Truthfulness from a transcendental-pragmatic point of view

by Dorothea Apel

Germany, 2017

Abstract

Discourse ethics of Apelian provenance provides ultimate justified (K.-O. Apel) norms. Against their binding power however, following can apparently be criticised:

1. **Ultimate justified norms** appear to be true only for those who already feel bound by discourse.
2. Theoretical **ultimate justification** of discourse norms cannot demonstrate where motivation for the individual should derive from in order to abide by these norms.
3. Furthermore, it cannot be demonstrated how a person should know how to fulfil these norms, especially when, as Apel himself admits, contextual conditions for reciprocal observance of norms is not given and hence unilateral abidance is not reasonable.

Invalidation of all three points is indeed already inherent in the concept of **ultimate justification**. However, I argue that through introduction of a transcendental-pragmatic redetermination of **truthfulness**, these points of criticism can be refuted yet even more decidedly.

The foundation of my thesis states that **truthfulness** of a speaker is not a validity claim through which a speaker imposes a claim expressing its subjective sensations as effectively experienced – as assumed by Habermas and Apel – but rather that **truthfulness** is the presupposition with which the speaker fulfils the norms of argumentative discourse (K.-O. Apel) and consensually oriented speech (J. Habermas).

More precisely, my thesis claims that the salient characteristic of this presupposition of **truthfulness** lies in a twofold, hitherto unnoticed, peculiarity:

Firstly, **truthfulness** is the sole presupposition which the competent speaker, at any time and with certainty, can catch up with.

And secondly, this possible infallibility of the speaker in his **truthfulness** is at the same time a necessity. Since **truthfulness** is the presupposition with which the speaker raises validity claims in regards catching up on all counterfactual, ideal but non-circumventable presuppositions of argumentative discourse and consensually oriented speech acts and acts.

One could say that catch up with **truthfulness** is the practical equivalent of theoretical knowledge to the effect that discourse is non-circumventible for the rational speaker and hence presuppositional norms of discourse are non-circumventable.

Thus, it can be said that each rational competent speaker in its **truthfulness** has inasmuch always already acknowledged the self-catching-up of reflective ultimate justification.

Conversely, what is self-caught-up through reflective knowledge of ultimate justification is nothing but **truthfulness** of one’s own speech.

Thus, with afore introduced concept of **truthfulness** with which a speaker in all certainty at any time can catch up, one can now object against above outlined points of criticism:
1. It enables to reinforce that norms of discourse do not require explicit decision by discourse itself, but is true for any rational and competent speaker who means anything truthful.
2. Motivation to catch up with these norms is already built into the linguistically constituted “conscience” of any rational competent speaker.
3. Since norms of argumentative, consensually oriented speech are caught up in truthfulness of speech, the competent speaker knows how to catch up with these norms.