

Absolute Imperatives of Rationality in Transcendental Pragmatics and Communication Theory

Diana Gasparyan

National Research University Higher School of Economics,
20 Myasnitskaya Str. 101001 Moscow, Russia

Abstract: In this article I am offering some critical comments on two of the most important programs of modern social and political philosophy: transcendental pragmatics and communication theory. These considerations will cover two main problems: justification of rational prerequisites of activities, that would be common and universal for all of humanity and universal and transparent communication, that is common for all representatives of intersubjective commonality. The first problem is the difficulty of removing the fundamental contradiction between "ones" and "someone else's" and the second is the difficulty of simulation of communication unity, that despite its universality, may serve as different packages of values.

Key words: Social and political philosophy • Transcendental pragmatics • Communication theory

INTRODUCTION

The leading representatives of social and philosophical thought are clearly traced back to Kant and it was his *philosophy of judgment*, from which all necessary methodological resources for building various theories of communication are successfully extracted [1]. However, it is worth mentioning another reason why theoretical sociology appeals to practical philosophy of Kant. This factor could be called political. The gist of it is that from the discussions of the 80s to the present, the legacy of Kant has been seen as a *reasonable* alternative to the dialectical programs, namely Hegelianism and Marxism that for a long time have been the intellectual vanguard of social sciences. To a great extent, this is due to the fact that following to, in particular K. Popper, the dialectical concepts of history are often accused of unethical. Such charges are provoked at least by historic process, which according to Hegel is structured by "cunning of the World Reason", hiding an even more cunning, the truth that in the end, any historical event can be vindicated, as well as any crime against history or in the name of history can be declared the law and necessity, or in Marx's terms, the result of an objective view of history [2]. Consequently, where the principle of a historical selection works automatically, the subjects are exempt from the burden of responsibility for the duty

to judge and thus cease to be subjects. It is this ability to make moral judgments that the revival of transcendental philosophy hopes to reanimate. Two prominent theorists of our time Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas put this intention into the base of their research projects.

In this article, I will consider some aspects of these programs. At that, I will make an attempt to analyze the following problems: 1. the question of rational prerequisites of action that are common for all members of humanity and therefore, as it seems, resolving the fundamental contradiction of the extended mind ("ones" and "other") and 2. the question on communication or "communicative action" as a possibility of positive rather than negative (dialectical) relationship to the world of social and historic fact.

The Main Part: First, we will show that modern social theories oriented to the primacy of rationality are largely the reception of "practical reason" of Kant, who lays intellect into the basis of any practice. Transcendental and pragmatic philosophy and socially oriented neo Kantianism are based on an unconditional assumption of rational, fusing any positive activity. Kantian cognitivism in social matters is based on his normative view that knowledge requires universality and necessity and on the related position that practical theory requires knowledge. The action that is not lighted by intellect is either

meaningless or destructive. For instance, Kant's "Critique of Judgment" is in a sense the first *communication theory*. The ability of human beings to communicate is not always theoretically explainable but practically it is a fact. Apart from being a fact it is also some idea, which essence is that every agent of speech addressing his message to another agent is based on the prerequisite of possible successful communication. Accordingly, the counterparty can understand him provided that its formulation meets the standards of logic and rhetoric of communication. Kant calls these norms "allegations of common sense". He distinguishes three allegations: 1. allegation of prejudice free thinking ("independent thinking"); 2. allegation of extended thinking ("to think putting oneself to someone else's place"); 3. allegation of consistent thinking ("always think in accordance with oneself" [3]. The second statement, as we see, is a transcendental version of extended rationality that, however, for the thought tempted by dialectics is merely reduplication (replication) of ratio and is deemed repressive. However it is this version (Kantian's) that is applied by contemporary researchers to reconstruct the rationalist philosophy as capable to explain the nature of society. Rationality is defined in this case not as an ability to reach obvious truths, but as the ability to communicate. The action is equally effective and successful to the extent, at which it is rationally built or correlated with the requirements of intellect. In this sense, the categorical imperative is a conclusion of the analytically solved problem, the prescription to verify someone's deeds with the majority may be formulated without reference to a particular social life. Then, the mind guiding the practice of operating subjects is the main guarantor of accordance to the law and optimality of deeds. This approach is to a great extent preserved by modern socially oriented neo Kantianism [4].

So, in his justification of productive power of communication Habermas is based on *the Apel's theory of transcendental pragmatics*: the speech affirms itself through its own performative acts. Apart from them there are no competent instances that are destined to support the arguments. And that's also why the speech is devoid of repression; in the discourse of argumentation there are structures of such speech situation that can neutralize the effects of repressiveness and inequality [5].

The followers of such transcendental pragmatics devote a large part of their works to the problems of communication especially because they hope to find there the counterbalance to two extremes of "dialectical" version of the order: either the irrationality of private

interest or dictatorship of administrative power. So, in this way Habermas uses the key notion of "*public*", around which the sphere of research, which is the most important for socio-philosophical thought, has been organized from the beginning of the 60ies and until recently [6]. The analytical mind, as opposed to dialectical reason, is structured dualistically, that means that the original coordinates of its possible location is preset by pairs of oppositions. These are the prerequisites that are followed by transcendental pragmatics since social order in it is understood in the light of the opposition: "private/public". Further, it is "public" and in a more specific sense "community" becomes an independent subject of analysis. For civil society the fundamental is separation between, first of all, private and public, as well between society and state. But this means that within the public (non-private) sphere the important disengagement and confrontation appear. The "public authority", first of all the power of the state, is opposed to the public that is not directly involved in the performance of governmental functions. This is the point of growth, where free unofficial critical "public" is analyzed by modern pragmatists especially carefully. The very position, as it is easy to notice, is directly opposite to the concepts that, sprouting out of Hegelian absolutism, express the known skepticism about critical opposition. According to a number of post-Hegelian programs the production of critical discourse can not develop an indeterminate language for world description and to speak in the space of sovereign speech breaking off relations with authorities [7]. However, Habermas and Apel, for example, are rather optimistic in this issue – for real deterrence of negative influences of private interests and authoritarian and totalitarian pretensions of power the civilized democratic structures were established. Among them there are structures of civil society, i.e. nongovernmental public associations, where Habermas distinguishes informal unofficial mobile structures of "public", which in his opinion successfully cope with induction of critical senses [8].

Two-volume work of Habermas "Theory of communicative action" published in the beginning of the 80ies continuing and developing the concept of "public" is a theory uniting rationality and activity, being a kind of modern critical (in post-Kantian sense) version of "intellect and rationalization sociology". The efforts were centered on one more opposition – differentiation or, more correctly, contraposition of *instrumental and communicative action*. The embodiment of instrumental action is the sphere of labor. In such opposition we can

trace the intention to bind the Hegelian idea on subjects' activities with instrumental action deriving two distinctive features of instrumental action – orientation to success and transformation of givenness (labor and struggle). When performing an instrumental action in accordance with the criterion of efficiency and control over reality, the forecasts related to the consequences of this action are realized. The communicative action is understood as such interaction of at least two individuals that is ordered according to the norms accepted as obligatory [5]. If the instrumental action is oriented to success almost in Hegelian sense, then the communicative action is oriented to the understanding between the operating individuals, the consensus. Hence, the instrumental and communicative rationalities may be distinguished. The notion of instrumental rationality is found already in Max Weber. It should be noted that at that, action typology was significantly transformed in the 20th century. So for transcendental pragmatics of the 60ies, the main pair of notions was the above mentioned instrumental and communicative types of action. Later Habermas, using already somewhat different criteria for differentiation, distinguished the following four types: strategic, norm-regulating and expressive (dramatic) and communicative action. At that, strategic concept includes instrumental and “proper strategic” action [5]. Orientation to success and usage of means meeting the set objectives remain the general distinctive signs. But now the purely instrumental action is in accordance with the approach to human's action, where the material, instrumental and pragmatic criteria are set foremost and social context and coordinates remain out of context. The strategic action in a proper (narrow) sense is what centers social interaction between people, processes of solution and rational choice. In communicative action, as beforehand, the focus of agents was on mutual understanding, search for consensus and overcoming of difficulties.

The following important stage in developing the concept of transcendental pragmatics was investigation of action types in relation to respective types of rationality. Based on Weber concept of “rationalization” (elimination of religious and mythological pictures of the world) we may perform “desubstantialization” and “demythologization” of intellect first of all in the struggle with the concepts of Hegelian type [9]. However, in the struggle with substantialism the transcendental pragmatics is not ready to sacrifice the gains of traditional rationalism. The problem is rather the salvation of intellect. Any progress of traditional rationalism either toward the development of action theory, or toward

activeness and sovereignty of actors – individuals and towards investigation of interaction, intersubjectivity, i.e. cognitive moral and practical, socio-historical aspects of human interaction, are taken into account. Final objective of transcendental pragmatics is in interlacing of “activity approach”, in investigation of intellect as specific rationality of activity and in investigation of particular intersubjective, communicative measurements of being.

For supporters of transcendental pragmatics and communicative action, as for Kant, the right actions are based on the truth, since according to the line of arguments that goes back to antiquity (Socrates), the good proceeds from the truth. Kant builds his moral theory, considering the rational behavior of autonomous subject generalizing the principle determining this behavior [10]. If the idea is universal and if it is potentially suitable to everyone, it should be accepted as a principle of action for all rational beings [11]. This is why Kant's procedure is related to the fact that is right *in general*, rather that with what is useful to everyone. In contrast to Kant the transcendental pragmatics and communication theory hope to justify ethics based on the dialogue or consensus, where rational consensus replaces the categorical imperative. In communication theory the just is understood as useful, but not quite in the utilitarian sense. The point is that we can accept the norms as justified only if others, who consider all kinds of possible consequences, can accept them as such. Such an approach is based on the principle of rational consensus, where the process of solving the utilitarian component is important, but not in a selfish and altruistic sense.

So, despite the fact that transcendental pragmatics partly inherits the Frankfurt School, namely its critical spirit, it remains a defender of rationality, against which the other members of this school opposed [4]. Habermas and Apel share the critique of instrumental reason, but keep distance from the dialectical rationality. This distance, not in the least, means that the relationship to the world is determined not by a negative, but on the contrary a positive mode built through communication. The ratio of the character to the world relates to its relationship to other people, especially with such an important factor, as the processes of "speaking", speech, expression of certain linguistic proposals and hearing of counteragents of activity. This in turn, results in the conclusion that the concept of communicative action requires to consider actors as speaking and listening subjects that simultaneously highlight certain claims to the significance of what they say, think and what they believe. Therefore, the ratio of individual subjects to the

world is always mediated and related by the opportunities to communicate with other people and their disputes and the ability to reach an agreement. These claims on the importance (and the related processes of recognition – non-recognition) are proposed and realized in the process of discourse.

However, Hegel's famous setting of the 20th century "attitude to the world is realized through the world denial" is subjected to a separate analysis of transcendental pragmatics. In his work "The Philosophical Discourse on Modern" Habermas in general paints a picture of philosophic possibilities of rationality that opened for the intellect after the death of Hegel [6]. However, he identifies three main branches, which are graded according to the motivation of the critics of our time: Old (right) Hegelians reject the modern world because of remaining and worsening problems of alienation, lack of integrity and consolidation of society, mechanistic, technocratic and atomized fragmentation of ratiom, Young Hegelians (left) do not accept this, because, in their opinion, the true accession of intellect has not yet come, the world is too irrational and finally, Habermas distinguishes the third branch (post-Nietzsche), which can be briefly described by Nietzsche's aphorism: "We logicalized the world to explain it". This is the last direction, to which Habermas refers primarily Foucault and Derrida and Bataille, then guiding by the following consideration: the reality should be criticized, not because it lacks rationality, but because it is over-rational [6]. This third branch is the most consistent with the concept of extended rationality: if rationality appears as a totality, then nothing can be opposed to it, it blocks the critical mechanisms and becomes dangerous in its invulnerability. This interpretation of dialectical rationality was accepted by many critics of Hegelianism in the 20th century [4]. It is likely that Habermas opposes to a meaningful name of this last variant of Hegel's philosophy reading. But in reality his objection only reproduces the argument that this is part of the concept of rational totalization. This objection states that the critical arguments against intellect should be reasonably arranged, otherwise they will lose their active force, but if they are rational, then, they are fighting against themselves. As such, the critical argument of Habermas seems to be doubtless, but it misses a very important aspect. This omission is a key for Habermas and in particular, for Apel, because it structures the theory of the "forced" the rationality of the actors. Both theorists are convinced that, in order to oppose the intellect, the opponent must engage in rational communication (always and already rationally aligned)

and thereby become a member, not the opponent (dangerous, at least). The famous "performative paradox" of K.-O. Apel is in favor of this mechanism; it designed to justify its transcendental-pragmatic approach. The performative paradox in transcendental pragmatics is that I do not indulge in real contradiction with myself, that I can neither argue, nor at the same time justify deductively without formal pragmatic presuppositions of argumentation, which always has to be recognized so that the argumentative language game could retain its meaning [12].

The essence of the transcendental-pragmatic approach is that universal principles can not be deduced, as they are the conditions rather than the results of the system deductions. That is why they can not be left out - being only formal, they can not be formalized. Just at this point the "omission", which we have mentioned above, is localized. Its meaning is that the submitted evidence is self-substantiation, as pronounced in the name of reason. Folly is either devoid of its own language [7], or agrees with the arguments of rationality, not because it is a rational game and has already agreed with the precepts of logic, but because it is always playing the game. The rules of this game are not subject to a simplified version of illogicality, where "no" serves as a "yes" and vice versa. Its trick is that it is no different from the formal rationality, it just does not want to obey its political imperatives and in this first disobedience the mismatch of logic and politics can be disclosed - the truth that hides the power. Rationality is a formal rather than meaningful education. The very transcendental pragmatics agrees with this. But its supporters believe that this fact is enough to make a rational universal and communication - understandable to all participants. However, this is not the case, since we can act rationally to achieve irrational goals, or use a form of intelligence to justify the irrational forms of beliefs - beliefs or prejudices. Rational may serve to our unconsciousness (principle of rationalization) and the unconscious can carry anything: conflicting desires, destructive impulses, irrational motives, etc. [13]. Irrationality (folly) can not be reduced to a breach of the Spotless Mind, it can be completely indistinguishable from rationality in the form and means of expression - its difference lies at the level of goals and objectives, i.e. strategic content. But can a strategy be irrational? Whether we are dealing with a situation, where as a result of the struggle of ideologies and as a consequence rationalities, one of them seizes power by proclaiming itself the only true carrier of rationality? The answer of the supporters of transcendental pragmatics to

this question is no. According to their logic, normal communication complies with the following rules: it is impossible to criticize (the arguments put forward against reason) and speak on behalf of something other than reason [5]. But it is easy to see that in this argument, its supporters from the start do not go beyond a rational discourse and, in addition, try to speak in the name of reason. This, in turn, leads to two problems.

The first problem is that the thematization of intellect as an object requires indicating some out-of-reason area, which can be addressed to the experience of the mind on a meta-descriptive terms. The second problem is the opposite claim – it is impossible to leave the area of the reason, not even to mention the fact that if that happened, we would have nothing to prove. Here it is a statement of Habermas that contains impossible combination of the first difficulty with the second one; it, first of all, speaks of the mind (in its limits) and, secondly, asserts its totality (the inability to go beyond its limits.) However, it is this contradiction that remains a kind of "blind spot" in the theory of transcendental pragmatics, as this is the "opacity" that organizes the integrity of this discourse.

The belief of rationalists is that, in their opinion, in the mind of every individual there is a universal communicative vocabulary, the same for all sentient beings, that should be used in the preparation of management solutions. It is this vocabulary that will be in the public opinion, freely generating in the process of communication between personalities. In such circumstances, the philosopher must explicate the vocabulary of the human mind and ensure the correctness of its use in discussions.

Proponents of transcendental pragmatics believe in the ideal of a universal, transparent communication for all members of the intersubjective community. When Habermas uses the concept of "subject", for all reservations and clarifications he still has in mind the classical subject of transcendental reflection, because it is ready to abandon the fundamental properties of the subject, namely: 1. the ability to be part of the universal community (universal ethical principles to practice and considering them good) and 2. the ability to be one and indivisible integrity and to coincide with itself. However, these properties are taken more for granted and can be challenged. But then it is not so much important as the surface communication flows - even if it succeeds in eliminating the external contradictions, the contradiction arises much earlier, at the internal structure of the subject, whose "subjectivity" is undermined by the inclusion of the principle of opacity and, the subject's inability to relate to himself without irreflexive balance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can say the following. In the transcendental pragmatics universality of the transcendental subject is obviously given on the ownership of all agents to the base of transcendence. However, this provision does not consider one important inferential consequence, namely that, to which post-Kantian history of philosophical thought has inevitably come. That elevation of the subject, that starts with Descartes and reaches its apotheosis in Hegel, referring to the absolute, finds some difficulty. This difficulty relates to such absolutized subject or subjectivated absolute necessarily implies dominance, sovereignty and autonomy - the trinity of its consistent existence. Main condition of existence of such subject is unconditional solitude, which means in practice its *absolute domination*. If the absurdity of existence of more than one absolute is obvious, then in relation to the subject it is not obvious. If in the event of a second occurrence of the absolute both appear to be disqualified, then for the subject, his claim for unlimited sovereignty, not violated by meeting with similar in kind, results, at least, in the situation not compatible with the real one, where the set of empirical subjects are carriers of finite minds.

But then, what the proponents of transcendental pragmatics and communicative action state, namely, that the subjects are initially united by universal understanding of the good, rationality and communication, can make sense only in relation to one of the absolute subject, or recognizing their diversity, they will have to be deprived of absoluteness and, hence, understanding of a single good. And if we assume that the appearance of a universal subject should serve the "public", we find that this public is the very majority against the minority.

REFERENCES

1. Searle, J.R., 2010. Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization. Oxford University Press, USA.
2. Popper, R.K., 1971. The Open Society and Its Enemies, Vol. 2: Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath. Princeton University Press.
3. Kant, I., 2001. Critique of the Power of Judgment (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant). Cambridge University Press.
4. Ryan, I., 1982. Marxism and Deconstruction: A Crit. Articulation. Baltimore, XIX, pp: 232.

5. Habermas, J., 2001. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action: Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought)*. The MIT Press.
6. Habermas, J., 1990. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought)*. The MIT Press.
7. Foucault, M., 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Sel. interv. a. other writings, 1972- 1977*. Ed. with an afterword by Gordon C. N.Y. XII, pp: 200.
8. Habermas, J., 1985. *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Beacon Press.
9. Norton, A., 1998. *Reflections on Political Identity*. Baltimore.
10. Apel, K.O., Eduardo Mendieta, Karl-Otto Apel, 1996. *Selected Essays: Ethics and the Theory of Rationality*. Prometheus Books.
11. Scott, A. and Karl-Otto Apel, 1983. *Foundation of a non-positivist sociology*. University of Leeds.
12. Apel, K.O., 1984. *Understanding and Explanation: A Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought)*. The MIT Press.
13. Freud, S., 1990. *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (The Standard Edition) (Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud)*. W. W. Norton & Company.