I. Habermas’s “Discourse Ethics”

A. The Principle of Universalization (62-68)

1. What does Habermas mean by the principle of universalization or, as he sometimes calls it for short, “principle U”?

2. How does Habermas understand his version of the principle of universalization to differ from Rawls’s “original position” in which a similar perspective of impartiality is demanded of us? Why does Habermas consider real discourse and dialogue among those affected by a normative principle to be important in its justification, not merely our consideration of what, hypothetically, we suppose people would say?

B. The Justification of the Principle of Universalization (78-94)

1. Why does Habermas consider it important to seek to justify the validity of the principle of universalization? (78-79)

2. Habermas’s argument for the universal validity of the principle of universalization hinges on his point that whenever we engage in argumentation we presuppose rules of argument (Alexy’s Rules) which, in the context of considering the validity of normative principles, implies the principle of universalization itself. Hence we cannot argue against the validity of the principle without contradicting ourselves because in the act of argument we presuppose it. How so? (88-94)

   a. Why does Habermas consider the following statement to be nonsense: “Having excluded persons A, B, C … from the discussion by silencing them or foisting our interpretation on them, we were able to convince them that N is justified”? (91) Is he right?

   b. What are Alexy’s rules and how do they imply the principle of universalization?

3. Morality and Ethical Life (102-109)

   a. In what way is Habermas’s discourse ethics a “procedural” ethics which presupposes an array of substantive values to be tested as to their potential validity as a moral principle, acceptable to all?
b. What does Habermas mean in speaking of ethical values concerning “the good life” which, though they may not be properly moral principles for him insofar as they are not acceptable to all, may still be accepted as valid in their own limited contexts? What are some plausible examples of ethical values, as Habermas understands them? What are some plausible examples of moral principles, principles of justice, as Habermas understands them?