Truthfulness as self-responsibility towards co-responsibility

by Dorothea Apel

Germany, 2017

Abstract

In my first speech I discussed my thesis from a theoretical point of view. Subsequently, in this second speech, I shall expand on my thoughts in respect of practical implications thereof.

The thesis of my first speech posited 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).

Furthermore, I posited that truthfulness is the sole presupposition which the competent speaker, at any time and with certainty, can catch up with.

Applying this concept of truthfulness, I explore the question as to how far a rational person can be held morally responsible for its own actions, referencing Hannah Arendt’s question in “Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil”.

By trying to answer this question, I would like to demonstrate that at the level of justification of one’s own actions, any rational competent speaker has the duty to justify its speech acts and acts truthfully. This also implies, however, that every rational speaker has to take self-responsibility towards co-responsibility, together with all other co-speakers and towards any other people concerned, even those who are only affected potentially. Thus, due to the possibility of truthfulness in justification, any rational person can be held morally responsible for its own actions; precisely because truthfulness is the sole presupposition which the competent speaker, at any time and with certainty, can catch up with.