

# KARL-OTTO APEL ON INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND ETHICS

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**Abstract:** *K. O. Apel is preoccupied with the grounding and foundations of an ethics of joint responsibility, such that the control of the alienating, anti-human and anti-humanistic consequences of the technical and scientific society be possible. The nucleus of the argumentation resides within the displaying of the inter-subjective and dialogic structure of logic, reason, and discourse; this reference cancels the scientist attitude assumed by analytic epistemologies and, at the same time, the methodic and methodological solipsism having a Cartesian origin.*

**Keywords:** *ethics, inter-subjectivity, value judgment, responsibility, categorical imperative.*

Karl-Otto Apel finds a paradox of modern era: on the one hand, "a need for universal ethics" (actually, a macro-ethic valid in the limited space of the planet, for all humanity) and, secondly, the difficulties - even desperation - to be found in such an ethical intersubjective validity in terms of a scientific type, while the "prevailing scientific idea of" objectivity "away, the legislative plan, any rule or any value"<sup>1</sup>. Global expansion of scientific and technical civilization expels a moral power in microspheres (family, couple, neighborhood) that can not be controlled consequences concerns the destiny of humanity itself. *Homo faber* is always characterized by a pragmatic expansion, so it is obvious brittle balance between the constituent instruments of aggression inhibition available and function similar instincts of morality, but in today's world disparities threaten human existence itself by all the direct and secondary effects of technical (post) industrial civilization. Therefore, ethical issues common to people on a planetary scale, and ineffectiveness of moral conservatism should be replaced by an ethic of responsibility. Intellectual circles belief is that "the possibility of intersubjective validity of the arguments is exactly co-extensive possibility of scientific objectivity in science and mathematics and formal logic that empirical-analytical sciences. Since you can not deduct any rules and value judgments by logical-mathematical inference formalism, or by inductive inferences that are based on the facts, the idea of scientific objectivity seems to return valid claim high moral standards and value judgments sphere of arbitrary subjectivity."<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, moral norms are culturally and historically relative, so subjective. On the other hand, it wants an analytical meta-ethics description in relation to

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<sup>1</sup> Karl-Otto Apel, *L'éthique à l'âge de la science. L'a priori de la communauté communicationnelle et les fondements de l'éthique*, Lille, Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1987, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

axiological neutral, citing the demands of scientific theory, so emphasizes the investigation of linguistic convention or the rules of logic "moral discourse." Normative ethics is thus precisely the unmasked value assumptions on which it is based. "A cohesive ethical responsibility to be universal, i. e. intersubjectively valid, it seems, therefore, both necessary and impossible."<sup>1</sup> Invoking a supposed "historical necessity" fails, as observed by K. R. Popper, in a "moral futurism." Deadlock is sought by Karl-Otto Apel interpreting the advantages and limitations of two main areas which divide modern philosophy - "analytic philosophy" and "existentialism" - and discovered a possible complementarity between axiological neutrality of science and subjectivity that are interpreted as existential philosophical and ideological expressions of the liberal separation of public life and private life.

Western public life is structured on utility values, industrial rationalization - as Max Weber before - involves the instrumentalization of action, and pragmatism is the philosophy of such a society. The Karl-Otto Apel finds rules, instrumental rationality and strategic decisions concerning the purpose of involving human practice, themselves - as a rule - not able to circumscribe the positive criteria for assessing the desirability of these goals. Mediation of neutral axiological science and technology, between theory and practice can not solve the problem of planetary responsibility of the consequences of industrial civilization. On the other hand, no legal conventionalism - present democratic ideologies - can not provide a fundamental moral norm intersubjectively valid, all variants of liberal theory of contract, legal or moral claim to intersubjective validity founds rules in terms of a methodological individualism or a solipism, that the only basis for conciliation or empirical mediation are individual interests and arbitrary decisions, but can not establish moral character of those binding conventions.

It is obvious that it is not possible to suspend / total neutralize value judgments in scientific discourse content, as the line of K. Popper is conceivable model of a science of the spirit that has neither explanatory laws nor is axiologically neutral, but "normative - hermeneutics "in the best sense of the term. The opening of such interpretive labor, Karl-Otto Apel supports the idea that anyone who wants to understand human actions (including "speech acts") must undertake communication, "meaning that action must share responsibility intentions"<sup>2</sup>. Thus, even in the structure and content of explicit performative and self-referential statements, certain assumptions are aiming to present the necessary and universal validity of human speech: "1. Intersubjectively valid claim to the truth of propositions, 2. Intersubjectively valid claim to the accuracy of regulatory language (...) acts as acts of social communication, 3. Claim to authenticity or sincerity of expression of subjective intentions, calling for interpersonal recognition."<sup>3</sup> These demands / requirements / conditions can be challenged only by accepting a pragmatic self-contradiction, their universality is played by Karl-Otto Apel and calls for appearance of extension of quasi-transcendental hermeneutics, as Heidegger and Gadamer pointed out,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Karl-Otto Apel, *Le logos propre au langage humain*, Éditions de l'Éclat, 1994, p.49.

meaning that "the world is experienced always already interpreted by the language "and that" the priority of the language commonly understood in the context of the world lived, is in a way that can be said, inevitable condition of possibility and intersubjective validity of any theoretical elaborations imaginable."<sup>1</sup> Inter-comprehension normative ideal can not be achieved by inter-comprehension that occurs in and through ordinary language, and if a "regulatory hermeneutics" must be possible - in order to improve the comprehension trial - then it must assume a normative ethics.

Distancing themselves equally in hermeneutics and analytical strategies, Karl-Otto Apel summarizes that "the logic of ethics implies logically," involves an ethical, as a condition of possibility. "The validity of logical arguments can not be controlled but not in principle, it does require a community of thinkers be able to reach an intersubjective understanding and consensus formation."<sup>2</sup> Thinking can not be validated within the framework of a "private language" in principle, it is rather the "public" one. So do not use the correct logic that motivates an individual intellect "ethical logic", but recognition of what people said the subjects of logical argument. Moreover, the theory of speech acts just recognizes that dialogue leaves no value at neutrality, but, beyond information on the states actually faces communication between individuals with implicit or explicit moral demands. The transition from the logic of normative ethics is possible by overcoming regulatory solipsism, methodological intersubjectivity implying legitimacy. It is worthwhile here, to be observed a complementarity epistemological thesis: empirical-analytical sciences (descriptive and explanatory) involve hermeneuticsintercomprehension, communicational community of scientists and hermeneutics involves intercomprehension in turn, using all available information on the facts - what requires recourse to empirical-analytical sciences. But "as far as intercomprehension and intercomprehension hermeneutics are also a necessity and the goals, it entails an ethics, all while being claimed, with information from the empirical-analytic science, the ethics of presumed"<sup>3</sup>. In this context, Kant's distinction between hypothetical and certainty can not be used as a project of foundational ethics, since the hypothetical case that is not motivated by a pathological interest. Read more: if one accepts the argument that ethics is presumed logic, the very possibility of rational foundation of ethics seems to be compromised. So whether it's the foundation of logic or ethical foundation, it is to reach an infinite regress. The difficulties are avoided by K.-O. Apel by a statement of principle: "in your argument lies a priori desire to justify not only all" assertions "of science, but, beyond any human aspirations (including people's implicit claims against others who are covered the actions and institutions)."<sup>4</sup> The meaning moral reasoning expressed by the principle that "all human necessities, leave the path argument harmonized with those of other people must be subject, as claim (aspirations) of virtual communication community concern." Setting up such an ethical principle that communication is

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<sup>1</sup> Karl-Otto Apel, *L'éthique à l'âge de la science*, ed.cit., p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 92–93.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

at the same time, "under an ethic of democratic will of the basic training of the agreement"<sup>1</sup> This fundamental step not only draws power from the factual recognition of those who have adopted an agreement - the "model contract" - but it must be imperative for all those who have acquired through socialization, communicational competence - meaning they take expectations into the equation - virtual claims - of others, adopting a common cause of the will. "Subjective decisions of individual moral conscience claim the Christian tradition in secular liberalism and existentialism are now mediated by the a priori requirement of intersubjective validity - the fact that each individual can easily recognize the argument as a public explanation of any possible criterion validity, and also, the constitution of rational will."<sup>2</sup> "Methodological solipsism" is so outdated also in ethics. But beyond the mere formulation of the principle, it is a much more difficult task of imposing and its long-term performance, which in his opinion K.-O. Apel is involving first "approach to develop moral debate" (deliberation "in general practice)" and then "to effectively institutionalize this method to political limited and legal conditions." Idealized assumptions include communication ethics paradigm. K.-O. Apel himself admits that the difficulties are not taken to institutionalize intellectual discussion (debate, deliberation) moral and most importantly, passing that this institutionalization must be imposed in specific social-cultural situations that are structured by conflicts of inevitable interest. Community communication is always concrete, imposing limitations on the exercise of the principle and moral responsibility do not coincide with the requirements specified levels. By analogy with the a priori transcendental philosophy's traditional - especially the kind of Kant's design - instead of unity consciousness - the community mediated intersubjective interpretation of signs, the foundation assumptions include: a) a priority of ordinary language which belongs to legal hermeneutics b) the priority of communication whose principle is "the will of argument" that belongs to the rational foundation of ethics, c) recommends fundamental moral norm "to aspire to an agreement".<sup>3</sup> At the same time, giving it a decisive role, pragmatic dimension is dialectically acceptable inserting the "ideal community, real community" as a "real possibility (realized) of the real society"<sup>4</sup>. If thinking is lacking and a solitary aspect of communication, in fact depends on the real environmental discussion / debate, it must be presumed to belong to a real communicational community, socially and historically determined, and at the same time, we must assume jurisdiction for the purposes ideal communication community. This contradiction is surprising, in fact, the dialectic of reality and desirability, confrontation demands effective communication with communication competence, and the solution is only possible by becoming historical: historical fulfillment of the ideal communication community and real communicational community. "You just need to postulate a morally historical contradiction that solution." That "should" under two basic principles for regulating long-term strategy of any moral human action: first, to

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

ensure all deeds and gestures of the human species survival as a real community of communication, and, secondly, the ideal community to achieve real community of communication".<sup>1</sup> Ensuring continuation of species is an ethical imperative to control the macro-effects of current technology. "Human society can and should all be analyzed in terms of survival strategy, a system of self-assertion", implying, therefore, "a long term strategy for emancipation"<sup>2</sup> Methodological and ethical-legal meaning of this regulator founding principle avoid value judgments in the field of vagaries of subjectivity, suggesting a moral self-transcending.

Opening the same principles, J. Habermas distinguishes on the one hand, instrumental activities - directed against the outside world - and strategic - arranged by manipulating others to get their application - which are rational, by being successfully completed, successful adaptation and, on the other hand, activities involving communication intercomprehension, adhesion between the partners, impartiality and accountability normal argument. Communicational activity always presupposes that the other is a person and should be treated as such, on this moral basis is possible circumscription of what is true for everyone - so for a principle of universalization - through dialogue and responsible debate, "communicational activity occurs because actors provide support to projects inside action and not tend toward their respective goals than on the sole condition that exists or can be a ready understanding of the situation and expected conditions, thus tending<sup>3</sup> to intersubjective validity.

Responsibility includes a subjective dimension (set in and awareness of consequences, often accompanied by feelings of guilt printed education) and an objective component (completed social assessment made by another man, public opinion, justice etc. Therefore - Jean-Marie Domenach opines - responsibility is graduated into three themes present, for example, the English vocabulary: Responsible - when someone is recognized as the author of an act, has a task delegation and may be punished in case of weakness; accountable - for those who must give an account of the mission with which he was responsible for the acts committed, answerable - the responsibility for something that has been entrusted, and had to have it in security). Nature itself must fall under our responsibility, to the extent that modern techniques promises were reversed threats. Submission of nature for human welfare, brought about the success so far its largest - that way, and enrollment - contempt for human beings, the exercise of this power is not compelling has no historical equivalent, all inherited wisdom about right conduct has been deleted: "no traditional theory - H. Jonas shows - so we learn about the rules" good "and" evil "which must be fully subject to arrangements of power and its possible creation. Field's new collective practice in which we introduced as a leading technology (target) is still a virgin field of ethical theory."<sup>4</sup> In such contexts Domenach's argument is legitimate: civilizing "nature is not a matter of law, but the foundation and condition of any entity. This solidarity was paramount obscured by centuries of a culture which, in its Christian aspect, and its rationalist

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 133-134.

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Morale et communication*, Cerf, 1986, p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Jonas, *Le Principe responsabilité*, Ed du Cerf, 1990, p. 13.

terms, exalts the earth conquest, mastery and progress. Nature remains, but as a symbolic protest in the form of poetry and the novel. However, here she comes back as an awareness of threatened life. In the climate of anxiety that results from this, it would be dangerous to oppose the myth: Nature to the Technical Debt to Life."<sup>1</sup>

In a similar referential, Hans Jonas refuses utopianism scientist type, technology or policy, focusing on sober analysis of the human condition in contemporary civilization and recognition of structural ambiguity, constitutive of human nature. Starting from the Kantian principle of individual integrity and privacy, Jonas makes a categorical imperative corresponding to fragile humanity, anxiety seems to be the subject of current technologies, "so that the consequences of your acts are compatible with sustaining a genuine human life on earth" effects of individual acts "is not destructive to the future possibility of such a life", so "do not compromise the conditions for the indefinite survival of humanity on earth", "includes your choice of current human integrity of the object under your will"<sup>2</sup>. It is however clear that, if not undertaken / applied individually and institutionally managed, these remain mere fictions moral imperative. Karl-Otto Apel is not accidentally referring to the paradox of analyzing the current situation of human biosphere in terms of a dilemma: on the one hand, the necessity / urgency of having an ethic of solidarity and of responsibility, the power of requirement / intersubjective debt for all mankind, and, on the other hand, rational foundation of intersubjectively, ethically valid - which seems impossible, because it can not axiologically pertain to neutrality and, therefore, it is likely to be treated as mere ideology, suspicion, therefore, bias / biased.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Marie Domenach, *La responsabilité. Essai sur le fondement du civisme*, Paris, Hatier, 1994, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Jonas, *Le Principe responsabilité*, ed. cit., pp. 30, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Karl-Otto Apel, *Discussion et responsabilité, vol. I*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996, p. 134.