BUILDING ETHICAL INTERFAITH COMMUNICATION: Karl-Otto Apel's Approach to Global Religious Dialogue

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Abstract

This study explores the philosophical underpinnings of interreligious dialogue by examining Karl-Otto Apel's transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutics. The analysis focuses on the encounter between Pope Francis and Grand Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb. Employing a qualitative-descriptive method with a philosophical-communicative approach, the research analyzes Apel's discourse ethics and its applicability to contemporary religious dialogue. The data were obtained through library research and analyzed hermeneutically using content analysis. The results of the study suggest that Apel's theory offers a normative framework that has the potential to transcend the dichotomy between cultural relativism and theological exclusivism. The Human Fraternity Document is examined as a practical manifestation of communicative rationality that embodies ethical discourse. The study's findings indicate that Apel's approach fosters the development of inclusive, equitable, and ethically responsible interfaith communication. The report calls for educational institutions to incorporate communicative ethics into multicultural curricula, and it urges religious institutions to foster dialogical communities characterized by equality and openness. These efforts are vital for fostering sustainable peace and social cohesion within plural societies, particularly in culturally diverse nations like Indonesia.

A. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary global context, issues of religious diversity and interfaith relations stand as significant challenges that demand meticulous and contemplative attention (Hasibuan et al., 2024). The phenomenon of globalization has not only accelerated the exchange of information and human mobility on a global scale, but has also given rise to a number of significant societal challenges. These include identity crises, religious exclusivism, and increased tensions between religious groups (Mashuri et al., 2015). In this contest, interfaith dialogue is no longer a mere norm, but rather an ethical and political necessity in building a peaceful and just common life (Corpuz, 2025; Jati et al., 2022; Kopel et al., 2020). Consequently, it is imperative to scrutinize philosophical methodologies that can fortify the normative foundations of interfaith discourse. A notable event that exemplifies the pressing need for interfaith dialogue in the contemporary era is the historic meeting between Pope Francis and the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb (Perzy, 2025).

The ongoing dialogue, initiated in 2016, reached its zenith in 2019 with the signing of the Human Brotherhood Document in Abu Dhabi (Osredkar, 2021). The document's symbolic value is complemented by its role in representing a moral and spiritual agreement, aiming to foster a more tolerant, inclusive, and humanist world order (Yanuardanah & Mualimin, 2020). Amidst the prevailing global identity fragmentation, this juncture marks a pivotal milestone in the evolution of interfaith communication ethics (Perzy, 2025). A critical approach is offered through Transcendental-Pragmatic Hermeneutics when the normative foundations of these dialog efforts are understood from a philosophical perspective. This approach is characteristic of Karl-Otto Apel's thought. This theory underscores the significance of communicative rationality as the foundation for the establishment of intersubjective and transcultural ethical norms (Borrelli, 2020). Apel's argument posits that the assertion of any truth claim in communication necessitates justification within an open and egalitarian discursive space (Ortega-Esquembre, 2019). Consequently, dialogue is not merely a mere exchange of views; rather, it constitutes an ethical arena for achieving normative consensus through rational argumentation.

The objective of this study is to analyze the relevance of Karl-Otto Apel's thought in establishing the philosophical foundation of contemporary interreligious dialogue. This analysis will be conducted through a case study of the meeting between Pope Francis and Ahmed el-Tayeb, with the aim of exploring how the principles of transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutics can enhance the ethical, inclusive, and sustainable practices of religious dialogue. Furthermore, it is anticipated that this study will contribute to the development of communication ethics theory in the context of religious pluralism. In line with that, the question to be answered in this study is how the relevance of Karl-Otto Apel's thought, especially the theory of transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutics, can support the praxis of interreligious dialogue between Pope Francis and Ahmad el-Tayeb. This inquiry is pivotal in determining whether Apel's theory is confined to philosophical normativity or possesses the capacity to be operationalized within the domain of authentic religious praxis, which is replete with historical and political challenges.

This study is predicated on Karl-Otto Apel's notion that the transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutic approach furnishes a coherent and applicable philosophical framework to fortify the ethical basis of interreligious dialogue (Kettner & Molina, 2020). By establishing communicative rationality as the foundation for forming a moral consensus, this theory facilitates the harmonization of divergent beliefs without compromising their inherent identities. Therefore, the application of this theory to the dialogue between two major world religious figures can demonstrate how modern philosophy contributes to the realization of constructive and transformative interfaith ethics.

B. METHODS

This research employs a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach, utilizing a philosophy of communication framework. The primary focus of this study is the conceptual and interpretative analysis of Karl-Otto Apel's notion of transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutics, along with its application in comprehending the practice of interfaith dialogue between Pope Francis and the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar. This approach was selected because it enables researchers to examine the normative, epistemological, and ethical dimensions underlying interfaith communication in the contemporary global context. The data

sources utilized in this research encompass two distinct categories, namely: The primary sources utilized in this study encompass original texts that encapsulate the philosophical tenets of Karl-Otto Apel, prominently featuring his seminal works, *Diskurs und Verantwortung* and *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*. Additionally, the analysis draws upon the foundational document, Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, which was signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Ahmad el-Tayeb. The secondary sources employed in this study consist of academic studies, journal articles, dissertations, and other pertinent sources that delve into the intricate facets of discourse ethics, interreligious dialogue, and rational communication.

The method of data collection entails conducting library research, which involves examining various references related to the research theme. Subsequent to this, the data were analyzed hermeneutically to reveal the meaning structure contained in the text. These data were then combined with the transcendental-pragmatic normative framework to test the coherence, relevance, and practical implications of Apple theory in the context of religious dialogue. The researcher employed the content analysis technique to identify and evaluate the normative principles of communication reflected in the dialogue. The objective of this analysis was to assess how these principles can strengthen ethical praxis in interfaith interactions. This method is employed so that the research may achieve two objectives. First, it seeks to elucidate the relationship between theory and practice. Second, it endeavors to provide critical philosophical reflections on the role of communicative rationality in establishing inclusive, just, and transformative spaces of discourse in a plural society. Consequently, this methodological approach contributes to the development of communication ethics theory while expanding the scope of religious dialogue practices in the global public sphere.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Overview of Karl-Otto Apel

Karl-Otto Apel, a preeminent German philosopher of the 20th century, is widely recognized for his seminal contributions to the development of transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutics and discursive ethics (Sikka, 2012). Apel's

birth occurred on March 15, 1922, in Düsseldorf, Germany, and his death on May 15, 2017 (Wulandar & Masruhan, 2023). Apel's intellectual life was shaped in the context of post-World War II history and philosophy, a period that demanded moral reconstruction and rationality amid the collapse of modernity's values due to global conflict and totalitarianism (Habermas, 2020). Apel's academic credentials include a doctorate from the University of Bonn, which he obtained in 1950. He subsequently obtained a second degree in Mainz in 1969 and then became a professor of philosophy in Kiel from 1962 to 1969. n the early stages of his academic career, Apel's philosophical perspective was significantly influenced by German idealist thought, particularly the works of Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and G. W. F. Hegel. However, as time progressed, Apel underwent a substantial development in his thought, integrating hermeneutic approaches and linguistic analysis within the framework of critical philosophy (Filipiak, 2015).

A seminal intellectual moment in the development of his thought was his engagement in the dialogue of continental philosophy and analytic philosophy, especially through the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Martin Heidegger (Sikka, 2012). However, in contrast to Heidegger, who tends to emphasize the ontological dimension of language, Peirce develops an ethical and normative approach to language through the concepts of ideal communication community and communicative rationality (Scivoletto, 2015). In his seminal works, such as Transformation der Philosophie and Diskurs und Verantwortung, Apel advances the notion that every act of communication carries with it claims of truth, honesty, and normative accuracy, necessitating an intersubjective consideration of these claims. He posits that the foundational principles of ethics cannot be anchored in cultural relativism or conventional authority. Instead, he contends that ethics must be rooted in communicative rationality that is transcendental-pragmatic (Borrelli, 2020). In essence, ethical principles must be established through open dialogue among individuals of equal moral standing, wherein rational argumentation and logical consensus serve as fundamental tenets.

Karl-Otto Apel is recognized as the intellectual partner and, at times, the "philosophical counterweight" of Jürgen Habermas. Despite their shared commitment to the project of communicative rationality in the tradition of Frankfurt critical theory, Apel places significant emphasis on the transcendental-

pragmatic dimension as the basis of normative legitimacy, while Habermas places significant emphasis on the sociological and procedural aspects of communication (Afrilianti, 2024, pp. 229–232; Filipiak, 2017). As an academic, Apel dedicated the majority of his professional career to the University of Frankfurt am Main, where he engaged in teaching and scholarly writing for an extended period. He is esteemed as a philosopher who has persistently defended the principles of moral responsibility, ethical communication, and the significance of discourse in public life (Böhler, 2003). His thought has become an important reference in moral philosophy, global ethics, interreligious dialogue, and contemporary political philosophy. Apel's intellectual legacy is marked by his contribution to the establishment of a link between modern rationality and the necessity for an ethical reconstruction that is capable of addressing the crisis of meaning in the postmodern world. By integrating transcendental reflection and linguistic pragmatism, Apel establishes a new foundation for philosophy to maintain its relevance in addressing contemporary ethical, social, and political issues.

Karl-Otto Apel's Transcendental-Pragmatic Hermeneutics

Karl-Otto Apel developed a transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutics as a response to the limitations of traditional hermeneutics and modern positivism (Habermas, 2020). Apel's departure from intellectual anxiety related to contemporary reality, in which positivism, relativism, and moral nihilism are increasingly prevalent in the discourse of modern thought (Tetyuev, 2019), is a significant departure from the prevailing trends in contemporary philosophy. According to Apel, this condition engenders a state of impasse in ethical discourses, as it erodes the existence of a robust, shared foundation for the discernment of universal moral truths (Wulandar & Masruhan, 2023). In this particular instance, Apel poses a fundamental question: "How can we be morally responsible for future generations if there is no universally accepted ethics that can be embraced by all parties?" This inquiry underscores Apel's apprehension regarding the dissolution of the normative foundation in collective existence, a phenomenon he attributes to the fragmentation of values.

Apel sought to transcend the prevalent hermeneutical approach in post-Heideggerian German philosophy, particularly the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (Scivoletto, 2015). While recognizing the importance of historical context and tradition in the process of understanding, Apel does not reject Gadamer's hermeneutics. However, he also criticizes Gadamer for being too yielding to cultural relativism (Scivoletto, 2018). According to Apel, hermeneutics does not provide a clear normative basis for distinguishing between just and oppressive interpretations (Afrilianti, 2024). He questions, "Can we only understand the world from within our own tradition? Where, then, is the place for a rational critique of tradition itself?" (Apel, 1998, pp. xxxvi–xxxvii). This critique sets the stage for Apel's development of a new approach, which he calls "transcendental pragmatics": the search for a normative foundation that does not rely on metaphysical systems but also does not fall into relativism. Here, Apel engages in dialogue with Habermas, as both philosophers seek the basis of rational ethics through communicative theory (Apel, 1998).

Apel appreciates and sympathizes with Habermas's theoretical project, especially his idea that communication is the foundation of ethics. However, Apel asks a critical methodological question: "What kind of communication is this?" (Kettner, 2006). This question becomes the starting point for developing a transcendental-pragmatic theory of discourse and communication, which emphasizes the universal normative requirements for a rational and fair exchange of opinions. Thus, Apel seeks to establish an ethical basis that is both rational and not trapped in cultural relativism and not rigid like the positivistic model. He emphasizes the need for a universal normative foundation that can facilitate moral accountability across generations and traditions.

The collaboration of thought between Karl-Otto Apel and Jurgen Habermas is widely regarded as a significant milestone in contemporary social philosophy and ethics (Kesselring, 2017). Despite their divergent approaches and accents, these scholars are unified by a shared philosophical concern, namely the crisis of rationality in modern society (Afrilianti, 2024, pp. 229–232). In the contemporary context, characterized by the preeminence of science and technology, as well as the fragmentation of values precipitated by globalization and cultural pluralism, Apel and Habermas endeavored to reconstitute the foundations of rationality. This

endeavor encompassed not only technical aspects, but also normative and communicative dimensions (Filipiak, 2017; Kettner, 2017). Apel and Habermas offer a critique of instrumental rationality, defined as a form of rationality that prioritizes the pursuit of effectiveness and efficiency in achieving predetermined objectives. This critique asserts that the emphasis on instrumental rationality disregards the inherent value and moral significance of the objectives themselves (Blau, 2022; Hedberg, 2006; Lopez-Gonzalez, 2018). This form of rationality, stemming from the positivistic scientific paradigm and propelled by the logic of capitalism and modern bureaucracy, has effectively reduced human reason to a mere instrument for controlling and optimizing the world. However, it has not been utilized for understanding, interpreting, or ethically justifying actions (Overwijk, 2021).

In response to this issue, Apel and Habermas propose an alternative approach, termed "communicative rationality." In contrast to instrumental rationality, communicative rationality prioritizes dialogue between individuals as the fundamental aspect of the cognitive and behavioral processes (Kesselring, 2017). Rationality is no longer regarded as a subjective trait; rather, it is now understood as an intersubjective ability to cultivate mutual understanding through honest, open, and equal communication. In this case, language functions not only as a means of conveying information, but also as an ethical medium that facilitates the establishment of legitimate social norms. It was within this paradigm that the foundational principles of communication theory were established, thereby laying the cornerstone for the evolution of intersubjective ethics. In this framework, Apel and Habermas contend that ethics must transcend the confines of individual volition, moral intuition, and metaphysical doctrines that are particular. Instead, moral values must be tested and justified in a discursive space, i.e., a rational forum where every subject can propose, refute, or approve norms with justifiable reasons (Ndayambaje, 2017).

According to Kettner (2006), the aforementioned theory gave rise to a concept known as discourse ethics. The fundamental principle underlying this ethical framework is the notion that only those norms that can be rationally accepted by all affected parties in an ideal communication situation can be considered morally valid (Apel, 1988, pp. 7–14). In essence, moral validity does not

stem from external authority or tradition, but rather, it is derived from consensus reached through a process of argumentation that is free from coercion, manipulation, and domination. Discursive ethics does not claim absolute truth; rather, it seeks to ensure that accepted norms have intersubjective legitimacy through a process of fair and rational communication (Ortega-Esquembre, 2019). In the course of developing this project, Apel placed greater emphasis on the transcendental-pragmatic dimension, thereby demonstrating that all forms of rational communication inherently presuppose certain ethical prerequisites, such as honesty, openness, and a willingness to listen (Kettner & Molina, 2020).

Apel's argument posits that individuals engaged in discourse are implicitly committed to certain moral norms, a commitment that is vital for the continuity of communication itself. Conversely, Habermas's focus is on the sociological and procedural dimensions of communicative rationality within the modern public sphere (Afrilianti, 2024). This discrepancy in emphasis does not hinder the convergence of these two schools of thought on a shared theoretical trajectory: namely, the pursuit of universal ethics devoid of dogmatic foundations. In a world characterized by pluralism and conflict, Apel and Habermas contend that moral foundations rooted in religion, tradition, or archaic metaphysics are no longer capable of serving as a shared reference point. According to Apel and Habermas, the principles of communicative rationality—which are transcultural, open, and testable through argument—are the only ones that can serve as a common basis for an inclusive and democratic global ethics (Kesselring, 2017).

In the philosophy of communication approach developed by Karl-Otto Apel, three key elements complement each other: historical interpretation (hermeneutics), analysis of language acts (pragmatics), and universal normative requirements of communication (transcendental) (Gracia-Calandín, 2019). Apel's approach is characterized by his acceptance of Gademer's philosophical hermeneutics, which underscores the notion that understanding is inherently historical. It is imperative to acknowledge that no subject is entirely neutral or value-free; all individuals inherently operate from within a preconceived cultural and linguistic framework (Apel, 1998, pp. 1–45). In this sense, meaning is never objectively and universally present; rather, it is always mediated by experience, tradition, and language. It is imperative to acknowledge that all forms of

communication and interpretation are inextricably embedded within a distinct historical context, which exerts a profound influence on the manner in which individuals perceive the world and their interactions with others. Apel's contributions extend beyond the realm of hermeneutics, as he also explores the implications of understanding that is solely anchored in tradition and context. He contends that such a perspective precludes the possibility of critiquing injustice or implementing normative reform.

The Apel approach is a multifaceted methodology that is employed in various fields of enquiry. The second step in this approach is pragmatics, which emphasizes the analysis of speech acts—that is, the manner in which communication occurs concretely between individuals in actual situations (Sikka, 2012). This shift in focus entails a transition from an examination of the structural underpinnings of language to a consideration of its utilization in social interaction. The third, transcendental, is employed to formulate the normative and basic conditions that render rational communication possible (Böhler, 2003). In this case, Apel's objective is to identify universal principles that must exist to ensure the normative and ethical basis for communication and understanding between humans. Apel's comprehensive theory of communication was formulated through a combination of three approaches, integrating historical, pragmatic, and norm-transcendental dimensions. This theoretical framework aimed to address the question of rationality in human understanding and communication (Molina-Molina, 2019).

The Process of Understanding in the Perspective of Hermenutics, Discourse and Reflection

In the domain of communication philosophy, the process of understanding is not regarded as a purely subjective endeavor; rather, it is the outcome of the interplay among multiple dimensions (Saint-Dizier de Almeida et al., 2016). The present process is comprised of three primary approaches: hermeneutics, rational discourse, and transcendental reflection. Firstly, the hermeneutic approach underscores the significance of historical and cultural context in the interpretation of an utterance. The comprehension of meaning is not impartial; it is perpetually influenced by the individual's pre-existing understanding and interpretive

framework (Maxwell et al., 2020). Therefore, it is imperative to interpret communications and texts considering the context in which they were created. Secondly, in rational discourse, the focus is on assessing the normative validity of a statement or action (Damiani, 2020). To illustrate, in the assessment of fairness, this discourse entails rational inter-subjective dialogue, wherein each party contributes to the determination of applicable norms through justifiable arguments.

The third is transcendental reflection, which engenders the realization that every form of communication is inextricably linked to implicit moral assumptions that underpin the interaction (Böhler, 2003; Yuko, 2019). For instance, when individuals engage in an honest discussion, a normative assumption is made that honesty is a good value, although this is not always explicitly expressed. Consequently, the process of understanding is not only interpretative, but also normative and reflective. The three approaches are complementary in their depiction of the intricacies of human understanding in rational and ethical communication.

Universal Normative Terms of Communication (Transcendental A priori)

In the transcendental-pragmatic communication framework, a set of universal normative conditions exists that are a priori and become fundamental prerequisites for rational and ethical communication. These conditions are not only technical but also normative, as they are directly related to the validity and legitimacy of communication between subjects (Böhler, 2003). Firstly, veracity serves as the fundamental basis for the speaker, who is bound to articulate their genuine thoughts without deceiving their interlocutor. The absence of honesty in communication results in a loss of credibility. Secondly, sincerity entails that the intentions conveyed are born from honest intentions, devoid of manipulation or pretense. Thirdly, communication must be intelligible, which means that the message must be conveyed with an explanation that can be understood linguistically and logically by the listener. Fourthly, relevance necessitates that every utterance must be in accordance with the context and purpose of communication. Fifthly, communication participants must be open to criticism and willing to review their opinions if stronger arguments are found rationally.

The sixth requirement is the importance of equal participation, in which every individual affected by the issue has the same right to be involved in the discourse and the same opportunity to express their views without discrimination or marginalization. The seventh requirement is that healthy communication must guarantee freedom from domination (freedom from coercion). There should be no elements of pressure, threats, or coercion that hamper the freedom of participants in the discussion. Eighth, rational validity (or justificability) is required, meaning that any claims or norms proposed must be capable of being rationally justified and accepted by all parties involved. Finally, the primary purpose of communication is not merely to win the debate, but rather to demonstrate a commitment to truth and justice, namely a joint search for fair and substantially correct values. These conditions are formulated in the theory of discourse ethics by Karl-Otto Apel and further developed by Jürgen Habermas, which places communication in a position that is not only functional, but ethically and normatively charged as part of human rational praxis (Ortega-Esquembre, 2019).

Discourse Ethics

Discourse ethics is a normative ethical approach developed in the context of communication and moral philosophy. It relies on the requirements of rationality in the process of communication between individuals (Niesen, 2017). This approach is predicated on the premise that the moral validity of a norm cannot be determined unilaterally, whether by religious authority, tradition, or power. Rather, it is argued that such determination must be made in a discursive space that involves all affected parties equally and rationally (Ndayambaje, 2017). The fundamental principle in discourse ethics posits that "a norm can only be regarded as legitimate if it is consented to by all affected parties through free and equal rational discourse" (Pueyo-Ibáñez, 2019). In other words, moral legitimacy is not absolute or inherited; rather, it is the result of an open, rational, and inclusive process of critical dialogue. In this context, ethical truth is not regarded as a preexisting entity; rather, it is understood as the outcome of a collective deliberative process among autonomous subjects.

Discourse ethics does not aim to compile a list of specific moral injunctions, such as "Don't steal" or "Be fair." Rather, it focuses on providing a normative

framework to test the moral validity of a norm based on rational agreement (Ndayambaje, 2017). In the context of this framework, discourse ethics is comprised of three fundamental functions. Firstly, it provides a foundation for the objective assessment of the validity of moral norms within society. Secondly, it ensures that ethical standards are not imposed, but rather emerge from the engagement and consensus of all relevant parties. Finally, it offers a universal ethical framework within a pluralistic and complex global society (Böhler, 2003).

To elucidate this principle, one must consider the ethical implications of the utilization of public surveillance technology. In the context of discourse ethics, the question cannot be resolved through the application of personal judgment, positive law, or local cultural values. An open discussion space involving all relevant stakeholders is imperative. This inclusive forum must include citizens, state institutions, minority groups, and other affected parties. In such discourses, all arguments must be subject to rational scrutiny and should not be subject to imposition by any authority. Decisions are regarded as both legitimate and ethical only if all parties can accept them based on sound reasoning and mutual agreement.

Discourse ethics underscores the significance of open discourse as a deliberative mechanism. This suggests that individuals should have an equal opportunity to present arguments, criticize others' views, and change their stance based on stronger reasons (Krüger, 2016; Meisenbach, 2006). In practice, this necessitates the establishment of optimal conditions for communication, encompassing the principles of freedom of speech, equitable participation, and the absence of coercion or domination. Consequently, discourse ethics is not merely theoretical; it possesses extensive practical ramifications in the domains of public decision-making, policy-making, and the evaluation of social norms. In the midst of global challenges such as social inequality, surveillance technology, climate change, and cultural conflict, this approach provides an ethical framework that accommodates a diversity of views without compromising the principles of rationality and justice.

Religious Dialogue between Pope Francis and Al-Azhar Grand Sheikh in the Perspective of Transcendental-Pragmatic Discursive Ethics

The interfaith dialogue between Pope Francis and Al-Azhar Grand Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayyeb signifies a significant milestone in the history of interfaith relations, particularly between Islam and Christianity. The Document on Human Brotherhood for World Peace and Coexistence (2019) symbolizes and embodies this meeting, representing a significant effort to establish an ethical framework for inclusive and transformative communication (Fransiskus & El-Tayyeb, 2019). This framework transcends the confines of a mere diplomatic event or religious ceremony, signifying a collective commitment to fostering peaceful and inclusive dialogue. From the perspective of Karl-Otto Apel's transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutics, the dialog can be interpreted as a concrete practice of discursive ethics. In this interpretation, communication between subjects is carried out in a spirit of equality, openness, and shared moral responsibility.

Pope Francis and the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar unequivocally condemn all manifestations of violence perpetrated in the name of religion, underscoring the paramountcy of respect for human dignity as God's creation (Fransiskus & El-Tayyeb, 2019). This statement possesses a profound ethical dimension, as it demonstrates an acknowledgement of universal values that transcend theological boundaries and particular identities. In this sense, the Peacemaking Document is a concrete representation of the ethical commitment to build a more just, peaceful, and respectful world. This initiative demands an end to conflict and underscores the significance of education, social justice, and cross-cultural dialogue as the foundation for a future civilization (Fransiskus & El-Tayyeb, 2019).

Within Apel's theoretical framework, the actions of these two religious leaders can be interpreted as an embodiment of the ideal communication community. This concept represents a normative ideal, positing a discursive space wherein all participants engage in unrestrained, rational, and egalitarian dialogue, devoid of coercion or domination. Such a community transcends geographical, political, and religious boundaries, leveraging differences as ethical capital to foster mutual understanding. Pope Francis and the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar illustrate that, despite the persistence of theological differences that cannot be eradicated, constructive communication and mutual respect are still attainable (Kropáček, 2021). In this context, diversity is not a threat; rather, it is a hermeneutic wealth that must be ethically cultivated through reflective and inclusive discourse.

The principle of communicative responsibility, as articulated by Apel, is also evident in this dialogue. The utterances of these two figures function not only as expressions of religious identity, but also as commitments to a broader social reality. It is acknowledged that language carries consequences, and thus, the language employed in interfaith discourse must reflect moral sensitivity, historical awareness, and the volonté to reconcile. Pope Francis's openness to Islam, as evidenced by his various statements and symbolic gestures, including visits to Muslim-majority countries and the use of the term "brother" in addressing Muslims, demonstrates an effort to transcend the "us versus them" dichotomy (Catalano, 2022). In a similar vein, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar not only endorses the humanitarian principles inherent in Christianity, but also extends an invitation to Muslims, encouraging engagement in active dialogue and the forging of global solidarity (Lasim, 2022).

Consequently, the discourse between Pope Francis and the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar can be interpreted as a manifestation of discursive ethics, a concept that holds contemporary relevance, particularly within the context of a global landscape characterized by identity conflicts, intolerance, and humanitarian crises. It has been demonstrated that dialogue is not merely a method of communication; rather, it is an ethical commitment that stems from a transcendental awareness of shared responsibility as fellow human beings. In Apel's view, this is an effort towards an ideal communicative rationality, where each subject respects the dignity of the other, and every act of communication is directed towards achieving mutual understanding and a more just and humane social transformation.

Relevance and Implications of Karl-Otto Apel's Transcendental-Pragmatic Hermeneutics

The transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutic framework developed by Karl-Otto Apel makes an important contribution in answering epistemological and ethical challenges that arise in the context of a pluralistic society. A primary strength of this approach lies in its capacity to mediate between two extremes that frequently give rise to discord in contemporary religious discourse: cultural relativism and theological exclusivism. Apel's position is not one that embraces the notion that truth is exclusively constrained by a specific cultural context. However, he neither endorses nor repudiates the approach that asserts an absolute superiority over

doctrinal truth. Instead, he proposes a paradigm of ethical communication rooted in intersubjective rationality—a dialogical space in which the subjects of communication seek to reach an understanding through arguments that are universally justifiable and free from domination.

This paradigm is particularly salient in today's globalized world, where religion, rather than serving as a source of peace, is frequently employed as a means to fortify exclusive identities and incite conflict. In a multicultural society, the necessity for an ethical framework that can accommodate differences without reducing identity to homogeneity becomes increasingly imperative. Apel's hermeneutics allows for a reflective approach to religious differences, wherein each party is not compelled to relinquish their beliefs, but rather invited to engage in rational discourse that respects the dignity and moral autonomy of all parties. Consequently, Apel's thought furnishes a robust theoretical foundation for the development of a more substantial interfaith dialogue, one that is oriented towards the achievement of universal values such as justice, solidarity, and peace.

From a pragmatic point of view, the transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutic approach has broad implications in various sectors of social life. In the domain of education, for instance, the principle of Apple's communicative rationality can serve as the foundation for a multicultural education curriculum. This curriculum should not merely promote tolerance as a passive disposition. Rather, it should foster the development of critical awareness and the capacity for reflective dialogue. Students are encouraged to recognize and understand the ethical and rational basis of diversity in an equal discursive atmosphere. In the context of interfaith relations, this theory can be operationalized through a religious diplomacy approach that is not trapped in mere formal symbolism, but is based on the principles of true deliberation and participation. Religious leaders, academics, and other social actors are encouraged to establish a space for dialogue that is not characterized by a top-down or normative-dogmatic approach. Instead, the objective is to foster a horizontal dialogue that is receptive to criticism, correction, and collaborative reconstruction of human values.

In Indonesia, a nation characterized by a multifaceted and varied religious terrain, the Apel approach can be regarded as a philosophical underpinning that serves to fortify the infrastructure of deliberative and democratic interfaith

discourse. As a nation founded on the principles of the five principles of the Indonesian Constitution (Pancasila) and committed to the values of humanity and social justice, Indonesia requires a hermeneutic approach that relies not only on formal tolerance, but also on communicative rationality, allowing for the intersubjective transformation of understanding. In this particular context, transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutics can be integrated into public policy, particularly in the formulation of regulations that are inclusive of the diversity of religious beliefs and practices.

Furthermore, this approach has the potential to contribute to the enrichment of civil society discourse, a process that has played a significant role in maintaining social cohesion in the face of potential identity fragmentation. Therefore, it can be concluded that Karl-Otto Apel's theory provides a conceptual contribution to the understanding of the dynamics of ethical communication in the midst of plurality. Furthermore, Apel's theory offers applicable praxis directions for the development of a more dialogical, just, and humane society. This approach posits that rationality is not the exclusive property of a particular tradition; rather, it is a universal human capacity to understand, correct, and take responsibility for communication actions in an inclusive and reflective social space.

D. CONCLUSION

The results of this study demonstrate that Karl-Otto Apel's transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutic approach provides a robust and applicable philosophical foundation for the praxis of interfaith dialogue within the context of a plural and complex global society. By establishing communicative rationality as the ethical foundation, this approach serves to mitigate the discord between cultural relativism and theological exclusivism, thereby fostering the development of a discursive space that is inclusive, egalitarian, and free from domination. The exchange between Pope Francis and the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar exemplifies the operationalization of discourse ethics in the context of transformative and civilized interfaith communication.

These findings imply the practical necessity of strengthening communicative rationality as a normative framework in various fields of social life, including education, public policy, and interfaith relations. Therefore, it is

recommended that the transcendental-pragmatic hermeneutic approach be integrated into the multicultural education curriculum and used as a reference in building a more reflective and participatory interfaith dialog model. Furthermore, religious institutions and social actors in Indonesia should promote the establishment of discursive communities that uphold the principles of equality, openness, and shared moral responsibility. This initiative would serve to strengthen social cohesion and realize sustainable peace in the context of diversity.

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