocratic autocracy of a manipulatory elite is based on the idea that free public discussion (in the long run) will guarantee the rationality of political-ethical decisions. Illegitimacy, as a consequence, is connected with systematically distorted communication. When a life form is internally contradictory and thus dialog-prohibitive, it is ripe for rational correction and critique. Deformations in intersubjectivity can be "measured" against the standard of reciprocal recognition of autonomous and distinct individuals which is embedded in the deep structure of ordinary language.

Thus, one of Apel's key ideas is that philosophy cannot be limited to a purely hermeneutical any more than to a bluntly naturalistic approach. In philosophy and critical sociology (as in psychoanalysis), the third a priori of bodily engagement gives rise to an "emancipatory science." Such a science incorporates forms of "quasi-explanation" in order to gain distance on and eventually overcome the ideological and character rigidities which obstruct a deepening of self-transparency and mutual understanding. Hermeneutical understanding of intended meaning, so Apel argues, is at a loss when the speaker or writer interpreted does not know what he means. Man, to reverse Vico's famous adage, has not made his own history, at least not totally and not yet. To this extent, historians must not only "understand" the past, they must also "explain" it. But "explanation" here is no end in itself, nor is it a means for increasing our control over objectified natural processes. Causal thinking, by giving us distance on circumstances which have resulted in systematically distorted communication, helps us to correct such distortion. If a covering law expresses a regular covariation between  $x$  (a preestablished ego in a given situation) and  $y$  (his behavior), then therapeutically provoked self-awareness of the behavioral rigidity should modify the initial condition ( $x$ ), and put the "law" out of

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 421.

action by making it irrelevant. Self-reflection, as a "dialectical mediation of explanation and understanding," has an emancipatory function based upon a rationally provoked *emendatio intellectus*. Apel's translation of this model for psychoanalytical therapy into the realm of critical social theory is fairly direct. The fragility of man's emancipatory interest in coercion-free dialog and eventual normative consensus is revealed by the extent to which it has been suppressed during the course of history. Until recently, scarcity has rendered some sort of inequitable distribution of goods inevitable. This economic fact has covertly fostered a conscience-assuaging ideology which legitimates absurd privileges, a forgetfulness for what Apel considers the anthropologically fixed interest in a society where all men would be autonomously self-governing and hence capable of engaging in domination-free dialog, in discussion where only the best argument would obtain unanimous assent. In technologically advanced societies, however, inequitable distribution has become merely a factual expression of (non-universal) oligopolist interests. Apel's critique of no longer necessary structures of domination, rigidified but obsolete distinctions between manipulators and manipulated, between the subjects and objects of history, would procede *via negativa*, removing ideological incrustations and bringing the suppressed emancipatory interest to light.

Now Habermas argues that Apel, in *Transformation*, is subjugated by a "vestigial decisionism."<sup>13</sup> This backsliding, he believes, stems from Apel's unwillingness to attend sociologically to the systematic connection between the specialized "argumentation community" and the more broadly based "interaction community." In the above cited passage indeed, Apel suggests that a decisionist, if coaxed and cajoled with sufficient maieutic skill, would eventually recognize the binding character of universal pragmatic norms, and would then, by voluntary corroboration, "step over" onto the side of reason, where he was of course all along.

For Habermas, this conception bases morality on an "existential act" and hence betrays the entire project of an immanent or naturalized ethics. In order to draw a sharp line between moral conduct and anything suggesting an individual's decision to accept a norm, Habermas himself emphasizes the catastrophic and automatic consequences entailed by prolonged violation of universal pragmatic rules:

The *fundamental* mistake of methodological solipsism not only extends to monological thinking [as Apel suggests] but also to monological action. It is absurd to think that a human being, capable of speaking and acting, could uninteruptedly engage in the boundary case of communicative action (the monological rôle of instrumental and strategic action) without losing his identity.<sup>14</sup>

If a speaker were steadily to violate what Habermas considers the universal pragmatic maxim of "truthfulness," for example, if he were always to lie, then after a while he would no longer know what he was saying. The rules uncovered by "rational reconstruction" or "quasi-transcendental reflection" on communicatively competent acts of speaking/hearing are conceived as forming

<sup>13</sup> J. Habermas, *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), pp. 152-53.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

a sort of second nature, a boundary beyond which man simply cannot go, at least not continuously and not for long. Unfortunately for Habermas, Apel himself says something very much like this.<sup>15</sup> From Apel's viewpoint, nonetheless, Habermas' argument may appear to blur dangerously Kant's distinction between the "necessary" force of natural laws and the "necessitating" character of moral laws. If there is a substantial difference between their positions, it may be connected with the fact that Habermas tends to be overly optimistic about the possibility of an "empirical realization" of a regulative ideal.

To criticize Apel in a more pertinent manner is not quite so simple. Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of his whole approach stems from the systematic ambivalence of the word *Verständigung*, which means both "mutual understanding" and "agreement." Apel does not say that if you understand someone else then you agree with him, but he says something very much like this. One is disturbed by his tendency to treat disagreement as if it were a matter for socio-psychological inquiry into hierarchical deformation and coercion—almost as if it were not co-constitutive of genuine intersubjectivity. Even if one does not believe that real dialog is only possible in a polytheistic society, it is hard to escape the impression that Apel has gone too far in locating the quintessence of intersubjectivity in a future consensus to be reached by Peirce's self-selected and presupposition-sharing community of natural scientists. Peirce, it will be recalled, regarded human individuality as a function of error. If we all think correctly, so he argues, we will (in the long run) all think exactly alike. Apel, to be sure, says nothing so fatuous. Indeed, he is perhaps even more sensitive than Habermas to problems of individual human responsibility. Nevertheless, his tendency to shuttle disagreement into a purely psychological realm, as if it were some kind of degenerative betrayal of primordial social concord, seems worth questioning. By overburdening the word "anticipation," he does not make it any easier for a reader to grasp the real status of his *consensus omnium*. Likewise, the idea of "transcendental reflection" as an anamnestic process of uncovering pre-established intersubjective agreement contains a discomforting echo of the "pure contemplative theory" with which Heidegger set out to "remember Being." Hence, it could increase the difficulty of dealing adequately with that human *concordia discors* which, although to be achieved and not presupposed, is still much more than a strategic compromise between locked and separate psyches. In any case, it is hard to believe that what really counts in intersubjectivity, and indeed in ethics, even if "embedded" in ordinary language, is simply awaiting a transcendental argument to set it free. Although Apel's confidence in the social consequences of his philosophical argument is morally energizing, it does seem somewhat ingenuous. But perhaps he too would admit that meaningful interaction, at its very origins, has as much to do with fruitful opposition as with unanimity and agreement.

<sup>15</sup> *Transformation der Philosophie*, II, 414ff.