
ЭПИСТЕМОЛОГИЯ И ФИЛОСОФИЯ НАУКИ

WHAT MAKES «COMMUNICATION» POSSIBLE?*

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The article presents sufficient space for a thorough analysis of the conceptual issues of the “Communicative Programme” (the **CP**) developed by E. Husserl, L. Wittgenstein, K.-O. Apel, and J. Habermas who attached great importance to the fundamental role of “communication” in epistemological justification.

The CP analysis carried out in the article is based on a number of models worked out to provide insight into the following two arguments of the CP proponents: 1) the CP statements are justified through their universal validity; 2) “There is no pure individual in the communicative society (**CS**)”. It is demonstrated that the former argument leads to a vicious circle, while the latter one — heads to overt absurdity in terms of logic.

Key words: communication, communicative program, vicious circle, Husserl, Wittgenstein, Apel, Habermas.

1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “Philosophical Investigations” and his concept of “language-games” (1) was a natural response to the program of logical positivism striving to build a universal and logically strict scientific language. This logically “strict” field — the artificially constructed languages of various semantics — seemed to have lost its essential difference from the “nonrigorous” humanities and arts. Could that have really been so? Karl-Otto Apel believed it could, and Wittgenstein backed it up with sound conceptual grounds.

Wittgenstein’s favourite illustration repeated throughout his “Philosophical Investigations” — that of the reasoning on “colours” — is strongly allusive of Edmond Husserl’s argumentation in his “Logische Untersuchungen” [4], as he aimed at justifying the “semantic unity of notion” and the “identity of propositions content”. What

* Работа выполнена при поддержке РГНФ(проект № 10-03-00085a).

propositions? Those about “colours” (“what is green, is not red”) and those about the Euclidean geometry (“the total of a triangle angles equals 180 degrees ” etc). Of course, Husserl meant the *ideal* semantic unity and the *ideal* identity of content. The thing is that the truth, according to Husserl, has an ideal nature and reveals itself “as an idea grasping the essence of empirically random acts, or as the idea of absolute adequacy as such” [4. S. 123]. But this ideal nature itself needs justification. What could have served for this? In Husserl’s eyes, it might have been provided by the “intersubjective program” designed to bring to light the ideal nature of notions and assertions; he describes it in his work “*Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität*” [3]. Yet, this ideal nature is seen only if we admit the existence of the transcendental subject (Ego), and in such a way that it could be proliferated: seen as a multitude of subjects — the “inter-subject”. Husserl claims that “to reveal methodically the transcendental intersubjectivity and its turning into the transcendental community, — is possible only proceeding from the concept of Ego and the system of its transcendental functions and actions” [3. S. 189].

However, Husserl’s intersubjective program itself faced with serious difficulties. Thus, we can construct a model of “one single subject” who, as “*one — ἐνός*” and as having his “*foundation — αρχή*” in himself can be differentiated as and be given the name of *Enarch*. As I have already demonstrated [6], in this case, it is *not necessary* to turn to a *multitude of subjects* for the justification of the ideal unity of notion or of the propositions of colours and Euclidean geometry.

Apel points out another difficulty. He proceeds from the fact that a program based upon the “obviousness of consciousness”, represented, in his opinion, by Descartes, Kant and even Husserl, has exhausted itself and proved insufficient for “justifying the significance of ‘cognition’ — which is manifest, for example, in the a priori significance of the Euclidean geometry in a Kantian mood, or the so-called *Farbsätze* in the mood of Husserl. Why is this so? In Apel’s opinion, such “phenomenological and cognitive-anthropological statement is based on the ordinary visual obviousness of individual phenomena” [1. S. 2]. In other words, each one, *compos mentis*, contemplates the world as Euclidean and as having appropriate colours. We can think of non-Euclidean metric, or of some principally different combinations of colours, but we cannot visualise such things!

This shortcoming of the aprioristic and phenomenological approaches should be overcome: “It is exactly because of this that the justification of the Euclidean geometry or the *Farbsätze* intersubjective significance is insufficient here” [1. S. 2]. Such a justification, Apel believes, demands that obvious visualization should go together with a kind of “language-game”. This means that ordinary individual visualization should be “raised” above the individual to the transcendental level. How can this be achieved? Only in a special “communicative-semantic field” where “my personal obviousness” is combined with the “common significance for us”. Thus, Apel corrects Kant and Husserl as his follower, replacing the “apperception synthesis” by the “*communicative interpretation synthesis*”. This was the turning point from the “consciousness analysis” to the “communication analysis”.

The thing is that, within the scope of reasoning, — however doubtful and skeptical the polemist himself might be — it is he who sets the “transcendental premises” and at the same time, acknowledges them: both for epistemology and for a science *on the lines of a transcendental language-game* of an unlimited communicative society. Wittgenstein, too, speaks on the common (communicative) linguistic “behavior” in his *“Philosophical Investigations”*: “206. The common behavior of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language” [7].

Apel supposes that the path should be leading from Kant’s “transcendental idealism” and Husserl’s phenomenology — through the synthesis of later Wittgenstein’s “language-games” and Charles Pierce’s “indefinite community of investigators” — to his own “transcendental pragmatics”. In such “transcendental communicative society”, the truth is understood in the following way: “*any obviousness of consideration* is stated due to the linguistic understanding of a proposition *a priori significant for us*, and may further retain its meaning in the conventional theory of truth (in Sinne Kon-sens-Theorie der Wahrheit) as an *a priori* bound knowledge” [1. S. 3]. It is so because, in communication, the transcendental core of any individual *ego* coincides with the transcendental core of the *entire society of the participants of communication*, both real and possible.

What does Apel need this synthesis for? He sees it as the only way to overcome, on the one hand, the centuries-old chasm between the “sciences about the spiritual matters” and “sciences about the nature”, and on the other hand, to transcend the Cartesian and Kantian tradition of the “subject-object” dissection of the world when describing. He considers it to be possible in a special field that he calls “transcendental pragmatics”. What does it actually mean? It means that in both spiritual and natural kinds of sciences we have to deal with the same absolutely unavoidable procedures — “interpreting” and “understanding” in the frames of a “transcendental communicative society”. And he adds: when all claims of the “language of propositional calculus” for the role of the unique language of science have failed, that is, after there have emerged new constructive semantic systems — this “strict” field does no longer differ essentially from the “non-rigorous” spiritual sciences.

So, we can see that certain “communicative expectations” were invariably inherent in Husserl’s, Wittgenstein’s, and Apel’s philosophies. This provokes a question: is the “communicative program of knowledge justification” really so substantial?

To answer I am going to examine this program only in one of its bearings: how the *validity of judgements* can be made good in its frames? It has been shown above that Husserl associates validity with the identity of a notion’s semantic unity for different transcendental subjects. Wittgenstein doubts the very status of “identity” as such, preferring the “comparison of equality” instead (2): “254. The substitution of ‘identical’ for ‘the same’ (for instance) is another typical expedient in philosophy” [7].

For Apel it is the “statements *a priori* significant for us”, based, in the final analysis, upon the *conventional theory of truth*. In other words, for the CP representatives, the sign of a statement trustworthiness is its validity. Here, in my view, communicative expectations encounter a grave difficulty.

2. CRUCIAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST COMMUNICATIVE PROGRAM

2.1. First argument: Vicious circle in justification of epistemological validity

2.1.1. A distinction between logical and epistemological validity

To analyse “intersubjectivity” attained in communication, let us introduce some designations, to help us make clear its logical and epistemological structure.

Step 1. The variables $x_1, x_2, x_3, \dots, x_n$ are introduced to designate certain classes of theoretical models.

Step 2. A set of subjects of epistemology is introduced, designated by the symbols $A_1, A_2, A_3, \dots, A_m$.

As we presuppose that different subjects, like $A_1, A_2, A_3, \dots, A_m$, understand propositions of theoretical models $x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n$ in an identical way, that is, that the *meanings* inherent in the objects described by propositions $x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n$ fully coincide, let us agree that

Step 3. there is a “one-to-one correspondence (OOC) of meanings of the propositions $x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n$ for all subjects $A_1, A_2, A_3, \dots, A_m$. Let us describe this correspondence as an equivalence, which will result in the following expression:

$$[I] A_1(x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n) \leftrightarrow A_2(x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n) \leftrightarrow \dots \leftrightarrow A_m(x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n).$$

where symbol « \leftrightarrow » means logical equivalency.

Step 4. Satisfiability of such OOC is what we shall call the “*intersubjective justification*” of the propositions $x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n$.

In other words, when there is a OOC in understanding of the propositions meanings in all explanatory models — then we can speak of achieving the “*intersubjective justification*” for these models.

Step 5. On the grounds of our conclusions to steps 3 and 4 let us agree preliminary to call the correspondence [I] the *epistemological* definition of validity.

An important reservation should be made here: the *epistemological* definition of validity should not be mixed with its *logical* definition as a tautology (an identically true formula).

Having made all these assumptions, we still have to admit that we cannot answer the most important question: can we consider such OOC to be identical with *epistemological validity*? Most likely not! For, e.g., OOC may be applied only to the variables *already* available for the researchers $A_1, A_2, A_3, \dots, A_m$. But there are scientific propositions not included into their scope at the discussed moment, and some more from merely theoretical sphere (e.g., mathematics) having no direct relation to natural sciences. Hence, it is necessary to differentiate between the two types of *epistemological validity*. Let us call them:

1) *Factual epistemological validity (FEV)*. It takes place when validity is applied to a finite set of propositions $x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n$ and a finite quantity of subjects $A_1, A_2, A_3, \dots, A_m$ in sense [I].

2) *Analytical epistemological validity (AEV)*. In this case validity is applied to any preset proposition $x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n \dots$ and for any possible subjects of discussion $A_1, A_2, A_3, \dots A_m \dots$. Then we have an equivalence of another kind:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{[II]} \quad & A_1(x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n \dots) \leftrightarrow A_2(x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n \dots) \leftrightarrow \\ & \leftrightarrow A_3(x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n \dots) \dots \leftrightarrow A_m(x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots x_n \dots) \leftrightarrow \dots \end{aligned}$$

Let's take an example of FEV. Think of “phlogiston” as a special state of matter able to transfer heat. Its existence had validity for S. Carnot and his contemporaries in the sense [I], but then it lost its explanatory meaning. In other words, the notion “phlogiston” falls out of use in the scientific language of thermodynamics. So, it had validity for the 18th — early 19th-century physicists and chemists, but not for today's representatives of the same branches of science.

This means, it can never have validity in sense [II], as being not valid for any preset researcher. Wittgenstein would have simply explained this by different “language-games”. But — think of both principles of thermodynamics, formulated by Carnot on the assumption of phlogiston existence and retaining their scientific value up to now, notwithstanding the linguistic unit “phlogiston” has lost it. So, the nature of validity of the thermodynamics principles is rooted somewhere else. As a matter of fact, AEV can be reached solely *by deduction*. It is simply proved analytically — a thing Carnot did with the use of “the ideal thermal machine” model.

This is why tautologies (laws, identically true formulae) from mathematics, logic, theoretical physics and other analytical spheres of knowledge also belong here.

2.1.2. *The vicious circle in justifying FEV*

Having determined the existence of epistemological validity of two different types, let's ask a question: *On what grounds do we call a proposition justified intersubjectively (communicatively)?* The answer would be the following: *On the grounds of its FEV*. Indeed, the validity of a statement — let it be a proposition from the model x_1 — is made manifest because the statement is used by all participants of the discussion, or simply by the inductive opinion examination of all participants in order to establish the fact of validity:

$$A_1(x_1) \leftrightarrow A_2(x_1) \leftrightarrow A_3(x_1) \dots \leftrightarrow \dots A_m(x_1).$$

Having examined opinions of all participants we give the following answer: the proposition from the model x_1 is *justified intersubjectively (communicatively) because it has FEV*. Of course, we speak here of the enumerative induction. FEV includes a number of subjects of communication (A) as large as it is wished, but finite, and the similarly finite number of models (x) (statements).

If this is really so, we can ask, on what grounds can we claim that a statement *has FEV*?

The answer is: *on the grounds that the statement is justified intersubjectively (literally — that all participants of the discussion understand the discussed propositions (their “meanings”) identically, that is, there is an equivalence at work*. So, we cannot help having it this way: *epistemological validity* is proved through *intersubjectivity (com-*

municativeness), whereas the status of the latter is proved through *epistemological validity*.

We cannot escape a certain vicious circle in any “intersubjectivity” justification. In my opinion, the reason is that, *seeking to prove the intersubjectively interpreted validity* we, actually, deal with the *inductive way of conclusion*. Its main fault — that of the *non demonstrative nature of conclusions* — is extended to the *communicative justification of knowledge*.

As I see it, the problem is rooted in the fact that, within the frame of intersubjective approach, epistemological validity can never be justified because *the very process of intersubjective justification of formal-contentual (such as physical ones) and contentual (e.g., sociological ones) theories, is based on the inductive generalisation instead of deductive conclusion*. A good example here may be getting an intersubjective proof for a registered supernova outburst in different observatories of the world.

If that is the way it is, AEV as including an open class of subjects and statements, cannot be in principle inductively proved. The only way to ground it properly is through deduction — for example, for a certain class of formulae in propositional logic, tautological as they are, etc.

3. SECOND ARGUMENT: IMPOSSIBILITY OF A “PURE INDIVIDUAL”

3.1. Historical remarks

Let us dwell on the argument referring to the impossibility of a “pure individual” and, therefore, of a “monologue”.

The assertion that an “individual” cannot be and is not “pure” as related to the communicative society is equally coherent to both Wittgenstein and Apel and to Habermas.

Wittgenstein asks in his “Investigations on Philosophy” (fragment 199):

“199. Is what we call ‘obeying a rule’ something that it would be possible for only *one* man to do, and to do only *once* in his life? — This is of course a note on the grammar of the expression ‘to obey a rule’.

It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which someone obeyed a rule. It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which a report was made, an order given or understood; and so on”.

The answer is unambiguous: it is impossible! Where then words are “checked” by the rules of a language game? This takes place in ‘practical activities’: “206. *The common behavior of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language* (italics added — A.P.)“ [7]. In terms of this article — it is “communicative society” that is taken as the system of references in this case.

Similar views are expressed also by Apel when he speaks of a communication participant [1. S. 22]. Without this transcendental premise of cognition, the latter, in Apel’s opinion, could not turn into an argument. Neither Kant nor Fichte had realized this and therefore were not able to substantiate cognition satisfactorily. It is important for us to stress Apel’s intention to state the very “identical indistinguishability” of the

cognizing “I” and the transcendental communicative society, practically dissolving that “I” in itself. Taking into consideration the fact that transcendentalism of Kantian consciousness is transformed into the transcendentalism of language, Apel makes the next step: of the “I” being dissolved, when speaking of a subject of science and commenting upon Wittgenstein’s approach [1. S. 20].

Habermas proposes a new program of philosophic thinking changing the subject by CS [2. P. 19].

Any author has the right to express *any* ideas, which, however, does not free him from responsibility. So, it is rather the right of expressing “any consistent ideas”. Here, of course, we should bear in mind that our field of interest is epistemology. So we find it necessary to point out that the epistemological concept denying the very existence of a self-supporting and “independent individual” meets at least with two intrinsic difficulties that we shall express in the form of two theses: the strong and the weak one.

3.1.2. The strong thesis: “a separate individual has nothing that were not a product of a community”

If we assume that there exists a “bound and only bound individual”, who is an entity having nothing in himself/herself except what is produced by a community, then we will have to admit the presence of absurdity. Let me make it clear.

Let’s present the arguments of the communicative program proponents, in respect of the “impossibility of the existence of a pure individual”, in the form of clear-cut categorical judgments. In other words, let us simply build a social-communicative model. It should be noted from the start that even if the modeled conditions are ideal, they correspond, nevertheless, to the essential features of the communicative program and namely to such an extreme case when a human is denied any “extra-communicative individuality” whatsoever.

In a sense, we are building here a model of a “communicative society” stating the basic or, if you wish, the most important conditions of the communicative program. Of course, one cannot expect a model to “fully correspond to the reality” of a communicative society — or, simply stated, — of communicating people. But there is no need in such claim. The task is to make this model reflect the essential features of real communication, without which it is, according to its proponents, impossible.

With this purpose, let us introduce such notions as “communicative society (CS)” and “an individual”. Several preliminary assumptions are necessary:

- a) The notion of “CS” will be taken in its *non-collective* meaning, as *the aggregate of individuals* it consists of.
- b) An “individual” will be understood as an element of this CS, a cognizing and knowing entity.
- c) All other characteristics of a human individual will be left aside.
- d) We can assume both a CS consisting of a large number of individuals, and a CS consisting of one single individual.
- e) “An individual’s characteristics are defined by the CS”, that is, an individual is produced by the society, exists in the CS and hence is its medium.

Having thus introduced the necessary notions and conditions for their interpretation, let us formulate several statements applied to them:

α) a CS consists of individuals.

β) Every individual as a separate entity has nothing in him which were not produced by CS.

The truth of the (α) statement seems obvious for there is no such society that did not consist of individuals. Even in the extreme case — when there is only one individual — this “society” will nevertheless be a nonempty set. On the other hand, there is hardly anybody ready to state that a society does not consist of individuals.

The validity of the (β) statement is not so obvious, though, we have agreed to think that the discussed model, however artificial it were, corresponds to the real state of things in the communicative epistemology. This means that the communicative program proponents are themselves set on the ideal of eliminating all conditions of “monologue nature” or, to use Apel’s wording, of the “methodical solipsism”. What does this mean? For us, it means that any participant of communication must minimize his “individualistic qualities” for the sake of society. Thus, if we ask the communicative program proponents: “why monologue does not exist?”, we will hear in response: “because there are no pure individuals”. And further on: each individual is an Individual solely because he is a product of social relationships (Marx), and a total of communicative acts (Habermas), whose “I” is equal to the transcendental community (Apel). In other words, it is social relationships, actions, values, regulations and standards that speak through the “language of an individual”. It is this interpretation of individual’s nature that is expressed by the (β) statement.

Now, if statements (α) and (β) are valid we can, based upon their content, make the following conclusion:

γ) CS consists of individuals each of which separately does not have anything that were not a result of the society’s actions.

We have obviously come to an absurdity. For, if each separate individual has nothing that would not belong to the “whole CS”, then the “CS” itself must contain “something” that can fill the emptiness of a separate individual. But as the entire CS consists of such “empty” individuals, this “CS of individuals”, interpreted in a non-collective sense, then would be empty too, would contain nothing.

3.1.2.2. The weak thesis “the community is primary and an individual is secondary”

The above said might be argued in such a way that, of course, there are no “pure individuals” having no individuality at all. It is present in everyone, but this individuality is “secondary” as related to the “primary role” of communicative society. Now let us examine this argument of the primary role of communicative society and the secondary place of an individual.

Here two more statements will be formulated:

a) *CS, being primary, consists of individuals, whose individuality is secondary.*

b) *Each individual has an individuality which has nothing transcending the primary qualities that are all results of the CS actions.*

Uniting these two, we come a conclusion:

c) *CS, being primary, consists of individuals having individuality which has nothing transcending the primary qualities that are all results of the CS actions.*

This leads us to absurdity once again. For, if the “individuality” of a separate individual is secondary as related to the “collectivity” of the CS, it means that the whole CS consists of individuals whose individual qualities are secondary as related to the collective qualities of the whole CS. But as we have agreed to interpret CS non-collectively meaning that in the whole CS there can be nothing that is not contained in the aggregate of the “individualities” of its members, it means that the CS itself can have nothing but the “individualities” of the individuals it consists of. If this is so, then no “collective” qualities of CS can be primary as related to “individual” qualities of an individual. Therefore, the thesis of the “primary role of CS as related to the secondary role of an individual” is also false.

Here we must bear in mind that, as we remain within the frames of epistemology, the understanding of the essence of criticism of the above statements may be hindered by the commonplace ideas transferred, by analogy, into the field of epistemology. Let’s take an example.

Imagine a ton-heavy stone lying on a footpath after a hurricane. Of course, no individual, however strong, will be able to move it away from the path. But if fifteen individuals come and try hard together, that is, collectively, *summing up* their efforts, they might succeed. The stone will be moved away not by a separate individual, but by a *community* of individuals, which is in this case a simple sum of physical efforts of separate individuals. A community here is also taken in a non-collective sense: there is nothing but *the sum of abilities of separate individuals*. This is a very simple example of merely mechanical movements in space.

However if we take a more complicated task and “ask” a community — taken again in a non-collective sense — to prove a theorem, to compose a symphony or write a poem, instead of moving a stone — the situation will be different altogether. Even if we sum up the efforts of fifteen individuals *capable of this kind of work* we won’t get the theorem proved, the symphony composed or the poem written. Why? In our opinion, it is because *in the rational sphere* the communicative joining of efforts of separate individuals cannot be looked upon as a simple “sum” of their activities as it is the case in the mechanical sphere.

Based on the above arguments we then come to the following conclusion: *communication in itself adds nothing to what an individual has already had himself.*

It would be naïve to deny the role of communication in transmitting knowledge, in learning or in criticism etc. But stating that communication as such contains in itself something more (or is able to give more) than the aggregation of the communicating individuals has already had, inevitably leads to absurd conclusions described above.

So, we must state serious difficulties in justification of the CP. Of course, the enormous contribution of Husserl, Wittgenstein, Apel and Habermas to the communicative strategy development can hardly be overestimated. Yet, the *expectations* placed in *communication* by the mentioned philosophers and their followers, have proved to

be unreasonably overestimated as compared to the *communicative reality* where the vicious circle described in this paper and the difficulties connected with “a pure individual” are minor faults in comparison with other more serious flaws.

NOTES

- (1) See: [7. § 7].
- (2) “216. ‘A thing is identical with itself.’ — There is no finer example of a useless proposition, which is yet connected with a certain play of the imagination. It is as if in imagination we put a thing into its own shape and saw that it fitted” [7].

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ЧТО ДЕЛАЕТ «КОММУНИКАЦИЮ» ВОЗМОЖНОЙ?

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В данной работе анализируются основные тезисы «коммуникативной программы» (КП), развиваемые в работах Э. Гуссерля, Л. Витгенштейна, К.-О. Апеля, Ю. Хабермаса, возлагающих большие надежды на способность «коммуникации» быть основой эпистемологического обоснования знания. Для анализа КП построено несколько моделей, которые позволили прояснить и реконструировать два ее аргумента: 1) утверждения КП обосновываются через общезначимость; 2) в коммуникативном сообществе не существует «чистых индивидов». Показано, что первое утверждение содержит логический (порочный) круг, а второе логически строго приводит к абсурду.

Ключевые слова: коммуникация, коммуникативная программа, порочный круг, Гуссерль, Витгенштейн, Апель, Хабермас.