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ACTION AND ETHICS
A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE LATE FRANKFURT SCHOOL (APEL, HABERMAS, WELLMER)

Abstract. I shall delineate what I see as the strength and relevance of transcendental-pragmatics within the intellectual setting in the post-war period. I shall indicate how the discussions within transcendental-pragmatics have revealed inherent challenges, while at the same time the intellectual and institutional surroundings have changed unfavorably during the last few decades. And I shall briefly indicate how these inherent challenges and new constellations could and should be met, to the effect that transcendental-pragmatics could reveal its philosophical importance and practical relevance under changed conditions; the catchword here is gradual (melioristic) reasoning.

Keywords. Transcendental pragmatics, civilization crisis, principles for a civilized society, validity claims, argumentative redemption, truth, universal justification.

As a starting point I assume that Practical Philosophy includes Political Philosophy and Normative Social Philosophy. Moreover, I take it that Transcendental-Pragmatics, as a practical philosophy, has "temperature". (Anyone who has met Karl-Otto Apel or Jürgen Habermas would understand.[1]) So, for those working in transcendental-pragmatics, what is at stake?

Briefly stated, those doing transcendental-pragmatics have a mission: A calling to cope with civilizational crises, as a normative challenge, and a calling to cope with modernity, conceived in terms of science-based and institutionally differentiated societies, with various 'cognitive interests', not merely instrumental rationality, but also interpretive and liberating reasoning, conceived as discursive reasoning.

In short, I assume that their main concern is discursive enlightenment, i.e., a modern society moderated and normatively justified by self-reflective and discursive reasoning. That's what really matters for philosophers engaged in transcendental-pragmatics and discursive reasoning.

[1] Cf. e.g. APEL [1998] and [2003], and HABERMAS [2001], [2004], [2005], [2012].

To elucidate this point, I shall situate transcendental-pragmatics historically, within changing intellectual and institutional constellations.

1. The post-war constellation and the role of transcendental pragmatics

I start with the following suggestion: Transcendental-pragmatics should be conceived as a philosophical and existential response to skepticism and civilizational crises. Hence, it is no accident that transcendental-pragmatics emerged after the Second World War, nor that it primarily emerged in Germany and not in the victorious Anglophone world.[2]

This is my first point: the general intellectual constellation in the post-war period, when transcendental-pragmatics gradually emerged, can be characterized by challenges from three angles:

(i) There was a need to respond to *the War and the Nazi period*,[3] to cope with the civilizational damages. In this situation, transcendental-pragmatics represented an attempt to formulate a post-skeptical response to the question of how to justify universally valid principles and practices for a civilized society.

Moreover, broadly speaking there were two dominant intellectual positions in this post-war period, on the one hand (ii) *existentialism,* advocating normative decisionism[4] (and cognitive relativism), and on the other hand (iii) *positivism,* defending normative decisionism and emotionalism (and epistemic scientism). Hence, transcendental-pragmatics had clearly recognizable adversaries in these two philosophical positions, existentialism and positivism.

Intellectually and politically, the emerging transcendental-pragmatics could thus be seen as located within a triangular constellation, with the challenges of war experiences as the overall background and with existentialism and positivism as two competing intellectual positions on each side.

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[2] For this reason, transcendental-pragmatics makes sense primarily for those who are faced with these challenges. Those who remain unconcerned and self-content without questioning their own foundations will hardly grasp the intellectual importance and existential impact of transcendental-pragmatics. Cf. the difference in early life experiences for Richard Rorty and for Karl-Otto Apel. During WWII, Rorty was peacefully looking for wild orchids in the US, while Apel was exposed to the breakdown of civilzation on the Eastern Front (see RORTY [1999], pp. 6–7). The same holds true for pseudo-skeptical intellectuals who refuse to pursue the skeptical challenge to the bitter end; a critique of this attitude, see SKIRBEKK [1958].

[3] See APEL [1988b].

[4] At least in its popular versions. Moreover, the decisionism in early Heidegger, cf. the politically ambiguous term "resoluteness" (*Entschlossenheit*) in *Sein und Zeit* [1927].

Add to this that the first generation of the Frankfurt school (T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer) relied heavily on a dichotomy of power-infected instrumental reason on the one hand, and liberating aesthetics on the other, with a similar neglect of argumentative and liberating reasoning as in Heideggerian existentialism. Against both these positions (Heidegger and Adorno/ Horkheimer), and also against logical positivism (as in the Vienna School), a reconsideration of *various kinds of rationality* became an urgent task for the emerging transcendental-pragmatics. Thus, a discursive and reflective notion of rationality was elaborated and defended by those who tended toward transcendental-pragmatics (in the first place, Apel and Habermas), and at the same time the notion of rationality was being differentiated according to different sciences and different basic acts.[5]

2.Inherent discussions and challenges

There were inherent discussions and challenges.[6] Just a few reminders concerning the notion of truth: At the point of departure, we have the relationship between justification and truth. Justification "can be lost", it may change by "time and space" and by the persons involved, and justification is seen as gradual, as more or less well established, whereas truth "cannot be lost", being independent of time and space and of the persons holding it.

Hence, *identifying* truth with justification renders truth relative.[7] But, on the other hand, if one defines truth and justification as *radically different*, it is hard to see how truth could ever be reached by humans, because, as fallible beings, we depend on investigation and discussion, that is, on processes of justification.

The transcendental-pragmatic response to this dilemma consists in an attempt to conceive the notion of truth as an "idealization" in a transcendental-pragmatic sense, that is, as an unavoidably presupposed regulative idea.[8] However, discussions within and around the community of transcendental-pragmatic

[5] Cf. Habermas on different "cognitive interests", and Apel/Kettner on "die eine Vernunft und die vielen Rationalitäten".

[6] The discussions within transcendental pragmatics are related to extensive contemporary discussions. Here are some references, ordered alphabetically: AUSTIN [1975], BAILEY [2013], BENHABIB [2009], BRUMLIK [1986], BRUNE [2003], GRONKE [2003], HELLESNES [2002a] and [2002b], JAKOBSEN [2012], KELLERWESSEL et al. (eds) [2005], NIQUET [1993], RAWLS [1993], [1995], RYLE [1945], SEARLE [1969], SKJERVHEIM [1996], STRAWSON [1966], WELLMER [2004], [2007], WERNER [2003], WITTGENSTEIN [1953], YU [2006].

[7] Cf. Richard Rorty.

[8] Not "idealization" in the sense of "idealized models" as in economics or physics.

philosophers reveal that this notion of truth remains controversial.[9] Briefly, here is a reminder of some main points in that respect:

Karl-Otto Apel conceives of the notion of truth as a transcendental-pragmatic precondition in terms of an "ultimate opinion" of an ideal community of researchers and discussants "in the long run", and hence as a speech-act inherent "regulative idea", unavoidably presupposed in our interaction, and at the same time indicating the direction of our search for truth, but never fully realizable in real life and in human history.

This Apelian notion of truth as "ideal consensus" was attacked from various angles, for instance by Albrecht Wellmer who presented various counterarguments:[10]

(i) According to Wellmer, Apel's notion of an "ideal consensus" in terms of an "ultimate opinion" entails a "God's eye" view, contrary to Apel's own intention. It entails a metaphysical rest, despite Apel's claim of overcoming theoretical metaphysics by speech-act inherent transcendental arguments.

(ii) Moreover, due to our human finitude, there will always be a plurality of linguistic approaches and thus (Wellmer says) a "fight about truth",[11] and hence there can be no final consensus.

(iii) The notion of an ideal consensus is therefore conceptually meaningless: It presupposes the end of history, the end of human conditions, and thus it does not make sense as a goal for human efforts. More specifically, it presupposes, according to Wellmer, complete transparency, absolute knowledge, and moral perfection – which makes the notion meaningless.[12]

The latter claim[13] is explicitly repudiated by Apel, adding that such a claim would indeed have been absurd. However, to my mind, a problem remains in Apel's own position due to the unavoidable pluralism of languages in most cases; not necessarily as a "fight" between conceptual perspectives (as Wellmer says), but as a linguistic and conceptual pluralism, (e.g.) due to the differentiation of a manifold of discipline-inherent conceptions and languages in modern science-based societies.

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[9] Some references, ordered alphabetically: APEL [1967], [1973], [1979], [1988a], [2001], [2003], [2011], BÖHLER [2003], [2013], BÖHLER et al. (eds) [1987], [2003], DORSCHEL et al. (eds) [1993], HABERMAS [1983], [1984], [1991], [1992], [1999], [2000], [2003], KETTNER [1993], KEUTH [1993], KUHLMANN [1982], [1986], [1992], KUHLMANN et al.(eds) [1982], ÖFSTI [1994], [2003], RÄHME [2003], [2007], RORTY [1989], [2000], SKIRBEKK [1982], [1997], [2011], TRANØY [1976], WELLMER [1986], [2003].

[10] WELLMER [2003].

[11] *Streit um die Wahrheit*, ibid.

[12] WELLMER [1993], p. 162, where he says that Apel presupposes *vollkommene Transparenz, absolutes Wissen*, and *moralische Vollkommenheit*.

[13] Ibid., p. 153.

Moreover, what about Wellmer's own position? Basically, Wellmer refers to what he sees as a grammatical point, namely a switch of perspectives between "my beliefs" and "the beliefs of others",[14] the former perceived as true, that is, for me here and now, and the latter conceived as fallible.

To my mind, the strength of Wellmer's point lies in his emphasis on the unavoidability of truth-claims here-and-now, grammatically in the first-person indicative mood.[15] But there are questions to be raised (as Apel was quick to point out), for instance, whether Wellmer's own claim about a grammatically founded epistemic switch should be conceived as a universal validity-claim, and thereby as a claim to consensus under ideal conditions, despite linguistic pluralism and human finitude.

Let me also recall some further objections to Wellmer.[16] A distinction between "my beliefs" (in the first-person indicative) and "the beliefs of others" (in a third-person perspective) should not be construed as a strict dichotomy. There are evidently interconnections between the two perspectives, in the sense that "my beliefs" are those beliefs that have been established and tried out in interaction with other persons. Moreover, even though I take "my beliefs" here-and-now to be true, from experience I am at the same time reflectively aware of my own fallibilism. I know I am fallible; and that is exactly the reason why I recognize an urge to go further, to be open to trying out my present opinions by new investigations and renewed argumentations, possibly with new conceptual and disciplinary perspectives.[17] But then we are underway, if not towards perfection, at least away from what can be recognized as less reasonable opinions – in short, a *gradualist meliorism*,[18] as a transcendental-pragmatic precondition, and thus as a "constitutive regulative idea".

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[14] Habermas has a similar point (as Wellmer), emphasizing the switches between (i) taking something to be true and (ii) questioning something in further research (HABERMAS [1999]). But in Habermas this appears as a sociological point about scientific and scholarly research, not as a self-referential (transcendental-pragmatic) point – and that is a decisive difference.

[15] Wellmer defends the view that the notion of truth is related to self-reference, but also that fallibilism may take different forms and degrees. Those are good points. But he does not delineate the melioristic, the dynamic drive toward improvement, away from that which is seen as less good reasons. Hence he does not talk about "regulative ideas", which he interprets as in Apel, and not melioristically.

[16] Here we refer to WELLMER [2003], not WELLMER [1986]; see next footnote.

[17] Concerning the need of deliberation and argumentation, for fallible human beings, cf. JOHN STUART MILL [1859], chapter II, "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion".

[18] This is in accordance with main points in WELLMER [1986], pp. 124–131 and 171–172, and [1993], p. 175, where he argues for a gradualist approach and for "negative justification" (*negative Rechtfertigung*). Similar points in SKIRBEKK [2002]. Also Kettner, [in:] APEL and KETTNER (eds) [1992], p. 22: "Der diskursethische Ansatz kritisiert das Bestehende im Lichte *regulativer* Ideen. […] Regulative Ideen sind […] Orientierungsinstrumente für die melioristisch-kritische

Two points are then decisive:

(i) Fallibilism is to be conceived as a plural notion, to be illuminated by various case-studies.

> In discussing fallibilism Wellmer refers to Wittgensteinian arguments from life-world certainties and act-inherent 'tacit knowing'. I agree. We should look into a variety of different cases of more or less fallible knowledge and insight: comprehensive theories, simple statements, conceptual frameworks ('vocabularies' in Rorty's terminology), and act-inherent certainties.[19] Moreover, in analyzing act-inherent competences and insights we may argue convincingly for necessary preconditions.[20] I would go further, arguing for the cautious usage of 'arguments from absurdity' on a variety of cases in order to reveal different kinds (and degrees) of 'absurdity', and thereby, reflectively, also to reveal different kinds of necessary preconditions. [21]

In short, fallibilism should be conceived of as plural, as gradual, and thus we should carefully look at different cases.

(ii) The notion of "regulative ideas" should be conceived melioristically, in terms of overcoming less good views and arguments, not in terms of a comprehensive final truth.

> Wellmer refers to the importance of considering the question of various conceptual frames, or 'vocabularies' (referring to Richard Rorty, and thereby to Heidegger on 'world disclosure', *Welterschließung*). I agree. We should consider the tricky question of (relative) conceptual (in-) adequacy, not merely the question of truth (in terms of conceptually constituted statements and theories).[22] Moreover, we may talk about conceptual (in-)adequacy in gradual terms, as more or less adequate or

Arbeit bestimmter Negation". Further comments on the Apel-Wellmer controversy [in:] SKIRBEKK (ed.) [2004], pp. 7–27.

[19] For instance, Darwinism is a fallible scientific theory, but definitely less fallible than creationism. And descriptive macro-anatomy of the human body is hardly fallible at all, since we know it all – it is no longer a subject for research, but merely a subject for the education of future doctors and health personal.

[20] Cf. the 'praxeological' analysis of Jakob Meløe et al., [in:] SKIRBEKK (ed.) [1983].

[21] SKIRBEKK [1993]. For the term 'arguments from absurdity', cf. also Gilbert Ryle on informal 'reductio ad absurdum arguments', RYLE [1945].

[22] E.g. SKIRBEKK [2012]. To make it brief: all statements in a scientific theory (say, in economics) may be well established, within its own conceptual frame, and still the theory may be blind for various phenomena within its field of concern (e.g. to the effect that economic theories often fail in predicting future events). In short, its conceptual 'world disclosure' is (relatively) inadequate for coping with important facts.

> inadequate. Hence, to the extent that there is a spill-over between conceptual (in-)adequacy and truth-claims, we could even talk about gradual truth-claims, about (comprehensive) theories being more or less true.[23]

In short, in discussing fallibilism we should also look at the question of conceptual adequacy and inadequacy (and at the possible spill-over to the question of propositional and theoretical truth), and in looking at cases of relative conceptual adequacy or inadequacy a melioristic perspective should be considered (avoiding what is less reasonable).

> A reminder: in transcendental-pragmatics, four speech-act inherent validity-claims are paramount in this connection: truth claims, rightness claims, claims to truthfulness, and claims to meaningfulness. Briefly stated, truth and rightness claims are seen as argumentatively ("discursively") "redeemable" under ideal conditions, characterized by "the forceless force of the better argument" and mutual recognition among the participants[24] – in short, under free and equal conditions for all participants, and by a willingness to seek better arguments and to listen to each other.[25] In transcendental-pragmatics, rightness claims are seen as claims for *norms* of justice and fairness, primarily for the regulation of conflicts, not as claims concerning *values*. Truthfulness claims are not seen as discursively redeemable. Such claims are "redeemed" by interpersonal experiences among those concerned. Moreover, meaningfulness is construed as a precondition of meaningful argumentation (and communication), though it may also be related to questions of conceptual adequacy or inadequacy. These are the main characteristics of the discourse theory of truth and rightness that pertains to transcendental-pragmatics (or respectively to "universal" and "formal"pragmatics in Habermas). However, there are various critical remarks to this conception of four validity claims, for instance: (i) There are arguments in favor of *further differentiations*, e.g. between truth claims of singular statements and truth claims of comprehensive theories, and also between these truth claims and claims of (relative) conceptual adequacy.[26] (ii) Simultaneously there are arguments in favor of *transitions* between various validity claims, e.g. between theoretical

[23] SKIRBEKK [2003].
[24] Personal autonomy (*Mündigkeit*) is not an empirical fact; it is a task (for each individual and also for society), and in that sense it is a regulative idea. This is a point with practical implications, though often overlooked in political theory. Cf. SKIRBEKK [2011], pp. 183–185.
[25] Similar points, e.g. J. S. MILL [1859] and TRANØY [1976].
[26] WELLMER [1986], p. 168, SKIRBEKK [2003] and [2012], pp. 73 f.

truth claims and conceptual adequacy claims, and also between conceptual adequacy claims and value questions.[27] (iii) Thus, there are arguments in favor of the view that the relative conceptual adequacy of "*situation descriptions*" is *decisive for normative (moral and ethics) validity claims.*[28]

3. New constellations – institutionally, politically, intellectually

At first, some brief remarks on institutional changes: In academia we have had an increasing specialization and fragmentation, also within philosophy. Due to the Bologna reforms of European universities, time schedules for the humanities have been shortened and various disciplines are cut up into smaller units. Publishing houses, also those that are named university press, are increasingly commercialized, focusing on textbooks and light literature, rather than professional philosophy. These trends are bad news for philosophy, not least for transcendental-pragmatics, conceived as a comprehensive project, requiring discursive and self-reflective reasoning and a broad knowledge of opposing philosophical positions and of modern science-based societies.

As to changes on the intellectual level, I shall recall a few points: After World War Two, positivism was a philosophically well-articulated position and an easily recognized target for criticism. Today the situation is more diversified and amorphous. Modes of thinking reminiscent of positivism are certainly still around, but often embedded in implicit attitudes and suppositions within highly specialized disciplines and professions, such as neuroscience and biology, or economics and political science, professions that often disregard epistemic questions of a self-referential nature and questions of normative justification. Hence, in order to articulate a philosophical criticism that those concerned in these fields of research cannot ignore, it is decisive to be well informed about what is going on in these sciences and professions and to articulate one's criticism in a language and in a way that is seen as relevant and important for those who are the addressees of this kind of criticism. Arguing in general terms for a supposedly superior philosophical counter position will not be seen as convincing. In order to be relevant, such criticism has to be specific and inherently situated in the disciplines and professions that are its target.

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[27] E.g. SKIRBEKK [2012].

[28] WELLMER [1986], e.g. pp. 125, 134–5. In SKIRBEKK [2003] and [2012] questions of conceptual adequacy and of different "situation descriptions" are related to the plurality of scientific and scholarly perspectives, whereas Wellmer tends to refer to socio-cultural cases such as the fight for a revision of the "description" of women, children and homosexuals, see WELLMER ibid., p. 125.

Today, existentialism is no longer a dominant position. But again, there is a variety of disciplines and professions that incorporate similar epistemic and normative shortcomings as did existentialism in the post-war era, such as ethical decisionism and cultural relativism with a disregard for argumentative and self-critically reflexive reasoning. For instance, within the humanities and social sciences, and related professions, there are various versions of contextualism, deconstructivism and post-modernism, each with a disregard or even an explicit rejection of self-critically reflexive argumentation in the search for truth and universal validity, seen as eurocentrism or logocentrism, and for these presumed flaws "Western Enlightenment" is blamed. For instance, there are strands within "cultural studies" that are uncritically inspired by Foucault and (so-called) "French theory". There are strands in political multiculturalism and in academic postcolonial studies that are reminiscent of former leftist criticism of class-suppression and power in disguise, often without arguments for legitimate and universal principles, in opposition to illegitimate and contextual ones.

In short, the intellectual situation has become more opaque and amorphous, more difficult for the kind of criticism that transcendental-pragmatics articulates.

The same holds true for the general mood and basic political challenges: No more the predominant post-war front against the atrocities of the Nazi regime and its neglect of normative universality and self-critical argumentation. No more the cold war and the fight against Soviet totalitarianism. No more the politically motivating reactions against American warfare in Vietnam. Today, the situation is less clear. How should the main challenges be conceived? Is capitalism the main challenge? Or is modern technology the core of our problems, with its unprecedented and detrimental potentials? And what about politicized religion and premodern cultures, well equipped with modern technology and weaponry? What about new and increased differences between rich and poor? And what about environmentally unsustainable consumption and reproduction?

In short, after the Second World War the role and importance of the ideas brought forward by the emerging transcendental-pragmatics were easily recognizable, at least for an enlightened audience, against the backdrop of positivism, existentialism, and Nazism. Today the overall intellectual and political situation has changed. Even where transcendental-pragmatic philosophers argue convincingly for the philosophical strength of their mode of thinking, they are no more within an intellectual and political constellation where these ideas are easily recognized as relevant and important for a broader audience.

4. The philosophical importance and practical relevance

I shall briefly sum up what I see as the philosophical importance and practical relevance of a revised transcendental-pragmatics, under new institutional and intellectual constellations.[29] Here it comes:

Transcendental-pragmatics represents a resource for defending claims to universal validity for basic norms as well as for validity-claims in general. The clue consists in self-reflective arguments concerning act and speech-act inherent preconditions. In a pluralistic world, with a need to overcome "the fight of gods" (Max Weber), this is a decisive contribution. Even so, transcendental-pragmatics should be conceived cautiously and melioristically, with an awareness of nuances and differences, also for the main cases of self-reflective arguments.[30]

In addition to strict self-reflection, as in the transcendental-pragmatics of Karl-Otto Apel, there are also self-referential arguments in a broader sense, as in "arguments from absurdity", applied on contextual inconsistencies and category mistakes.[31] Hence, there are transitions from the self-reflective core of transcendental-pragmatics to melioristically conceived precondition-analyses in a broader sense – e.g. concerning specific conceptual usages and perspectives, be it in various scientific and scholarly disciplines or in world views and "comprehensive doctrines" (Rawls).

Moreover, transcendental-pragmatics, when conceived cautiously and melio-ristically, supports and protects a discursive culture and an awareness of different types of rationality and reasonableness. In a pluralistic and precarious world, this is an important contribution. In this respect, transcendental-pragmatics represents a defense of a post-skeptical and self-critical enlightenment.

At the same time, transcendental-pragmatic thinkers ought to recognize and relate themselves to the considerable changes that have occurred within their institutional and intellectual setting. To my mind, the following revisionary steps ought to be undertaken:

Argumentative virtues of classical analytic philosophy should to a larger degree be incorporated into the mood and mode of thinking among transcendental-pragmatic philosophers.[32]

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[29] Cf. "The Modernity Debate: Rationality – Universal and Plural?", [in:] SKIRBEKK [2007]. German version in BURCKHART and GRONKE (eds), [2002].
[30] Cf. SKIRBEKK [2002].
[31] Ibid. Also, RYLE [1945].
[32] There should be less sweeping overviews and careless usage of comprehensive concepts on a high level of abstraction, such as the crude dichotomy between man and nature (in Habermas), criticized, [in:] SKIRBEKK [2012], pp. 57–72, or between man and animal, ibid. pp. 191–214.

Hence, we should more openly recognize and investigate the epistemic variety of what we conceive of as transcendental preconditions for valid thinking and argumentation.

Moreover, we should investigate the variety of basic preconditions inherent in various activities and professions in modern institutionally differentiated and science-based societies. In so doing, we should also investigate in which sense there are gradual transitions between philosophical reasoning and discussions in the public sphere, and between philosophical insights on the one hand and everyday actions and science-based activities on the other.[33]

To the extent that such requirements are fulfilled, this revised transcendental-pragmatic philosophy could probably play a positive role by fostering and strengthening a self-critical and self-conscious enlightenment in academic life, in public opinion-formation, and in politics in general.

However, we should recall that philosophy is more than transcendental-pragmatics, even when the latter is revised and extended beyond the hard core of strict reflection on the primordial situation of argumentation.[34] In philosophy, there is *one focus* on truth, on validity-claims and argumentative redemption, but there is *another focus* on conceptual creativity and originality (on "world disclosure", *Welterschließung*, in Heidegger's terminology). In philosophy, and in life in general, both are needed.

There are urgent questions facing our world today. These challenges are utterly complex, and to a large degree beyond the scope of transcendental-pragmatics. Nevertheless, a reasonably revised transcendental-pragmatics has a role to play in an ongoing and case-oriented critique of science and rationality, and in the critique of religion,[35] not least of the three monotheistic world religions with their inherent validity-claims for their specific notions of god and their interpretations of sacred scriptures. In this sense, transcendental-pragmatics could contribute to a moderating "modernization of consciousness".[36]

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[33] When investigating the various specific or general preconditions for different societal and scientific activities, the investigators ought to be knowledgeable about what is going on in the field under investigation, be it in physics or social science. In this sense, they ought to have a "double competence".

[34] "Strikte Reflexion", in Wolfgang Kuhlmann's terms, cf. KUHLMANN [1993], p. 230. "Primordialer Diskurs", in Karl-Otto Apel's terms, cf. APEL[1998], pp. 794–797.

[35] Critique in the Kantian sense of purification, not rejection. As to critique of religion, cf. ROHS [2013].

[36] Cf. HABERMAS [2005], pp. 143 ff. In brief: (i) a recognition of the pluralism of 'comprehensive doctrines' (cf. also 'reasonable disagreement' in Rawls), (ii) a recognition of scientific and scholarly insights and discursive procedures, and (iii) a recognition of institutional differentiations, e.g. between law and religion, and about professional roles and private life.

Moreover, by furthering a dialogue between cultures, based on mutual recognition and a search for better understanding and better reasons – in contrast to unilateral and condescending preaching – the ideas and ideals of transcendental-pragmatics do have an important role to play in our contemporary and complex world.

In short, new civilizational crises may emerge. Dependent on form and extension, many things will then be required, but also this: A defence of universally valid normative principles, across cultures and material interests. A defence of Enlightenment, as a project with an on-going strengthening of personal autonomy, against ignorance and narrowness. A defence of serious discussions and open dialogues, across conflicting positions.

Hence, there is hardly any reason to assume that transcendental-pragmatics will lose its relevance in times to come. Presumably, it is rather the other way round.

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