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On Habermas's differentiation of rightness from truth: Can an achievement concept do without a validity concept?

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Abstract

The metaproblematic of this article is the cognitive structure of morality. In the context of an investigation into Habermas's theory of validity which respects his strong cognitivism and emphasis on moral knowledge, the focus is on his proposal to treat rightness as 'justification-immanent' rather than as 'justification-transcendent,' as in the case of truth. The imputation of asymmetrical validity bases to rightness and truth is probed in terms of the distinction between achievement and validity concepts which is informed by the mathematical-philosophical conceptual pair of finite and infinite ideal limit concepts. The thrust of the argument is spearheaded by the question whether the process of the discursive construction and justification of rightness is not of necessity required, as in the case of truth, to have recourse to a transcendent – albeit immanently rooted – cognitive property beyond formal-pragmatically backed procedural presuppositions to secure its validity. A final brief coda collates suggestions made in the course of the argumentation toward a cognitive-sociological approach that links up with Habermas's central concepts and could complement his inspiring vision of the 'cultural embodiment of reason'.

Introduction

Habermas originally presented his view of the difference between truth and rightness in his early writings and, since then, it has become apparent that his particular interpretation of rightness in contrast to truth actually represents a characteristic feature of his thought. In his late work, however, this distinction is treated with greater precision, although not wholly differently, due to a significant extent to his revision in the late 1990s of his long-held discursive or consensus concept of truth. The revision did not entail a complete surrendering of this concept, to be sure, but it did require compensation of its limitations by the adoption of a complementary pragmatic concept of truth. The effect of this move was the strengthening of the discursive concept's practical roots and procedural implications by pragmatism – but a pragmatism simultaneously interpreted somewhat more strongly in Kantian terms than many an American pragmatist would be willing to countenance. Habermas accomplished this feat by recognizing that pragmatism retained the transcendental framing inherited from Kant, yet managed to mitigate the tension between the empirical and transcendental moments. This recognition was consolidated by the introduction of the crucial concept of 'immanent-transcendence'. It marks the displacement of the dualistic metaphysics of Kant's transcendental idealism by a processual conception showing Hegel's fingermarks according to which transcendental conditions in the form of strong idealizations instead of Kantian ideas of reason are understood as being rooted in the world and in their transcending thrust beyond return to the anchorage in the world. This notion compelled the transgression of the conception of the discursive justification of truth claims as a purely immanent process, leading to truth being characterized as a 'justification-transcendent' concept. But what is striking in Habermas's late writings is his insistence that rightness, in contrast to truth, is a 'justification-immanent' concept instead.

Significantly, this asymmetrical characterization of truth and rightness compels a correspondingly divergent treatment of the validity of truth and rightness claims. Indeed, Habermas's focus is on the

theory of validity. In his account, the validity of a truth claim is secured by the strongly idealized context-transcendent unconditional validity concept of truth, whereas the equally unconditional validity of a rightness claim is by contrast given with the action-based context-immanent projected ideal of a perfect socio-moral world. Notwithstanding this difference, his principal concern is to establish the cognitive nature of rightness against emotivism, decisionism, contextualism as well as moral realism and, by the same token, to demonstrate a certain analogy between truth and rightness. Not only are they similarly dependent on argumentation and discursively offered reasons for the vindication of their validity, but both involve a binarily coded yes/no judgement. This assumption of a cognitively based analogy is supported by the phenomenon of learning where a person, in the case of rightness, corrects a previously held mistaken belief and is able to offer a justification for the moral insight that compelled its reframing.

Against this cognitivist background, Habermas concentrates on the contrast between empirical and practical or moral knowledge in order to clarify the issue of the validity of truth and rightness. Empirical knowledge attains universality under the aegis of the validity concept of truth to the extent that the explanation of an object or an event is adequate to the invariant constraints of an independent external objective world. Insofar as it is analogous to empirical knowledge, moral knowledge likewise has to reflect the invariant features of the social world in order to reach the universal validity of moral judgements. But to run moral knowledge in this way parallel to empirical knowledge is to fall in the trap of moral realism. To escape this undesirable consequence, one needs to appreciate that the social world is not an independently given or existing realm which constrains or determines our socio-moral cognition in a manner comparable to the objective world. Habermas's solution is therefore to regard the socio-moral world of interpersonal relations as a two-level phenomenon embracing a historical socio-cultural arrangement and the ongoing construction of well-ordered interpersonal relations in the light of normative expectations. The universal validity of moral judgements is thus secured, not by a thick background consensus as in neo-Aristotelianism nor by an historically specific cultural construction as in anthropology, but by the possible 'ideally projected social world of legitimately ordered interpersonal relations' serving as the regulative idea of the ongoing process of its construction. From this the conclusion follows for Habermas that whereas truth is justification-transcendent, rightness is justification-immanent.

While Habermas's argumentation is broadly acceptable, this is possible only up to a point. In these reflections, therefore, his theory of validity is approached in terms of the implicit assumption from which he proceeds in differentiating rightness from truth – that is, the question of whether, with respect to rightness, an achievement concept can do without a validity concept and fulfil its function. To set the scene, the first section reconstructs Habermas's threefold theory of truth in order to compare truth and rightness claims in respect of the regulative ideas governing them. This step provides a foothold for the major second section focused on the problem of validity in terms of the mathematical-philosophical distinction between finite and infinite ideal limit concepts with the intention of probing Habermas's reasoning for proposing an immanent rather than a transcendent validity basis for rightness claims. Critically concluding that the justification of a rightness claim must of necessity have recourse to a transcendent magnitude, just like a truth claim, the argument is closed by suggestively indicating contact points in Habermas's thought for the development of a cognitive sociology that could further his vision of the 'cultural embodiment of reason'. This proposal consolidates the implicit concern throughout these reflections with the metaproblematic of the cognitive structure of morality.

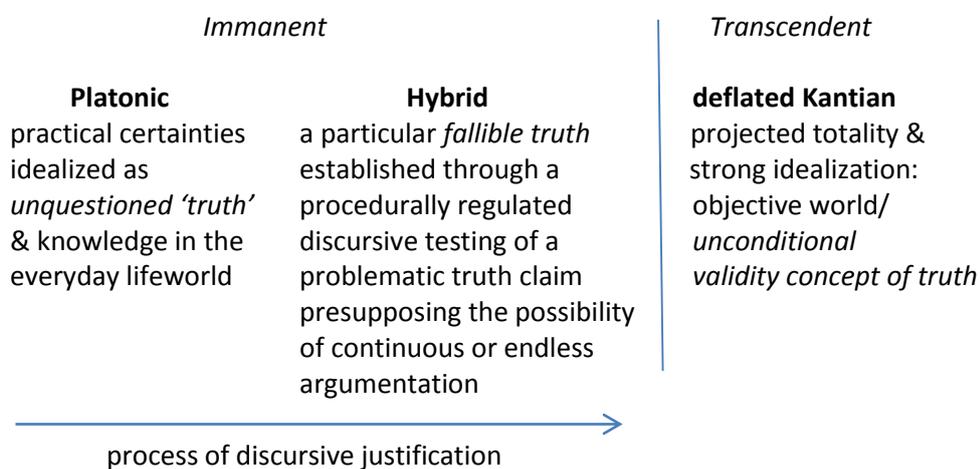**1 Regulative ideas governing truth and rightness claims**
To gain clarity about the problem of the validity basis of rightness in comparison with that of truth, it is necessary first to review the relevant structures that direct and guide these two kinds of claims in the course of the process of discursive justification. Habermas facilitates this by introducing a whole

range of what he, following Kant, calls 'regulative ideas' (2003: 227) or also 'idealizations'. This is the case particularly in his account of the revision of his concept of truth, but the discussion of the concept of rightness also provides a fruitful context. To create a background for the identification of the different types of regulative ideas, a reconstruction of Habermas's theory of truth is first offered. This preliminary step also opens the way for an understanding of his theory of justification as well as of the notions of achievement and validity concepts central to the current argument.

Habermas's theory of truth
Habermas's treatment of truth in his late theoretical philosophy consists of a self-critical description of his long-held but partially misleading discursive or consensus concept of truth, which he believes originally derives from Charles S Peirce's epistemic concept,[1] and the proposal of a complex replacement designed to correct it. His account of this revision, suggestively indicated a few years earlier (1997: 54 footnote 55), is presented in various publications (1999a, 2002, 2003) through a critical discussion of other authors and, consequently, is not readily transparent. His references to discursive, procedural and epistemic concepts of truth in describing the revised theory all obviously apply to the same matter, but differ insofar as they focus on distinct aspects of the process of knowledge production and justification – the first referring to its medium, the second to the rules governing the process and the third to its function. Unlike two authors who approach the problem in terms of Habermas's notion of '"Janus-faced" truth' (2003: 253), Levine (2010) stressing the everyday pragmatic *terminus a quo* and Seemann (2004) the discursive *terminus ad quem*, Habermas (2003: 100-1, 254) himself suggests that the new complex theory of truth actually embraces not two but three moments. Thus three distinct concepts of truth mark structural features of the justification process – a 'Platonic', a deflated 'Kantian' and a 'hybrid' one combining the previous two (see Table 1). Since these concepts are of unequal status, the Platonic and the hybrid moments, in contrast to the Kantian moment, strictly speaking need to be put in inverted commas.

Table 1: Habermas's three-moment theory of truth and justification

	Immanent		*Transcendent*
Platonic	**Hybrid**		**deflated Kantian**
practical certainties idealized as *unquestioned 'truth'* & knowledge in the everyday lifeworld	a particular *fallible truth* established through a procedurally regulated discursive testing of a problematic truth claim presupposing the possibility of continuous or endless argumentation		projected totality & strong idealization: objective world/ *unconditional validity concept of truth*

process of discursive justification

Source:
This scheme is extrapolated from suggestions in Habermas (2003: 99-100)

According to Habermas, his former consensus concept proceeds from the erroneous assumption that there is a conceptual relation between truth and justification, with the unpalatable result that the idea of warranted or justified assertion is to such an extent inflated through idealization that truth becomes transposed into the 'limit concept' (*Limesgröße*) or 'ideal limit' of the justificatory process (2002: 360/1999a: 250; 2003: 101). This implies that the outcome of the process gets identified with the limit representing the value toward which the justification process tends and which therefore defines its ideal achievement. Consequently, truth is turned into an achievement or

'success concept' (2003: 37) which it patently is not. Rather than simply rejecting this achievement-based concept, however, he indeed retains it due to the necessity of discourse for the testing and vindication of problematic truth claims – but not without complementing and thus correcting it.

This is first done by the introduction of a pragmatic concept of truth which ties the process to action and practices. Accordingly, he writes that 'objections have prompted me to revise the discursive conception of [truth as] rational acceptability by *relating* it to a pragmatically conceived, nonepistemic concept of truth, but without thereby assimilating "truth" to "ideal assertibility"' (2003: 38). This newly added component, the nonepistemic concept of truth, captures the implicit, naïve realistic, unreflective and unquestioned beliefs or 'truths' held with absolute certainty in everyday action and practices. It is the first 'Platonic' moment of Habermas's theory of truth in the sense of an idealization made in the performative attitude that is based on the assumption of unquestioned certainty and immunity against the acknowledgement of imperfections. The implicit claims advanced on the basis of such an everyday conception of truth become thematized, reflected upon, criticized and tested only when actions and practices fail so that the claims become problematized and discourse about their justifiability takes over.

It is at this point, when the argumentative process of justification pursues the goal of ideal assertibility and ideal acceptability, that the retained discursive, procedural or epistemic concept of truth, the second component of Habermas's theory of truth, comes into its own. However, if the justification process successfully reaches the goal of the vindication of the truth claim, at best only a qualified kind of truth is attained – an in principle fallible truth that could turn out false tomorrow, a pragmatically compelling yet not logically valid truth. In this case, Habermas insists with reference to Richard Rorty that it counts merely as the '*cautionary use* of the truth predicate' (2003: 38; also 1999b: 37).[2] Here we thus have the 'hybrid' truth concept which is intelligible in the sense that, while on the one hand delivering knowledge allowing action and practices to resume on the basis of nonepistemic truth after the discursive interlude, it on the other requires a truth concept that goes beyond or transcends the justification process itself.

This immanently rooted transcendent magnitude represents the third moment of Habermas's theory of truth, the moment of the 'Kantian projection of totalities'. A variety of revealing designations are used to invoke this moment, including 'truth [as] a property of propositions they "cannot lose"', 'unconditional truth', 'truth that is not epistemically indexed' since it is not knowledge but a strong idealization, 'a truth that exceeds all justifications', 'truth as such', 'truth [as] a concept of validity', 'a justification-transcendent concept [representing] the truth conditions that must, as it were, be met by reality itself' and 'context-independent truth' (2003: 38, 39, 40, 226, 227, 248; 2002: 360). Truth in this proper sense of the word is obviously regarded as of an entirely different order than the Platonic and hybrid varieties, although not unconnected to them. In their respective analyses, neither Levine (2010, 2011) nor Seemann (2004) comes to grips with this unconditional concept. The former assimilates it to the pragmatic concept and the latter to the discursive truth predicate.

It is noteworthy that there is an element of ambivalence in Habermas's presentation of this crucial transcendent concept. It derives from the fact, which might well have helped mislead Levine and Seemann, that he offers no good reasons for the introduction of the unconditional concept of truth (Renn, 2000). Exhibiting this ambivalence, certain statements leave the exact relation[3] between the everyday and the transcendent concepts in the dark due to a lack of certainty about the status of the latter. For instance: 'The nonepistemic concept of truth, which manifests itself only operatively, that is, unthematically, in action, provides a justification-transcendent point of reference for discursively thematised truth claims. It is the goal of justifications to discover a truth that exceeds all justifications' (2003: 39-40). Here the verb 'provides' overstates the case by overlooking the temporality of the structure-formation of the concept of unconditional truth in favour of the

temporality of its activation and instantiation by action and practices. That this reduction has a serious consequence is confirmed by the misrepresentation of transcendent truth as the 'goal' of justification, instead of maintaining its status as a validity concept.

A closely related instance of ambivalence is the often occurring contradiction between portraying truth as a regulative idea and arguing that it is not a regulative idea but rather a validity concept. For example, on one occasion, Habermas writes that '…truth – as a property that a proposition "cannot lose" – acquires an indispensable regulative function for fallible processes of justification' and, on another, that 'it is not truth as such but the epistemic concept of ascertaining truth that is the regulative idea guiding our practices of inquiry and justification. Truth is not a good that one might possess to a greater or lesser degree but a concept of validity' (2003: 91, 227). Here the word 'good' might just as well be replaced by 'goal', 'success' or achievement. Needless to say, these contradictory statements make apparent the crucial distinction between an achievement concept and a validity concept.

With the necessary background covered, the actual task of the current section – identifying regulative ideas operative in processes of discursive justification in the fields of truth and rightness – now looms. While not in systematic form, Habermas mentions a number of such ideas without which the justificatory process would be unable to start and unfold in an orderly manner along its temporal axis. The common characteristic of all these ideas is that they are idealizations that are effective as immanently operative presuppositions.

Regulative ideas governing truth claims
To begin with, Habermas writes, as quoted earlier, that 'it is not truth as such but the epistemic concept of ascertaining truth that is the regulative idea guiding our practices of inquiry and justification' (2003: 227). While singling out the idea of ascertaining truth, it is by no means the only ideational structure fulfilling a regulatory function for justificatory processes concerning truth claims. There are at least six more (see Table 2).
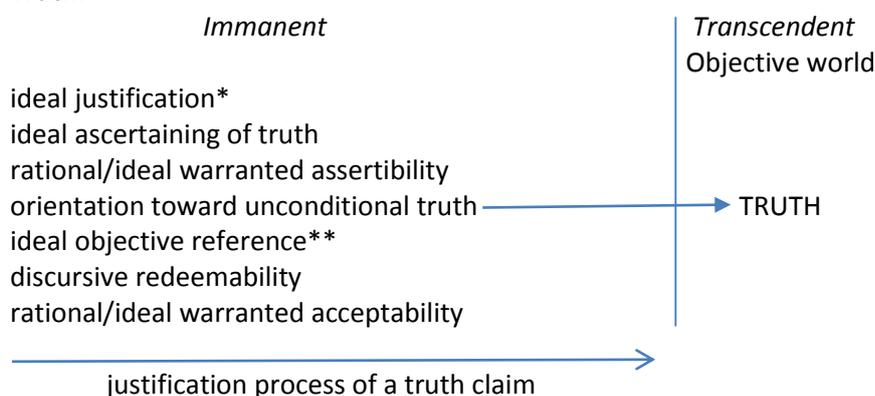
More general than ascertaining truth, first, is 'idealized justification' (2003: 91) in the sense of imagining the process itself without which it would be impossible for a participant to enter the discursive event in the first place. Directly relevant to the direction and guidance of the process, second, is a regulative idea he variously refers to as 'rational assertibility' or 'ideal warranted assertibility' (2003: 37, 248). This idea covers the ideal of advancing the assertion of a statement or proposition and its concomitant truth claim in accordance with the internal requirements of the matter addressed in the justificatory process. One could surmise that among such requirements would be considerations specific to the field in which the truth claim is raised – for example, ones relevant to the formation of a hypothesis and presentation of a proposition or explanation. Third and fourth, Habermas is emphatic that truth as 'a justification-transcendent concept…cannot be made to coincide with the concept of ideal warranted assertibility' (2003: 248). This holds since a truth claim not only transcends justification in the direction of validity as truth condition, but ontologically it simultaneously also has to refer to the external objective world. To cover the transcendent thrust, on the one hand, Habermas (2003: 91-2, 100-1, 254) introduces what he calls the 'orientation toward truth'. On the other, given the ontological connotations of truth, it is obvious that there must also be a regulative idea of what may be called ideal objective reference. In the fifth place, Habermas mentions the idea of 'discursive redeemability' in the sense of 'the obligation to defend "p" in argumentation – in full awareness of its fallibility – against all future objections' (1999b: 274, 37). Finally, in respect of the closure of the justificatory process he speaks of 'rational acceptability' or 'ideal warranted acceptability' (2003: 38, 248). At the point of the successful accomplishment of the discourse, the epistemological relation between truth and justification culminates in an achievement – the approximate emulation of the ideals pursued and the actual

justified or warranted acceptance of the truth claim by the participants. The knowledge thus gained can then be fed back into everyday action and practices so as to re-establish a basis of certainty for them to continue as usual.

Important to note is that all the regulative ideas listed above, bar one, are what Habermas would consider as 'justification-immanent' idealizing presuppositions insofar as they operate strictly within the bounds of the process. What becomes actually established in the end, then, is not truth as such, but rather a potentially fallible truth which could at any time in the future turn out to be false. For this reason, he insists here on the '*cautionary use* of the truth predicate' (Habermas, 2003: 38). Contrasting sharply with these immanent regulative ideas, however, is the orientation toward truth. It is a transcending tendency that correlates with and, indeed, serves to activate the concept of truth proper which by definition is of a 'justification-transcendent' nature (see Table 2). Interpreting Habermas from a cognitive perspective, this concept alone is able to function as the unconditional validity basis of a truth claim in that it bestows an inalienable structural property on the truth predicate. The validity problem is taken up below.

Table 2: Regulative ideas in and beyond Habermas

Truth:

Immanent	*Transcendent*
	Objective world
ideal justification*	
ideal ascertaining of truth	
rational/ideal warranted assertibility	
orientation toward unconditional truth ————————→	TRUTH
ideal objective reference**	
discursive redeemability	
rational/ideal warranted acceptability	

———————————————————→
justification process of a truth claim

Rightness:

Immanent	*Transcendent*
	Social world
ideal justification	
ideal confirmation of rightness**	
rational/ideal warranted judicability**	
***orientation toward right/justice ** ————————→	RIGHT/JUSTICE
ideal inclusive legitimately organized social world	
discursive redeemability	
rational/ideal warranted acceptability	

———————————————————→
justification process of a moral claim

Key:
* In early work (1979: 63) Habermas called it 'grounding' (*Begründung*) rather than justification (*Rechtfertigung*)
**Habermas does not mention these regulative ideas
*** Habermas's stance that a rightness claim's validity does not require transcendent recourse to a validity basis, like truth, implies that he dispenses with the ideal of the orientation toward right or justice as complementary to the orientation toward unconditional truth – yet elsewhere he regards 'the right (or) justice' as bearing 'categorical validity' (1999b: 28)

Regulative ideas governing rightness claims
To clarify the regulative ideas operating relative to rightness, it may be helpful to recall how it differs from truth. A widely shared assumption among philosophers since Kant's separation of practical from theoretical reason is that rightness should be distinguished from truth insofar as it pertains to the normative rather than the objective dimension. Kant further characteristically insisted that practical reason should not for that reason be marginalized, but instead should be accorded the full status of a faculty of judgement – a stance in which he is followed especially by Continental philosophers, including Habermas. From the start, Habermas's thought has turned on his conceptualization of *Richtigkeit*, or 'moral rightness', as calling for treatment in the same rational terms as objective truth yet nevertheless as being distinct from it. This is the case throughout his philosophical contribution from the 1970s to his late work, and it accounts also for the centrality of the concept of legitimation to his social, political and legal theory and the related analyses.

In his late work, Habermas (1999b, 2002, 2003) reiterates his criticism of analytic philosophy and the Weberian tradition for demoting practical reason respectively to the indeterminate woolly domain of the emotions and to the hardnosed reality of decisionism, and then extends it also to the currently popular historicist or contextualist denial of all categorical constraints, as advocated by Rorty in particular. Habermas finds the basic similarity between truth and rightness in the dependence of both types of claim on the discursive or argumentative process of justification in which relevant reasons are mobilized for their validity to become established and, further, in their being special cases of the general concept of validity. And assuming this similarity, he traces the difference between the two back to their association with the objective and the social world respectively and to their distinct relations to the process of justification. Truth goes beyond the process, whereas rightness remains confined to the process; truth is 'justification-transcendent' and rightness 'justification-immanent' (Habermas, 2003: 248). His reasoning is that truth marks the transcendent validity condition that must be met by a relation to the existing objective world and contact with some aspect of it, whereas rightness lacks any comparable ontological connotations due to its invocation of an inclusive interpersonally well-ordered socio-moral world which does not exist but must be brought into being by the participants themselves in and through the discursive process. Later, when the validity problem is raised, it will be necessary to return to this mode of reasoning, but for the moment this circumscription sets the scene for isolating the ideas that regulate the process of the justification of morally relevant judgements, norms or actions.

According to Habermas, 'the meaning of "rightness" consists entirely in ideal warranted acceptability' (2003: 248) – that is, the ideal to which the process of the discursive justification of a moral claim tends and has the status of a limit or value immanent to the process, one that falls short of a transcendent validity magnitude. Even if this idea captures the meaning of rightness, however, there must be other accompanying regulative ideas besides. Insofar as rightness, just like truth, becomes established in and through a process of discursive justification, it must be governed by regulative ideas similar to those operating in the case of a truth claim. First, ideal warranted acceptability, as his text makes clear, is shared between the justification of rightness and of truth, despite the latter exceeding it. Even if trivially so, a second regulative idea has to be idealized justification, as Habermas calls it in the case of truth. And then, for the ideals of ascertaining truth and warranted assertibility characteristic of truth, functional equivalents must be identifiable for rightness. These equivalents could be something like ideal confirmation of rightness and ideal warranted moral judicability respectively. And if a moral claim also requires defence against objections, the idea of 'discursive redeemability' must apply here too. But, as was made clear already, Habermas fields a rather subtle argument in respect of rightness in comparison with truth. Although regarding the ideal warranted acceptability of the judgement as exhausting the meaning of rightness, he introduces another extremely important, if not the most important regulative idea –

that is, 'the regulative idea of the mutual inclusion of the other in an inclusive – and to that extent universal – world of well-ordered interpersonal relations' (Habermas, 2003: 248). As regards this idea, Habermas submits: 'the reference point of an ideally projected social world of legitimately ordered interpersonal relationships can serve as an equivalent for the absent constraints of an objective world in the course of the presumably rational resolution of moral conflicts of interaction' (2003: 261). This comparison is central to his proposal to regard this very regulative idea, despite being justification-immanent, as securing the unconditional validity of rightness, in contrast to a truth claim which requires recourse to a transcendent validity magnitude instead.

This argument has two striking implications. First, by postulating equivalence between the regulative idea of an ideal social world and the reference to the objective world, Habermas apparently overlooks that the former is more likely to correspond, not directly to the objective reference, but to the regulative idea of ideal reference to the objective world which is absent from his account. The actual pursuit of the social ideal would equate with the objective reference. Whereas the objective reference has an immediate referent implying a mediate object in the form of a necessary thing or event, the invocation of an ideal social reality has a mediate referent in the form of a possibility which implies an immediate object, for example a conventionally accepted but unjustifiable norm, since no such idealization occurs in a vacuum. Second, taking a cue from the above list of regulative ideas operating relative to a truth claim (see Table 2), Habermas's stance implies that, in the case of a moral claim, he would see the regulative idea of a projected socio-moral world as making redundant a functional equivalent for the orientation toward truth carrying the transcending thrust. It seems, therefore, as though no such thing as an orientation toward right or justice is necessary in moral justification. The first point raises the question, without falling into moral realism, of how the social world figures in moral justification. The second is perturbing since rightness or, rather, right or justice is the principle complementing the formal presupposition of the social world in the same way that the validity concept of truth complements the presupposition of the objective world. Surely, the objective and social worlds both implicate the general concept of validity?

The prime difference between rightness and truth, as Habermas sees it, emerges from the above – a proposed difference that can be assessed only by critically investigating his reasoning in favour of this asymmetry. This requires shifting the focus to his theory of validity while keeping in mind the questions just flagged.

3 The validity problem
The above reconstruction of Habermas's position on the difference between truth and rightness allowed his theory of validity to emerge gradually, but to make it sufficiently clear for the purpose of evaluation it is necessary to focus on the presupposed distinction between an achievement concept and a validity concept informing it. This distinction is indeed interstitially available in his late work, for example, as when he speaks of a 'success concept' (*Erfolgsbegriff*) and a 'concept of validity' (2003: 37, 250/1999a: 50, 288; 2003: 227). And in his critical response to the objections that Lafont, Wellmer, Davidson and Rorty raise against idealization, he indeed alludes to these two types of 'limit concepts' (2002: 365-6), yet nowhere are they clearly identified nor is the conceptual pair mobilized for his argument. That this distinction is of the greatest importance, however, is borne out by the intertwined history and legacy of philosophy and mathematics, echoes of which are via Kant also still audible in Habermas's writings.

Finite and infinite ideal limit concepts
The interpretation Habermas (1999b: 38; 2003: 248) offers of the asymmetrical validity bases of truth and rightness has been shaped by the revision of his concept of truth, particularly by his supplementation of an immanent achievement concept by a transcendent validity concept. Whereas the revision fixed his understanding of truth's validity as justification-transcendent, the retention of

the qualified epistemic conception helped to channel his justification-immanent conception of rightness's validity. Assuming a comprehensive perspective on Habermas's theory of validity, it is apparent that two terms or limits are brought into play – the limit at the end of the immanent and transcendent levels respectively. In the mathematical-philosophical tradition, it is not just well-known since Aristotle that there are two different types of limit concepts, but beginning in the 17th century scientists, philosophers and mathematicians, including such figures as Galileo, Newton, Leibniz, Kant, Cauchy, Peirce, Cantor and Dedekind, have over time transformed the ancient Greek conception and thereby contributed to a virtually fully theorized understanding of them (Strydom, 2017a).

The 'limit' Aristotle (1961: 32; 2015: Book III, Part 6) discovered at the end of both 'potential infinity' and 'actual or complete infinity' eventually appeared under modern conditions in both mathematics and philosophy as two distinct 'limit concepts' – in mathematics, the nth terms or limit concepts of the 'convergent series' and 'divergent series' (Nelson 2008: 399) and in philosophy, for instance Kant (1968: A331=B388), those of the 'descending series' and the 'ascending series'. The convergent or descending series represents an ongoing process pregnant with potential that tends toward a limit – that is, a finite ideal limit concept – comparable to the mathematical magnitude pi (π) the value of which can at best only be approximated but never attained since it keeps on stretching into infinity. The divergent or ascending series represents a long-term structure-formation process the outcomes of which are evolutionarily stabilized completed structures – that is, infinite ideal limit concepts – that function to locate the ongoing process and its limit in a particular field and lending them appropriate structure. The two types of limit concept are structures, but structures of distinctly different kinds. Examples of finite ideal limit concepts in Kant (1968: A569-71=B597-99, 1956: 152) would be 'ideals', 'models' and 'examples' any of which could serve as 'a great goal' for action occurring on the level of a constructive process, 'but…can never…[be]…reach[ed]'. In his understanding, an infinite ideal limit concept is by contrast equivalent to an '*idea* or concept of reason' in the sense of totalities encapsulating 'the infinite …as *entirely given*' which are imaginatively projected by the power of the mind to serve as the 'absolute totality of conditions' of whatever counts as 'the conditioned' (Kant 1968: A320=B77, A331=B388; 1972: 93). By contrast with the finite type that directs, guides and in detail micro-regulates the unfolding of the relevant constructive process, the infinite type provides only a high-level formal macro-structure on the transcendent meta-level.

Limit concepts in Habermas
Habermas proceeds from precisely this basic Kantian distinction and operates throughout with it. He accepts that there are 'conditions that must be fulfilled so that what is conditioned can take on…values' (2003: 86). But after a lapse of more than 200 years, it is a distinction that has been transformed, loosened up and rendered dynamic. As he writes: 'Giving up the background assumptions of Kant's transcendental philosophy turns ideas of reason into idealizations that orient subjects capable of speech and action. The rigid "ideal" that was elevated to an otherworldly realm is set aflow in this-worldly operations; it is transposed from a transcendent state into a process of "immanent-transcendence"' (2003: 93). Consequently: 'If transcendental rules are no longer something rational outside the world, they mutate into expressions of cultural forms of life and have a beginning in time' (2003: 18). Accordingly, quoting Hilary Putnam that '[r]eason is…both immanent…and transcendent…', he concludes that '[r]eason is not some free-floating process, but the tendency to transcend all particular contexts from within is inscribed in the actualization of a given situated form of reason…' (2003: 221). Interpreting this, on the transcendent side there must be immanently rooted 'transcendental conditions under which we have epistemic access to the world' (2003: 18) in the form of ideas that structurally shape whatever falls under them; and on the immanent side of the conditioned, there is not only empirical knowledge, but also moral knowledge as well as the processes of justification whereby such types of knowledge become accepted – the

process including particular goals such as hypothesis testing and conflict resolution that are respectively directed and guided by appropriate immanent regulative ideas. In terms of the notion of limits (Strydom, 2017b), the transcendent ideas represent infinite ideal limit concepts such as 'truth' and 'justice' which are both validity concepts but correlate with the projected 'formal-pragmatic' totalities of the 'objective world' and the 'social world' respectively (2003: 102-5), while the immanent goals that entice and regulate justification processes in turn represent finite ideal limit concepts comparable to π, such as for example 'ideal warranted assertibility', 'ideal warranted acceptability' and the 'ideally projected social world of legitimately ordered interpersonal relationships' which can only be approximated but never fully realized.

Notwithstanding Habermas's monumental advocacy and defence of this venerable line of thought, however, a measure of ambivalence, elision and even contradiction is nevertheless observable at certain points in his account. It especially affects the treatment of the infinite limit that he tends to underplay despite his concern with formal features or properties, the reason for which needs excavation. As we know, Habermas originally assumed that truth is equivalent to an achievement or 'success concept' in the sense of representing the limit value toward which the process of justification of a truth claim tends and which it has to reach, even if only to an in principle fallible degree, if the claim were to be vindicated and accepted. His revision consisted in the supplementation of his consensual interpretation of this discursive achievement concept by introducing also truth as an unconditional transcendent validity concept – a move lacking proper justification (Renn 2000). The deflated achievement concept was retained as one applying solely to the search for and finding of a fallible truth under particular conditions in respect of which the truth predicate could be used only with caution. Regardless of his expressed intention to treat truth as a validity concept beyond this goal-oriented process, however, an impression of ambivalence and elision is created, as pointed out earlier, when truth is nevertheless presented as a 'goal' (2003: 39) – in other words, as an achievement and not a validity concept. In certain places, moreover, truth is described as an immanent regulative idea, which is then contradicted by denial in favour of stressing the transcendent nature of truth as a validity concept (2003: 91, 226-7).

Habermas's (2002: 370; 2003: 91-2, 100-1, 254) argumentation regarding what he calls the 'orientation toward unconditional truth' is revealing in a number of relevant respects. Above all, it confirms his understanding not just of his theory of truth, but more broadly also of his theory of justification, as threefold. The process of justification of a truth claim starts from a Platonic moment of practical certainty based on an unquestioned assumption of plain truth and secure knowledge in the lifeworld. When the implicit truth claim becomes problematized, however, a discourse arises about the possible justification of the validity of that claim. For such a process to take off at all, second, the deflated Kantian moment needs to be activated by those concerned by orienting themselves toward truth – a step that involves the projective imagining of a totality in the form of the commonly presupposed objective world which is complemented by the unconditional transcendent validity concept of truth. Third, the formal features of this orientation complex, particularly the validity concept giving the presupposition of the objective world a sharp edge, incursively enable, frame and structure the justification process in such a way that it immanently acquires a clearly defined goal which can be pursued relative to the particular lifeworld situation and external reality. The orientation toward truth, note well, brings 'the resources of Kant's intelligible world' (Habermas, 2003: 92) – here the validity concept of truth as correlative orientation complex – into play, while 'the idea of truth', an idealization representing the inalienable property of unconditional validity, transcendentally enables from on high as an always already presupposed context-transcendent condition the process with its finite idealized goal.

Simultaneously, Habermas is also specific about the endowment and capacity of the agent with regard to orientation within the framework of this tripartite model of justification: 'Accountability

consists...in an agent's *general* ability to orient her action by validity claims' (2003: 95). Instead of just the orientation toward truth, he speaks here significantly of the '*general*' ability to be oriented by validity claims in the plural – or rather, given the obvious structural difference between unconditional validity and validity claims he glosses over,[4] orientation by validity concepts in the plural. Besides truth, therefore, there is also the validity concept of right or justice complementing the formally projected social world which is crucial to the current argument as well as, of course, the validity concept of sincerity or truthfulness complementing the formal presupposition of the subjective world. The differentiated general orienting ability attributed to the agent unequivocally gives rise to a question regarding Habermas's confinement of the validity of a moral claim to a justification-immanent position, thus prompting a shift to a consideration of the validity basis of rightness.[5]

The validity basis of rightness: a finite or an infinite ideal limit concept?
By now it is well-established that Habermas, in contrast to 'justification-transcendent' truth, regards rightness as 'justification-immanent' (2003: 248). As anticipated earlier, his reasoning for this asymmetry needs to be carefully investigated if clarity about the validity basis of rightness were to be gained. The probe must obviously start with his portrayal of transcendence.

According to Habermas's presentation, truth's justification-transcendent nature derives from its being a validity condition that must be met by a reference to the existing objective world. Rightness, by contrast, is devoid of a comparable ontological connotation due to its invocation of an inclusive interpersonally well-ordered socio-moral world that does not exist but is yet to be brought into being by the participants themselves. The conclusion thus follows for him that rightness must be justification-immanent. The basic assumption from which this reasoning proceeds is unmistakably that without an ontological relation there can be no transcendence. Since a truth claim deals with an existing objective world, as an unconditional validity condition it of necessity has to be complemented by some reference to a thing or an event. This interpretation of transcendence in terms of ontological dependence and the denial of any role for the existing world in rightness invite at least two objections, however. First, rather than dependence being primary, transcendence is a matter of an idealizing thrust beyond, and such idealization is implicated not only in the orientation underpinning a truth claim, but likewise in that of a rightness claim. Second, from an inferential perspective it is apparent that not only a truth claim, but indeed also a rightness claim, necessarily implies a moment of immanence or 'secondness', to invoke Peirce's (1998: 150-1) terminology, an experience of confrontation with something, even if unthematic. No judgement, action or norm is justified in a vacuum.

The first objection that transcendence is not definable in terms of ontological dependence, but is by nature rather a matter of idealization, can appeal to both Kant and Habermas himself. In keeping with his understanding that an imposition of the mind was necessary to make sense of complete infinity, Kant (1968, 1972) arrived at his ideas of reason by projecting totalities onto the ascending series as its infinite ideal limit concepts. And some two hundred years later, Habermas (2003: 83-130) reconceptualized them as 'idealizations' or '"idealizing" presuppositions' that play only a weak transcendental yet nevertheless decisive formal framing and structuring role in the process of immanent transcendence. It is further supported by Habermas's own depiction of the speaking, acting, claims-making and thus accountable agent quoted earlier. An agent embodies a general orienting ability, irrespective of whether it pertains to the objective, social or subjective world, which thus implicates the orientation complexes or validity structures of 'truth', 'rightness'[6] or, rather, right or justice, and 'sincerity' (2003: 95; 1996: 5). And what is more, Habermas directly links transcendence to such 'strong idealizations' when he submits that '[b]y orienting themselves to unconditional validity claims and presupposing each other's accountability, interlocutors aim *beyond contingent and merely local contexts*' (2003: 17, my emphasis). Cutting through the short-circuiting

phrase 'orienting themselves to unconditional validity claims', the meaning is that beyond the participants' mutual orientation to validity claims raised and assessed in the discursive process, they are simultaneously in transcending mode oriented toward unconditional validity concepts such as truth, right or justice and sincerity.

The second objection to the effect that the inferential relations carrying a rightness claim, just like a truth claim, necessarily also include an immanent referential moment of 'secondness' is indirectly supported by Habermas's own argument. In line with the threefold Peirce-inspired model of inference embracing abduction/firstness, induction/secondness and deduction/thirdness with which he operates,[7] he argued from the start that 'in every instance of communicative action the system of *all validity claims* comes into play' (1979: 66, my emphasis) and, in the late work, insisted on the 'agent's *general* ability to orient… her actions by *rules* [such as]…the spectrum of reasons…[or]…validity claims…whose *concept* she has mastered' (2003: 95, my italics). This means, among other things, that although the rightness of social relations enjoys priority as the theme in a moral claim, such a claim nevertheless simultaneously brings into play both the remaining truth and sincerity claims. In this case, the moment of secondness is borne by the concomitant subordinate truth claim's reference to, say, an indefensible or unjustifiably accepted norm, an unjust situation or a suffering section of the population, which in turn is authenticated by an implicated sincerity claim. This moment of secondness, this unthematic reference, provides the necessary foil against which the sense of a potential or possible ideal social world emerges which itself can take form and become profiled only if it is supported by an orientation toward the transcendent unconditional validity concept of right or justice. It should be obvious that such a potential or possibility profiled against the background of what exists is precisely what Habermas's regulative principle of a social world of legitimately regulated interpersonal relations that still needs to be constructed implies. Logically, this abstract potentiality or possibility is indeed the ultimate ideal at that level, yet it does not coincide with the validity concept that complements the formal presupposition of the social world. It represents merely the finite ideal limit concept, comparable to π, toward which the constructive process tends and, at best, will be able only to approximate but never to fully attain. In other words, it is an achievement concept and emphatically not itself a validity concept, certainly not the validity concept of right or justice it of necessity requires. It follows that Habermas's emphasis on justification-immanence and declaration of this achievement concept as the validity basis of a rightness claim is questionable. This evaluation, to be sure, by no means entails the moral realist denial of Habermas's insistence that the projected ideal socio-moral world yet to be brought into being is the source that constrains the attainment of rightness or moral knowledge, comparable to objective reality in the case of empirical knowledge, but it does dispute that this is possible without transcendent recourse to the validity concept of right or justice.

The findings of the investigation into Habermas's reasoning suggests that, despite incorporating the Kantian divergent perspective, there is a strong tendency in his argumentation to fall back upon the convergent perspective he had originally adopted for the purposes of explicating his theory of truth. Notwithstanding his correction of this concept by supplementing it with the validity concept of truth, there is evidence not only of an occasional elision of the infinite and finite ideal limit concepts (Strydom, 2017b), but also of a transfer of this tendency to the moral domain. In yet another example of elision, the 'Kantian idealizing…of the whole' is described as an 'anticipation' and, hence, effectively reduced to the π-like relative ideal of 'an "endless" conversation' (2003: 102) instead of registering that the deflated Kantian totality is actually an infinite ideal limit possessing the status of a validity concept which had been imposed once and for all by the human mind. In the moral domain, the view of an 'ongoing', 'continuous' or 'endless' process which has only an immanent limit the fulfilment of which is always anticipated is retained, and in the late philosophy a sophisticated argument in favour of prioritizing it is even developed – but what about the primary validity concept incursively structuring this domain?

The role of proceduralism
Were a search conducted for an explanation of the peculiar treatment Habermas affords the infinite ideal limit concept in his account of rightness, despite his undoubted general endorsement of the transcendent validity dimension, one would in all probability come to the view that his characteristic attachment to proceduralism following the convergent axis is to be isolated.[8] Proceduralism itself is of course conditioned by the broader formal-pragmatic perspective that is action-based and, as such, lacks full structural elaboration.[9] To grasp the full range of conceptual strategies at play, therefore, the procedural perspective would have to be considered in conjunction with the achievement and validity concepts or, differently, the action and structural dimensions.

It is the case that Habermas often raises the importance of the 'formal-procedural properties' (e.g. 1999b: 38; 2002: 366; 2003: 251) or the 'formal and processual characteristics' (2002: 367) of justification. But then, assuming process and procedure, he typically elaborates on the pragmatic 'argumentative presuppositions' or 'communicative conditions' (2002: 367; 2003: 248, 261, 265, 269-70) which render the formal properties in the reduced guise of the formal-pragmatically framed '*form* of communication' (251) confined to the convergent axis. Generally speaking, proceduralism regards the norms regulating the acceptability of the outcome of a procedure as being the same as the procedural rules by means of which correct or just procedures are distinguishable from incorrect or unjust procedures. In dealing with the justification process, Habermas accordingly focuses on the communicative rules participants adhere to in the discursive process that double up as the appropriate rules governing both the acceptability of the result and the evaluation of the procedures followed – that is, while not adequately incorporating, if not excluding, the divergent dimension of validity concepts forming part of the always already presupposed meta-cultural preconditions of formal-pragmatically framed procedurally regulated discursive processes.[10] Rather than pursuing the incursively enabling formal aspect to the end, he prefers to stick to a pragmatist, almost Deweyan or ethnomethodological understanding of the discursive process instead. It is not only the ultimate formal aspect that gets underplayed, however, but overlooked is also the always latent interventionist action potentially transgressing the status quo which is typically dependent on the incursive significance of the enabling conditions.

It thus becomes comprehensible how adherence to the carefully circumscribed formal-pragmatically framed procedural perspective by its very nature discourages attention being given to structures that go beyond both the regulative ideas and the formal-pragmatically channelled communicative presuppositions of the performatively shared deliberative situation. What calls for stronger emphasis is the infinite ideal limit concept structuring the process of moral justification – irrespective of whether conceived as an immanently rooted transcendent structure, a deflated Kantian totality, a formal condition or the validity concept of right or justice – which, as the always already available structural property, exceeds both the structural property advanced by the process and the structural property instantiated in the course of its deployment. And, in addition, it should be recalled that any process of moral justification simultaneously also has recourse to transcendent validity concepts pertaining to other than the socio-moral domain.

Conclusion regarding the validity problem
The foregoing analysis of Habermas's reasoning regarding the asymmetry between truth and rightness, the former being justification-transcendent and the latter justification-immanent, was aimed at investigating the cogency of his counterintuitive proposal to conceive the validity of rightness as resting solely on the projected ideal of a legitimately organized socio-moral world which is yet to be brought into being. The probe into this aspect of his theory of validity was undertaken against the background of his quite drastic revision of his long-held concept of truth, while the perspective adopted was that of the necessary and unavoidable conceptual distinction between

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achievement and validity concepts or, more formally, the mathematical-philosophical distinction between finite and infinite ideal limit concepts.

Concerning the results, it is by no means that Habermas lacks the distinction between these two types of limit concepts – after all he is a Kantian. It is rather that he is less than explicit about the infinite type when necessary and that, as a consequence, the two types occasionally get elided to the detriment of the infinite one. Evidence of such elision was presented by reference to a number of moments of wavering and inconsistency in his presentation. These tendencies were traced back to his apparent predilection for the action-based formal-pragmatically framed proceduralist perspective. In the case of truth, he was compelled to revise his position so as to explicitly include the infinite ideal limit concept in the form of the transcendent validity concept of truth beyond the justification process. In the case of rightness, however, he fell back strictly on the proceduralist approach which led to a choice being made for the finite ideal limit in the form of an achievement concept, and it was then postulated as the universal and unconditional validity basis of a moral claim. But – and this is the basic point – however vital this emphasis may be to secure the importance of moral knowledge for discursive universalization, a π-like achievement concept alone cannot possibly carry the weight of unconditionality. Given that it is a cultural model of a possible social world, it is by its very nature a constructed universal which is characterized by its continually deferring potential. Such a universal is an eminent vehicle for moral knowledge, as Habermas is at pains to stress, and it could conceivably attain social validity on the scale of humanity as a whole. At whatever scale, however, its constructive universalization would require transcendent recourse to activate the incursive force of unconditional validity for immanent actualization. Only thus could it incorporate right or justice, a property like truth that cannot be lost as long as we are *Homo sapiens sapiens* – a cognitive property that was historically generated and evolutionarily stabilized and, due to the decisive intervention of the human mind, is preserved in the transcendent meta-culture and present as a trace in institutions and the head.

The conclusion follows, then, that there simply is no possibility of a successful process of justification of a moral claim that remains confined to an immanent achievement concept. Recourse to an unconditional validity concept entails both the complementary moments of an immanently rooted transcendent orientation toward right or justice and a transcendental structure enabling an immanent binary right/wrong judgement. Without such immanent-transcendent mediation, the projection of a legitimate socio-moral world would not come to pass, with the result that the process itself would founder even before being able to start. It is incomprehensible how moral justification could be exempt from the process of immanent transcendence.

Coda
Rather than closing on a critical note, however, a brief cognitive-sociological coda is called for to do justice to Habermas's inspiring contribution.

In spite of the historical deflation of Kant's transcendental philosophy, Habermas retains the detranscendentalized problematic in the form of what he significantly calls the 'cultural embodiment of reason' (2003: 218). This expression invokes a process in the course of which validity concepts – for example, truth, right or justice and sincerity – contribute to the communicatively and procedurally regulated transposition of the participants' presupposition of those concepts into achievement concepts – for example, ideal ascertaining of truth, ideal confirmation of rightness – and, eventually, into concrete attainments such as justifiably accepted truths and moral claims and their institutional embodiment and organizational elaboration. This process he casts in the dynamic form encapsulated by the concept of 'immanent-transcendence' (2003: 17-8, 93). And he further explicitly regards the perspective that the participants in such a process unavoidably must assume if they were to test such validity claims, as being of a cognitive nature – that is, they do so from a

'kognitive Perspektive' (1999a: 306).[11] Whereas Habermas's presentation of the relation between truth and rightness remains at too high a level of generality to capture the essential details of the process in question, these extremely fecund conceptions of his open a vista on a possible cognitive-sociological elaboration that could complement and strengthen his philosophical account.

The specifics glossed over in a general sweep can to a significant degree be excavated by rendering the philosophical ideas in their cognitive-sociological sense and following the structured yet dynamic relations involved among the various components and levels in these terms. First, the convergent and divergent axes are respectively represented by the first-order historical-construction process and the second-order evolutionary structure-formation and stabilization process. Second, the finite ideal and the infinite ideal limit concepts respectively marking the outer extremities of these two processes on distinct levels can from the proposed perspective be regarded as an immanent cultural model, or models, and the transcendent cognitive order of society respectively. All the regulative ideas or achievement concepts governing the justification of both truth and moral claims are thus abstract cultural models, while validity concepts such as truth, right or justice and sincerity form part of the cognitive order. Although from a long-term perspective the cognitive order is the outcome of both history and evolution and is subject to sluggish transcendental evolution, its concepts or ideas have a pervasive indexing, framing and structuring effect immanently wherever rationality prevails. The incursive force of the cognitive order shapes all cultural models from on high and, through the intermediary of the range of cultural models which bear traces of its cognitive imprint, it is also present in social organizational arrangements and in action orientations. For its activation, in turn, a cognitive order validity concept depends on cognitively endowed agents to assume an orientation to it, while cultural models – whether high-level cognitive cultural models or lower-level substantive semantic-pragmatic cultural models – are actualized by agents allowing themselves to be governed by their recursive regulative force. While attention to agency and the actualization of cultural models is crucial, cognitive-sociological research requires close analysis in particular of the generative function of the cognitive order. It is treated as equivalent to a genomenology insofar as its range of validity concepts incursively enter in variable procedurally mediated selective combinations into cultural model formation and actualization as well as into social arrangements and action orientations. The operation of 'communicative reason' required to satisfy the 'posttraditional need for justification' (Habermas, 1996: 5; 2003: 263, 266) under contemporary conditions of pluralism cannot be accounted for if this moment of cognitive digital composition, as it were, remains underestimated. It is a vital aspect of the process of immanent-transcendence which, as a whole, harbours a circuit of flowing cognitive properties via the micro-, meso-, macro- and meta-levels at their respective levels, all of which need to be theoretically available for analysis to be able to proceed.

To grasp this intact immanent-transcendent network of agential capacities and orientations, the complex of cultural models embodying socially available procedural and moral knowledge, the activation and actualization of such cultural models, the procedural instantiation of communicative presuppositions and, finally, the in principle universally yet only indirectly accessible cognitive order principles out of which such knowledge-bearing agential structures, cultural models and procedural properties are selectively constructed and composed, is tantamount to understanding the cognitive structure of morality. Crucial here, however, is that this set of relations is dependent on social actors occupying pride of place who, from the cognitive rather than just the linguistic perspective, are both organically endowed and especially culturally enabled as being capable of speech, action, critical reflection, mutual understanding, cooperation and world-creation.

Notes

[1] Peirce's concept of truth may well be more complex than this attribution suggests (Strydom, 2017b).

[2] Badiou (2007: 356) calls fallible truth 'veridicity' in distinction to truth.

[3] An adequate grasp of this relation is possible only in terms of the concept of immanent-transcendence.

[4] When Habermas writes, 'to orient her actions by rules whose concept she has mastered' (2003: 95), he himself effectively acknowledges that validity claims are but immanent structures that depend on transcendent structures, yet he tends to neglect this insight.

[5] Although Levine's (2010, 2011) interest in the pragmatic concept of truth leads him to focus on objectivity, the thrust of his essays is the broader concern with the implications of this differentiated general ability.

[6] 'Rightness' seems misplaced here, signalling a conceptual difficulty, since it correlates immanently with the formal presupposition of a social world marked by the transcendent unconditional validity concept of right or justice.

[7] In the exposition of his own position through Peirce in the late 1980s, Habermas (1992: 88-112) adopted the American's tripartite semiotic model – a step that might well have paved the way for his new theory of truth a decade later. The original model, extensively documented in Peirce (1998), cannot be pursued here but is discussed at some length in Strydom (2011 and 2018).

[8] Relevant to the confining effect of the procedural approach, Apel (1998: 649-837) has on three occasions identified the basic limitation of Habermas's architectonic framework.

[9] Although Habermas's introduction of unconditional truth has important implications for his formal pragmatics, he neglects to follow them up (Renn 2000: 485). Obviously implicated is the structural dimension underplayed by formal-pragmatics.

[10] It is noteworthy that Habermas himself insists that the formal features of moral justification – which must include the validity concepts of right or justice – are to be found, albeit frequently lacking institutional form, 'in *all* cultures' (2002: 367; also 2003: 268).

[11] The translation of the German passage containing this expression avoids the adjective 'kognitive' in favour of 'the very perspective' (Habermas, 1999a: 306/2003: 265) instead.

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