

Problems concerning Grounding of Ethics of Responsibility: A Consideration of K.-O. Apel's Criticism toward Hans Jonas

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Abstract

Is a rational grounding for ethics of responsibility possible? The author of this paper examines Apel's discourse ethics as an attempt to answer this question. A rational foundation of universal ethics of responsibility beyond different moral values and various cultures is one of the important problems today. Because the influences of activities of human beings have come to a global scale and they are sometimes unpredictable by the developments of modern technology. The moral philosophical justification of the survival of humankind is now an issue in this critical situation. In this regard we take the moral status of future generations into our consideration.

According to Apel's transcendental pragmatics, all assertions presuppose speech community that consists of participants of the discussion. From the view point of his pragmatics, a speech that involves so called performative contradiction makes the discussion impossible. Therein Apel finds basic moral norms of both the procedure of the rational discourse and a foundation of ethics of responsibility. In other words, norms of pragmatics that we must follow so as to make our discussion possible, gives a foundation of the ethics of responsibility at the same time.

The foundation of ethics of responsibility by Apel's discourse ethics has an advantage; it can invalidate the refutation of its opponents as critical rationalist by pointing out their performative contradiction. In this respect, the first and preliminary task of this paper is to confirm this strong point of Apel's counterargument against critical rationalism by pointing out that anti-foundationalism of his critical rationalism falls into a performative contradiction. It can clarify a persuasive aspect of ethics of responsibility of Apel.

Second issue is to elucidate the rational foundation of ethics of responsibility by Apel's discourse ethics in connection with the problems of the intergenerational ethics, especially in terms of the responsibility for future generation represented by Hans Jonas. The reason for it is; the question here is about whom we must reckon as participants of the discussion as to ethical matters of technological or environmental problems.

While Jonas's principle of responsibility is traced back to emotional and one-sided relationships as that of parents with their children, Apel makes clear the potential reciprocity of such parenthood. From this he can deduce that future generations are also partners of the ideal speech community. Finally I would like to consider this difference between Apel's discourse ethics and ethics of responsibility of Hans Jonas.