

This book assembles some of the results of a sustained interplay between the broadly analytic and pragmatist traditions and traditions in German philosophy and critical theory, with the central aim of outlining a transformation of philosophy along the lines of what the author calls a transcendental pragmatics of language, or a transcendental hermenentics.

Perhaps the guiding theme is a critique of the methodological solipsism which Apel finds presupposed by the unified theory of science, all forms of positivism, certain hermenentic positions relying on empathy as a key concept, and the transcendental theory of consciousness since Kant. Methodological solipsism, briefly, amounts to the view that 'one alone, and only once' can follow a rule, and hence one alone can understand something as something of such-and-such a kind - or, in other words, can employ concepts - which understanding is required for the possibility of any thought. Wittgenstein is naturally important here, being responsible both for the introduction of methodological solipsism into the analytic philosophy of language, and for its supercession, by showing that the use of concepts, the understanding of something as something, is possible only within a social life-form in which agreement in meanings, or participation in a language-game, is embedded.

This is enough to show that the positivist attempt to integrate the social sciences into the programme of unified science cannot succeed; for the grasp of empirical data requires the use of

concepts, and this necessarily presupposes communication between subjects in a language-game, and hence a cognitive interest in understanding others. Social interaction and communication cannot then be reduced to sets of causal relationships between objects (for example, in behaviourism), nor can the cognitive interest in understanding others be treated as merely one empirical psychological datum among others; for these attempts to establish a separation between the subject and its object, in accordance with a cognitive interest in the technical control of the object, always presuppose, in the very use of concepts, the cognitive interest in understanding the other as a communicant; a co-subject rather than an object.

Before bringing on the third in the triad of cognitive interests which Apel shares with Habermas, we need to see how the programme escapes the relativism of those like Winch, who, taking up Wittgenstein's themes, argued that the participation in a language-game required in order to understand a particular social life-form rules out any critical questioning of that life-form. We can understand a society only in its own terms; philosophy leaves everything as it is. Apel argues instead that, rather than take empirically given language-game as the starting-point of philosophy and accept the conservatism that goes with it, we should investigate the necessary conditions of the possibility of any communication, the structure required for any language-game to exist at all. The uncovering of these conditions is the work of a transcendental pragmatics of language. Among the conditions is that a certain notion of communication - which Apel calls the transcendental language-game, and which involves, at least, subjects telling significant

truths to others who are treated as equal members of the community - is a norm for participants in any given language-game. A norm not in that it is statistically the case that this is so (societies exist, as we know, where this does not hold), but in that this notion of communication sets an ideal of what is to be aimed at in social interaction. To illustrate: unless a child implicitly takes its parent to be saying something true and relevant to it, it will not be able to correlate utterances with states of affairs in the world, and so not be able to grasp their meaning at all.

In the light of this ideal communication community, critical theory takes actually existing social formations to task. It uncovers ways in which communication is obstructed or broken down by prevailing social, political, psychological and ideological structures: it does this in a language which cannot be restricted to the particular social life-form in question, but is nevertheless in principle accessible to, and its claims verifiable by, participants in that society through a process of critical self-reflection. In this way Marxist theory, psychoanalytic theory and the critique of ideology are seen to be governed by an interest in the emancipation of the self and others in order to achieve that ideal community which is presupposed, as an action-guiding norm, by any communication, or indeed thought, whatsoever. In this way also, the refusal of Marxists to divorce their theory from communist values is given a transcendental grounding: the Marxist critique is not just an account of capitalist society, but is necessarily a guide to its active transformation.

This simplified account of some basic themes necessarily omits Apel's insights on other related issues: the impossibility of a thorough-going objectivisation of language (as attempted in recent semantic theory), the structural transformations of transcendental philosophy from Kant through Peirce to Wittgenstein, and so on. It also perhaps suggests the high level of abstraction at which most of the writing takes place, which goes with the Kantian spirit in which it is conducted, and the immense depth and breadth of knowledge it assumes. It is not an easy book to read, and the repetition of themes is a help rather than hindrance. However, suspicions raised in analytic philosophers by the transcendental nature of the issues will be heightened by the eclectic character of much of the work: Wittgenstein's private language argument is taken on trust, as is Royce's notion of the triadic structure of the mediation of tradition, and Peirce's concept of an unlimited communication community.

When he gets down to some detailed argument, as in the essay on the foundation of ethics, the final quarter of the book, Apel carries less conviction: he never manages quite to match up with the preceding high abstractions. Scholars will also have complaints about the treatment of their pet authors. Despite such faults, the book offers an impressive overview and integration of some of the central preoccupations of critical European philosophy.