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Issue #08. June 1997

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Abstracts of the Papers (p. 3)
- Synthesising Intersubjectively
by S.H. Elkatip (p. 5)
- Truth in Pure Semantics: A Reply to Putnam
by Luis Fernández Moreno (p. 15)
- Argumentation, Values, and Ethics
by Alfonso Monsalve (p. 24)
- Framework of an Intersubjectivist Theory of Meaning
by Cristina Corredor (p. 33)
- Notes to Potential Contributors (p. 61)
- Copyright Notice and Legal Disclaimer (p. 65)
- Release Notice (p. 68)

SORITES (ΣΩΡΙΤΗΣ), ISSN 1135-1349
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ABSTRACTS OF THE PAPERS

SYNTHESISING INTERSUBJECTIVELY

S.H. Elkatip

The question discussed is whether Quine abolishes the analytic synthetic distinction or changes its nature. It is argued that either the point is trivial and the former is not established or the latter holds: Quine challenges the teaching that analytical statements are exchanged intersubjectively whereas some synthetic statements are private.



TRUTH IN PURE SEMANTICS: A REPLY TO PUTNAM

Luis Fernández Moreno

In his book *Representation and Reality* Hilary Putnam raises a number of objections against the semantical conception of truth. According to Putnam two particularly undesirable consequences of the semantical conception of truth are that the equivalences of the form (T) are logically necessary and that the truth of a sentence does not depend on its meaning. In this paper I examine these two objections of Putnam with respect to Carnap's formulation of the semantical conception of truth.



ARGUMENTATION, VALUES, AND ETHICS**Alfonso Monsalve**

Moral concepts are argumentative values with claims to universal acceptance. they exprees beliefs that are formed in dialogical exchange. The paper defines conditions of acceptability of this kind of beliefs and its limitations.

**FRAMEWORK OF AN INTERSUBJETIVIST THEORY OF MEANING****Cristina Corredor**

Here a critical revision is carried out of the intersubjectivist theory of meaning embodied in the Formal (Universal) Pragmatics developed within the framework of the Theory of Communicative Action (J. Habermas). According to very recent «internal» criticisms, only a version of H. Putnam's theory of direct reference can avoid the kind of meaning holism and linguistic relativism which assails Habermas' foundation of *shared meaning* on the intersubjective validity of a rule. A more detailed analysis of Putnam's views, as well as of the referred criticisms, shows that they in fact represent an unorthodox reading trying to conciliate Putnam's first functionalist theory with his second pragmatical Internal Realism. Finally it is concluded that only a *quasi*-Kantian view on the formal-pragmatical presuppositions underlying epistemic language use seems to offer an answer to the core *de iure* question: what makes it possible to justify validity for already constituted meanings in epistemic contexts.

SYNTHESISING INTERSUBJECTIVELY

S.H. Elkatip

The argument I present here falls into four major parts. First, we note that Quine's usage of the word «stimulus» is more prodigal than Skinner would have approved. In the second part, comes an argument inspired by Fodor: are not Quine's stimulus meanings precisely the linguistic items about which we were querying when we were trying to understand the translatability of linguistic behaviour? In the third part, Quine's notion of «culture» is at the centre of our interest because Quine hints that linguistic phenomena are embedded in cultural phenomena. I argue that Quine's relativism may rescue him from an infinite regress, but it does not save him from circularity: explaining linguistic phenomena by some other linguistic or quasi-linguistic phenomena.

The fourth part of the argument is: there is a whole series of vague notions Quine has been employing all along: «empathy», «testimony», «giving evidence», «importuning», «acquiring», etc. These deceive us into thinking that translation is accomplished in stimulus meanings. This part of the argument hinges on the following question: could Quine's work on linguistic behaviour and stimulus meanings have taken off without any of the obscure notions he brings into his account? I argue that not only do we need all those vague notions to understand what stimulus meanings were for Quine, but also stimulus meanings are superfluous: they do not accomplish what Quine wants them to do: to take linguistic phenomena to what he calls «the tribunal of sense experience». In conclusion: we synthesise intersubjectively via some mysterious notions like empathy, according to Quine, and we analyse subjectively; and the latter, in spite of the fact that Quine denies the existence of private languages.

Stimulus

It is true that in section nine of *Word and Object* (p. 32) Quine distinguishes «stimulation» and «stimulus meaning» and so tries to disambiguate the word. He says: in this concept of stimulus meaning «we now have before us the makings of a crude concept of empirical meaning.

For meaning, supposedly, is what a sentence shares with its translation; and translation at the present stage turns solely on correlations with non-verbal stimulation». In «Propositional Objects» (p. 158), he approaches the problem of identifying stimulus meanings: «Even a primitive mother, in encouraging or discouraging a child's use of a word on a given occasion, will consider whether the relevant object is visible from where the child sits. And even a highly civilized mother is content, when checking the child's testimony against the child's data, not to penetrate the child's surface... The trouble is really, of course, the intersubjective equating of stimulations». (cf. [4] p. 81: «Surely one has no choice but to be an empiricist so far as one's theory of linguistic meaning is concerned», and [6] p. 155: «Save the surface and you save all».) The problem of stimulus identification and resemblance is one that Quine leaves to posterity at the end of this essay: in practice it is not a problem for psychologists; they could work it out later. But, and this is the problem, what Skinner as a scientist would object to is the peculiarly Quinian aspect of this method: responses are correlated to stimuli, verbal or non-verbal; whereas as scientists we should have first determined our stimuli when planning our experiments. The crux of the Quinian problem is an indeterminacy in guessing about stimuli for linguistic behaviour. And, put in this way, it is a trivial enterprise: there is no clear cut analytic synthetic distinction for Quinians, because the stimulus meanings they are trying to discover are themselves indeterminate: they will be synthetic or analytic or a combination of both. This indeterminacy is self evident from the fact that we are guessing what the stimulus meaning is from statements which are themselves not purely synthetic or analytic, if our beginning point in our study indeed is, not those things Quine calls «occasion sentences», but, full-fledged statements.

Quine confesses above ([6] p. 158) that a child's testimony about experienced stimuli is important: child testifies, let's say, that there is a cat in the room; mother encourages or discourages the use of the word «cat». Let us suppose that there are not any bats, hats, mats or pats in the room. The child is randomly babbling ([7] p. 80): «random vocal behavior affords parents continual opportunities for reinforcing such chance utterances as they see fit; and so the rudiments of speech are handed down». and the parent hears distinctively the words «bat», «cat», «hat», «mat», «pat» among the babblings uttered. Does the stimulus precede the response? Is it simultaneous? In any case, you can not penetrate your child's surface to find the stimulus that prompted her to utter these things. Suppose, further, that the family dog, Fido, is also in the room, along with the cat. Both are clearly visible to you and to the child. You must be sure of the stimulus to reinforce «cat», unless you are pulling a trick! When you do, you take the cat and say «cat». You can not ask the child to testify that by «cat» both you and she means the «small furry domesticated carnivorous quadruped» that can purr and also hurt with its claws. The baby is not able to read The Concise Oxford Dictionary yet. If the child testifies that she was talking about Fido as the «cat», then you would not go into a discussion of

dictionary content with her. You will probably discourage the usage of «cat». Testimony can be either a verbal exchange with the child about how things are defined, or a physical exchange in which the parent is obliged to penetrate sensory surfaces in order to «(under)determine» stimuli. The former can not be since children do not usually chat about definitions and essences before they start speaking. And, it can not be the latter either, because, as Quine says, even primitive mothers will not do such atrocities.

Of course, Quine disclaims the weight of intersubjectivity in an 1990 essay, «Three Indeterminacies», when he says «I was expressing this discomfort as early as 1965... In my original definition [of observation sentences] I had appealed to sameness of stimulus meaning between speakers, but in 1981 I defined it rather for the single speaker» (pp. 2,3). He alludes to his gradual denouncing of the notion of intersubjectivity. It began in the nineteen sixties with *Word and Object*. The eleventh section of this major work was entitled «Intrasubjective Synonymy of Occasion Sentences». Quine was already expressing an eagerness to replace «intersubjectivity» by «intrasubjectivity»: «Altogether the equating of stimulus meanings works out far better intrasubjectively than between subjects...» ([7] p. 48) Quine's aim was to make the difference between private and public experience into one of degree as he stated this both in *Word and Object* and in the conclusion of his 1952 article «On Mental Entities»: possible subjects of experience differ just in «idiosyncratic neural routings or private history of habit formation». ([7] p. 31; cf. [10] p. 214.)

I think the notion of empathy includes intersubjectivity for Quine; it is the bigger notion. He compares the linguist with the child, according to the domination of empathy in learning a language: «Empathy dominates the learning of language, both by child and by field linguist. In the child's case it is the parent's empathy... In the field linguist's case it is empathy on his own part... We all have an uncanny knack for empathizing another's perceptual situation... Empathy guides the linguist... And much the same must be true of the growing child». ([1] pp. 3,4) Is empathy a symmetric relation or an asymmetric one? Is it reflexive as it appears to be in the case of the linguist who empathises with himself, on his own part? Is the mother teaching her mother tongue more like the linguist, because both are dominated and activated by empathy? Or, is the mother more like the native, because both are dominated passively by imposed translations? Is it both, and so, a symmetric relation? Quine also says, «Empathy guides the linguist still as he rises above observation sentences through his analytical hypotheses». ([1] p. 4) He compares a child's learning of a language to a linguist's attempt «to project into the native's associations and grammatical trends». If linguists are like children in forming their analytical statements, then surely, mothers are like the primitive natives, dominated by empathy. ([1] p. 4) Strangely, the linguist also has empathy on his own part, insuring the reflexivity of the relation. And, moreover, as a bonus, he can freely project himself into other people's subjectivities — whatever subjectivity is

for Quine. Empathy is a transitive relation like synonymy because the notion allows that anybody can project himself into anybody. In his discussions, Quine sets two proportions: (a) the mother is to the child as the linguist is to the foreigner; and (b) the child is to the mother as the linguist is to the foreigner.

Mothers should note that children learn their uniqueness in the following way: «'Mama', in particular, gets set up retroactively as the name of a broad and recurrent but withal individual object, and thus as a singular term par excellence». ([8] p. 10) Had Quine taken deontic logic and obligation sentences seriously, then mothers could be justified in warning their babies that mother is neither undetached mother parts nor mother stages but a human being. This is what most babies are told when they grab the tail of a cat: «No, poor cat; the tail is not a cat part or a cat stage!» And, that is how children first hear language even before they can walk, with norms: cats are good, they are animate beings, etc. Quine ignores deontic logic.¹ Nor does he distinguish movement from action. He seems to be cognisant of the requirement that some stimulations must be stimulations of movement. Stimulations are not all about more or less static things. ([7] p. 31) But, it is not clear at all how the child figures out the difference, for instance, between intonation in speaking behaviour and singing behaviour. ([7]. p. 96: «Mama sings».) It could all be singing or all be speaking for the child. Quine does not explain how the difference between movement-stimulations and action-stimulations are discovered or guessed by the child or by the field linguist.

A Fodorian Argument

It is quite futile to ask Quine whether there is room for intersubjective linguistic dialogue. He taught that «epistemology naturalised» was an attitude of «the mariner who has to rebuild his boat while staying afloat in it». ([4] p. 84) To Quinians, looking for intersubjectivity sounds like an unwarranted commitment to a definite source which can be exchanged among people. (for example in [5] p. 29: «We give up an assurance of determinacy».) I will first sketch an argument inspired by Fodor.² But, I myself am not at all convinced that such an argument will persuade Quinians, who derive the semantical properties of natural language sentences from those of their stimulus translations. Let us begin by noting that they fail to give a story about what makes the translations mean what they do. However, argue Fodorians, it is necessary to give a story about stimulus semantics, for the language of stimuli itself is productive. Call this language «M»: «each of the syntactically distinct expressions of M has its distinctive truth condition» and «these facts about the meanings of M expressions can't

¹ This opinion was further confirmed by consulting Professor C.J.F. Williams.

² (1990) Jerry A. Fodor, *Theory of Content and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MIT Press), p.190.

be parasitic on semantic facts about English».³ It is not necessary to call M «a language of thought», says Fodor: «If you don't like language of thought stories, then let it be a formula of anything you please».⁴ It could be a language of stimuli in Quinian fashion: «And now here are our stimulus meanings, functioning both as the meanings of some sentences and as the objects of some propositional attitudes. However, stimulus meanings are remote as can be from propositions in the sense of meanings of eternal sentences. They are meanings, on a reasonable usage of 'meaning', only of observation sentences». ([6] p. 156) There is no reason why these stimulus meanings can not be called «Quinese» or «Skinnerish» or, to borrow a term from Fodor, «Mentalese». The Fodorian reply is: «So, a story is wanted about what makes the symbols of Mentalese mean what they do».⁵ If the natural language of a native is explained by M, then the productivity of the Quinese language, M, can not be referred back to the natural language. Each of the syntactically distinct expressions of M has distinct truth conditions. We must learn why it means what it means without circularity, and, that is not a business of translation anymore.

Fodor notes the failure of translation with respect to transitivity as a relation. Synonymy is an equivalence relation and thus is transitive.⁶ But, translation is not symmetric either. Imagine a forum on intercultural dialogue during which you have serious reasons to shun misunderstandings. You would surely have your speech translated back into your own language to catch the discrepancies, if any. Otherwise, your hosts will hold you responsible, as the author of the radicalness in the translation, and it may cost dearly.

Culture

In «Three Indeterminacies» Quine relates the course of his discussions with other philosophers, mainly Davidson, Dreben, Follesdal and Lars Bergstrom, about intersubjectivity. He considers intersubjectivity to be a problem in linguistics, and says, «we can simply do without it». ([1] pp. 2-4) But, he mentions «intersubjectivity» in the very first sentences of the preface to *Word and Object*: «Language is a social art. In acquiring it we have to depend entirely on intersubjectively available cues as to what to say and when». (p. ix) Wondering about the meaning of «intersubjectivity» we go to the index: 1f, 8, 31, 134. The list is not very exhaustive. There are overlooked passages: the following, for instance: «terms for intersubjectively observable physical things are at the focus of the most successful of

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p.167.

⁵ Ibid., p.189.

⁶ Ibid., p.176.

unprepared communication... they are at the focus of such successful communication». (pp. 234,238)

«Intersubjectivity» was not a synonym for «translation». Maybe the following is true: first communication, then translation, but this is probably because communication entails more than intersubjectivity; the native and the linguist could commune, but they could not intersubjectively engage in a conversation before the manual was written. Could the baby and its mother entertain intersubjective dialogue before the baby begins to speak? They could share mother's milk; however, this is not what we usually think of as intersubjectivity, the sharing of a language.

«Intersubjectivity» was not included in the index of *The Roots of Reference*, published later in 1974. It occurs in the following passages, for example: «such intersubjective equating of stimulus situations... What are observations?... They are sensory, evidently, and thus subjective... socially shared... there is no presumption of intersubjective agreement about the enviroing situation...» ([3]. pp. 24,38) Quine does not clarify his notion of subjectivity, although it is vital to his account of empathy and is included in empathy, apparently a reflexive relation. Subjectivity is as mysterious as intersubjectivity.

Quine's «Mama» communicates her milk to the child; in teaching the mother tongue, she communicates her culture; jungle linguists communicate their sophistication to primitive natives; and so forth. (Here teacher and learner could be added to the list: [2] p. 6; [7] p. 7.) But, cultural norms are not shared like milk or chewing gum; they are shared linguistically. Quine remarks: «We improved stimulus synonymy a bit by socializing it». ([7] p. 66) «Synonymy» carries the full generality of «sameness in meaning». ([7] p. 61) Stimulus synonymy on an optimum modulus is an approximation to sameness of confirming experiences and of disconfirming experiences. ([7] p. 63) Stimulus synonymy is related to stimulus analyticity while synonymy of sentences in general would be related to analyticity. ([7] p. 65) Quine thinks that one cause of the failure «to appreciate the indeterminacy» ([7] p. 72) hovering over our traditional analytic-synthetic distinction is that «we may speak of interlinguistic synonymy only within the terms of some particular system of analytical hypotheses» ([7] p. 75): continuities encourage... an illusion that our so readily intertranslatable sentences are diverse verbal embodiments of some intercultural proposition or meaning, when they are better seen as the merest variants of one and the same intracultural verbalism. ([7] p. 76) Culture may be regarded as a process *sui generis*.⁷ However, this was not the point Quine was getting at. If we turn to the essay which Quine largely incorporated into *Word and Object*, he offers relativism as the antidote, if not a way out, for the circularity in his

⁷ (1968) Leslie A. White, «Culturology» in the *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, p. 547.

explanations: the obstacle to correlating conceptual schemes is not that there is anything ineffable about language or culture, near or remote... The obstacle is only that any one of intercultural correlation of words and phrases, and hence of theories, will be just one among various empirically admissible correlations... ([8] p. 25) For Quine, translation was all there is. In «On What There Is» he maintained that to «analyze it in terms directly of what people do» is the procedure to deal with «the fact that a given linguistic utterance is meaningful» ([12] p. 11) and concluded thus: «ontology can be multiply relative, multiply meaningless apart from a background theory... As for the ontology in turn of the background theory... — these matters can call for a background theory in turn». (cf. [5] p. 69) Relativism was the solution for the infinite regress deduced from his indeterminacy. Evidently, the circularity still remains.

The Proportion

Mothers do not begin with stimulations, stimulus meanings and occasion sentences and get standing sentences, observation sentences and eternal sentences: as soon as the child starts grabbing things, they have to reply with «No!» It is not necessary even to wait until the infant moves around in order to hear the reprimand: when the baby takes a hold of her hair and she must try and change the baby's diapers, she will find herself impatiently saying: No, that is not nice, etc. That is how the song «Hush little baby, don't you cry!» makes sense. Nor does dissent follow upon assent as Quine says in the *Roots*. The child is set upon her linguistic course first with norms. Values are not formulated the way Quine says they are: «The likening of obedience to toffee is indeed the very strategy of the parent's training program». ([3] p. 50) I wonder how many mothers hand down their values to their babies with a training program rewarding toffee.

Quine notes that «Learning to react in appropriate non-verbal ways to heard language is equally important. The child learns to react appropriately to many words before being moved to volunteer them. Dogs learn to act appropriately on some words without learning to volunteer any. Much of what is earliest and most urgent in language learning, furthermore, is a matter of neither stating nor asserting nor acting upon statements, but of importuning». ([3] p. 46) «Importuning» is explained in the *Oxford Dictionary* as «solicit pressingly» and «solicit for immoral purpose». Quine's intention was to be an empiricist like Kant, at least in *The Roots of Reference*.⁸ Given that he has expressed his awareness of how it goes with children — «Other utterances — greetings, commands, questions — will figure among the early acquisitions too» ([1] p. 2) — we can ask: In what sense do babies acquire these things as Quinian occasion sentences? How can we be certain of this — there is a stage in infantile history, in which

⁸ See his reply in *Perspectives on Quine*, p. 292: «I was on the Kantian course».

babies do not respond as dogs do, by sitting or standing, or imitate our linguistic utterances in any remarkable way? How far back are we supposed to push Quine's Kantian construction for proof of its correctness? If our sole criterion in the matter is parents' or linguists' «importuning», Quine's genetic account might have claimed any arbitrary point in the analysis as proof for its truth.

As early as the writing of «The Scope and Language of Science» in 1954, Quine maintained that it is the mother who intersubjectively appreciates the child's learning: (1a) «At the very beginning of one's learning of language, thus, words are learned in relation to such likenesses and contrasts as are already appreciated without benefit of words... The likenesses and contrasts which underlie one's first learning of language must not only be pre-verbally appreciable; they must, in addition, be intersubjective... the mother is in a position to appreciate that the child is confronted with something 'red'». ([9] pp. 218,219) (1b) «the foreigner's word has yet to be assessed, whereas the reference of the child's word has yet to be acquired». ([3] p. 83) Acquiring and appreciating/assessing are correlative notions for Quine. From this, the intersubjective correlation, it follows that synthetic statements are fixed intersubjectively. He exploits the similarities between a child and a foreigner in order to salvage the synthetic content precious to an empiricist. (1c) «Let us return our attention from the heathen who seemed to have a term for 'rabbit', to our own child at home who seems to have just acquired his first few terms in our own language: 'mama', 'water', perhaps 'red'. To begin with, the case of the child resembles that of the heathen». ([8] pp. 6,7) It is the correlative-intersubjectivity which is at work when both the child and the native «give evidence» of their recognitions: (1d) «to say that he refers to the color would be to impute our ontology to him... considering in place of the child a foreign adult who gives similar evidence of recognizing red». ([3] pp. 81,82)

On the other hand, there are texts which picture the child as an agent, exercising empathy: (2a) «the linguist unable to guess the trend of the stimulus meaning of a non-observational occasion sentence... He can settle down and learn the native language directly as an infant might. (See Chapter III for reflections on the infant's learning of our own language.)» ([7] p. 47) (2b) «The child scrambles up an intellectual chimney... these matters are not reflected in stimulus meaning... the child has to scramble for them by a method of simultaneous learning, and... the linguist has to resort to analytical hypotheses to translate them». ([7] p. 94) (2c) «the field linguist who is breaking into an unknown language by investigating native speakers... Let us return then to home ground and consider how our child might get on...» ([3] pp. 46,47) (2d) «the learner as theorist. That is the way to look at both the field linguist and the learning child.»⁹ (2b) suggests that

⁹ Replies in Perspectives on Quine, p. 291.

the stimulus meanings of (1) are purely synthetic in contrast to those referred to in (2). Those of (2) may involve analytical hypotheses and thus be other than synthetic. Moreover, (2a) announces quite explicitly that stimulus meanings are guesswork, but, because there somehow content which is not synthetic is involved, both the child and the linguist each have to do the work alone, that is to say, subjectively. It is then that empathy comes into play as a reflexive relation.

Quine talks of a reorientation in semantics whereby the primary vehicle of meaning came to be seen no longer in the term but in the statement: statements are translatable into sensory language as wholes, not term by term. ([11] p. 39) Carnap did not adopt a sense-datum language in the narrowest sense and eventually has had to abandon the dogma of radical reductionism. However, the dogma itself has lingered in the thought of empiricists: for «each synthetic statement, there is associated a unique range of possible sensory events». ([11] p. 40) Quine, on the other hand, argues that the cleavage between synthetic and analytic statements is indeterminate: «our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body». [11] p. 41) How can we come to grips with what Quine has called «the tribunal of sense experience»? In «Epistemology Naturalized», he had declared his interests as: Two cardinal tenets of empiricism remained unassailable, however, and so remain to this day. One is that whatever evidence there is for science is sensory evidence. The other, to which I shall recur, is that all inculcation of meanings of words must rest ultimately on sensory evidence. ([4] p. 75; cf. [10] p. 212) Quine's so called «stimulus meanings» are verbal responses in disguise or quasi-verbal responses. By moving a step backwards we are only reduplicating the linguistic responses of which we were seeking an understanding. In fact, Quine is in danger of a different kind of infinite regress, in addition to a charge of circularity, unless he admits that stimulus meanings are synthetically generated in experience. The query then is why he does not ground language more directly in sense experience and introduces intermediate stimulus meanings.¹⁰ I think because it is difficult.

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¹⁰ Special thanks to Anthony Rudd, University of Bristol, who, discussing with me in detail two final drafts, challenged me to clarify the argument; to Adriano P. Palma who commented on the opaqueness of an earlier version; it was circulated under a different title and was also sent to the 1995 Third Analysis Essay Competition.

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TRUTH IN PURE SEMANTICS: A REPLY TO PUTNAM

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§1. Introduction

One of the most important explications of the notion of truth is the semantical conception of truth. It was originally put forward by Alfred Tarski in the thirties and it rapidly gained important followers, notably Rudolf Carnap, but was not without critics, e.g. Otto Neurath. In recent years Hilary Putnam has become one of the most important opponents of the semantical conception of truth.

In his book *Representation and Reality*¹ Putnam raises a number of objections against the semantical conception of truth, two of which are the following. Firstly, he finds it objectionable that according to the semantical conception of truth the equivalences of the form (T) — for instance, the equivalence «the sentence ‘Schnee ist weiss’ is true in German if and only if snow is white» — are logically necessary. Let us recall that the equivalences of the form (T), or for short the T-equivalences, are obtained from the schema «S is true in L if and only if p» by substituting «L» for the metalinguistic name of an object language, «S» for the metalinguistic name of a sentence of the object language and «p» for the metalinguistic translation of this sentence. Tarski lays down as the condition for the extensional adequacy of a truth definition for an object language that every T-equivalence formed with the sentences of the object language should follow from this definition. The fulfillment of this adequacy condition is a very important desideratum for a truth definition and hence for a theory of truth, as it uniquely determines the extension of the intuitive use of the term «true» when applied to sentences.

Secondly, Putnam claims that according to the semantical conception of truth the truth of a sentence depends only on its syntactic structure and on the way the world is, and not on the meaning of the sentence. This second objection, if correct, would be a very strong objection against the semantical conception of truth, since it is undeniable that the truth of a sentence depends on its meaning.

¹ H. Putnam, *Representation and Reality*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1988.

It is worth noting that Putnam's argument against the semantical conception of truth in his book *Representation and Reality* is addressed at Carnap's rather than against Tarski's formulation of it. In the following pages I shall examine Putnam's two objections against Carnap's formulation of the semantical conception of truth.

Before presenting Putnam's argument it is advisable to remind ourselves briefly Carnap's distinction between descriptive and pure semantics. *Descriptive* semantics deals with the semantical properties of natural languages, and so of languages which are given by historical facts; the description of those languages is based on empirical investigation. In contrast, an artificial language is given by setting up a system of rules. Carnap formulates the interpretation of an artificial language by means of a semantical system and characterizes *pure* semantics as the analysis of semantical systems.² A semantical system is a system of rules formulated in a metalanguage and referring to an object language so that those rules provide necessary and sufficient truth conditions for every sentence of the object language. Accordingly those rules provide an interpretation for the sentences of the object language. In particular, the truth rules for an object language not only provide the interpretation of the sentences of this language, but also constitute a truth definition for the language.

§2. Putnam's Argument

Let us consider a language, L_1 , a fragment of the German language which contains only two sentences, «Schnee ist weiss» und «Der Mond ist blau». The truth rules for L_1 are the following: The sentence «Der Mond ist blau» is true in L_1 if and only if the moon is blue, and the sentence «Schnee ist weiss» is true in L_1 if and only if snow is white. Therefore the sentence «Der Mond ist blau» means in L_1 that the moon is blue, and the sentence «Schnee ist weiss» means in L_1 that snow is white.

Let «S» be a metalinguistic variable for sentences; then the truth rules and the truth definition for L_1 can be formulated thus:

² See R. Carnap, *Introduction to Semantics*, Cambridge, Harvard U.P., 1942, pp. 11 f. and 155, and R. Carnap, *Introduction to Symbolic Logic and Its Applications*, New York, Dover, 1958, pp. 79 f.

Tarski used the term «descriptive semantics» in the same sense as Carnap; see A. Tarski, «The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics» (in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 4 (1944), pp. 341-375), p. 365. In this paper Tarski employs the expression «theoretical semantics» to refer to the kind of semantics he develops (see pp. 345, 348, 362 and 365). Theoretical semantics in the sense of Tarski is the semantics of formalized languages, hence it corresponds to pure semantics in the sense of Carnap.

S is true in L_1 if and only if (S = «Der Mond ist blau» and the moon is blue) or (S = «Schnee ist weiss» and snow is white).³

Carnap and Tarski have indeed accepted such a truth definition for languages with only a finite number of sentences. Putnam formulates his objections to the semantical conception of truth precisely on the basis of the language L_1 and of the truth definition for L_1 . Putnam claims that a consequence of this definition is that the truth of a sentence depends only on its syntactic structure and on the way the world is, but not on the meaning of the sentence, because, Putnam says, whether a sentence S has the property «S is spelled ‘Schnee ist weiss’ and snow is white» (i.e. the property that the sentence is spelled S-c-h-n-e-e-space-i-s-t-space-w-e-i-s-s and snow is white) does not depend at all on the meaning of the sentence, and truth in L_1 has been defined as the disjunction of this property and another of the same kind.⁴ Putnam also asserts: Because the equivalence «the sentence ‘Schnee ist weiss’ is true in L_1 if and only if snow is white» is a *logical consequence* of the truth definition, that equivalence is *logically necessary* given this definition of «true in L_1 ».⁵

Putnam refers to a talk with Carnap in the fifties, in which Putnam argued against Carnap’s thesis that the T-equivalences are logically necessary⁶ thus: The fact that the sentence «Schnee ist weiss» is true in German if and only if snow is white is quite an empirical and contingent one. If the German language had developed differently, then the expression «Schnee» might have denoted not snow but water and then the truth conditions for the sentence «Schnee ist weiss» in German would not have been given by the sentence «snow is white», but by the sentence «water is white». Carnap replied to Putnam by means of the distinction between descriptive and pure semantics; the latter considers only languages taken as abstract objects and defined by semantical rules. Putnam puts Carnap’s answer as follows:

«When ‘German’ is defined as ‘the language with such and such semantical rules’ it is logically necessary that the truth

³ Putnam, op. cit., p. 62.

⁴ Putnam, op. cit., pp. 62 and 66.

⁵ Putnam, op. cit., p. 62.

⁶ Putnam considers it an unacceptable consequence of the semantical conception of truth not only that according to this truth conception the T-equivalences are logically necessary, but also that according to it these equivalences are logically true. However, from the context of his argumentation (see Putnam, op. cit., pp. 62 f.) it seems clear that Putnam regards both objections as equivalent. For this reason I shall take into account only the first of them.

condition for the sentence 'Schnee ist weiss' in *German* is that snow is white.»⁷

In *Representation and Reality* Putnam addresses an objection to Carnap's answer, an objection which he did not formulate at the time of his talk with Carnap, although he says that he had already thought of it. Let us consider the following definition of the language L_1 by truth rules and syntactic rules. Let «L» be a metalinguistic variable for languages and «S» a metalinguistic variable for sentences. Then the language L_1 can be defined thus:

$L_1 =_{df}$ the language L such that, for any sentence S, S is true in L_1 if and only if (S is spelled «Der Mond ist blau» and the moon is blue) or (S is spelled «Schnee ist weiss» and snow is white); and (syntactic restriction) no inscription with any other spelling is a well-formed formula of L.

At first sight one could perhaps think that this definition of L_1 is circular, because the term « L_1 » occurs itself as a part of the *definiens* of « L_1 » (namely as part of the predicate «true in L_1 »). On this point Putnam correctly asserts that the definition of L_1 is not circular, because the expression « L_1 » does not occur in the *definiens* of the expression «true in L_1 ». But, Putnam says, if in the last characterization of L_1 one substitutes the expression «true in L_1 » for its *definiens* in order to show clearly that the definition of L_1 is not circular, then one obtains the following definition of L_1 :

$L_1 =_{df}$ the language L such that, for any sentence S, (S is spelled «Der Mond ist blau» and the moon is blue) or (S is spelled «Schnee ist weiss» and snow is white) if and only if (S is spelled «Der Mond ist blau» and the moon is blue) or (S is spelled «Schnee ist weiss» and snow is white); and (syntactic restriction) no inscription with any other spelling is a well-formed formula of L.

Putnam concludes that:

«Apart from the syntactic restriction, this is now an empty (tautological) condition. Every language which satisfies the syntactic restriction satisfies this!»⁸

⁷ Putnam, op.cit., p. 63.

⁸ Putnam, op. cit., p. 65. Putnam raises this objection to the definition of a language in Carnap's semantics not only on the basis of the truth rules, but also of the designation (or reference) rules which belong to this definition. I do not present these designation rules, because they are not necessary for an understanding of Putnam's objection.

In other words: another language L_j , whose sentences have the same syntactic structure as the sentences of L_1 , but with a different meaning, satisfies the definition of L_1 too. Therefore Carnap's definition of a language by semantical rules is empty («tautological» in a broad sense) — apart from the syntactic restriction.

Putnam therefore claims to have shown that the sense in which Carnap maintains that the T-equivalences are logically necessary is unacceptable: Since Carnap's thesis that the T-equivalences are logically necessary is based on his definition of a language — a language defined by semantical rules — and this definition is untenable because it is empty, Carnap's thesis turns out to be unacceptable.

§3. Carnap's Definition of an Interpreted Language is not Empty

However, I do not agree with Putnam's objection. Against his claim I shall argue that Carnap's definition of an interpreted language is not empty.

First it must be pointed out how Putnam arrives at that empty description of a language. The procedure is absolutely *trivial*. If in an explicit definition one substitutes the *definiendum* for the *definiens*, then one arrives at a logically true statement, namely the identity or the equivalence of the *definiens* with itself. This is the procedure that Putnam applies to the definition of truth in L_1 which is part of the definition aforementioned of L_1 .

But that definition of L_1 contains not only the term «true in L_1 » but also the *definiens* of «true in L_1 ». Therefore the definition of L_1 one arrives at, if one leaves out the expression «true in L_1 » to show clearly that the definition of L_1 is not circular, is not the definition Putnam claims, but the following:

$L_1 =_{df}$ the language L such that for any sentence S , (S is spelled «der Mond ist blau» and the moon is blue) or (S is spelled «Schnee ist weiss» and snow is white); and (syntactic restriction) no inscription with any other spelling is a well-formed formula of L .

This definition of L_1 is *not* empty. One must stress here that the sentences of the metalanguage «the moon is blue» and «snow is white» which appear in the definition of L_1 state the truth conditions for the sentences «Der Mond ist blau» and «Schnee ist weiss», and hence they give us the meaning of those sentences of L_1 . The object language L_1 we are considering then fulfills this definition, because L_1 is a fragment of the German language consisting only of the sentences «Der Mond ist blau» and «Schnee ist weiss» and the *translations* of these German sentences into the metalanguage — i.e. into English — are the sentences «the moon is blue» and «snow is white». Thus the fulfillment of the definition of L_1 by a language depends not only on the syntactic restriction but also on the *meaning* of the sentences of the language.

If Carnap's definition of a language by semantical rules is not empty, as I have just argued, then it can be claimed that there is an *acceptable* sense in which the T-equivalences are to be regarded as logically necessary. Let us remember Tarski's condition for the adequacy of a truth definition, which Carnap assumes and which is intuitively satisfactory, as it uniquely determines the extension of the intuitive use of the term «true» applied to sentences: a truth definition for an object language is extensionally adequate if every T-equivalence formed with the sentences of the object language follows from this definition. So an extensionally adequate truth definition must have the T-equivalences as logical consequences and hence these equivalences are logically necessary on the basis of the truth definition.⁹

Now, Putnam admits that the fulfillment of Tarski's condition guarantees the extensional adequacy of a truth definition and he has not offered an alternative criterion for this purpose. Thus, Putnam would also employ Tarski's criterion to test the extensional correctness of a truth definition. But then, if as a result of this test Putnam concludes that a truth definition is extensionally adequate, he will have also to agree that the T-equivalences are logically necessary given that truth definition. Since in the framework of a truth definition and hence of a theory of truth which fulfills Tarski's adequacy condition the T-equivalences must be regarded as logically necessary.¹⁰

In short, once we have rejected Putnam's objection against Carnap's definition of an interpreted language, and if Tarski's adequacy condition for a truth definition is accepted, then it turns out to be admissible to regard the T-equivalences — as they are in Carnap's pure semantics — as logically necessary. If Putnam wants to reject this conclusion, he needs to question Tarski's adequacy condition for a truth definition, but this is something he is not willing to do.

⁹ See note 5.

¹⁰ On the other hand, it is obvious that the T-equivalences are logically necessary if one regards them (and more generally the truth definition) as part of the definition of the language, as Carnap does — see text from note 7 in which Putnam describes Carnap's reply to him.

Here we find a noteworthy difference between Tarski's and Carnap's semantics. In Carnap's semantics the definition of truth for a language belongs to the description of the language; in Tarski's semantics this is not the case. Tarski pointed out this difference: «[...] if we took a different point of view, represented, e.g., in Carnap [*Introduction to Semantics*]; i.e., if we regarded the specification of conditions under which sentences of a language are true as an essential part of the description of this language [...]» (A. Tarski, op. cit., p. 373, n. 24).

§4. The Dependence of Truth on Meaning in Carnap's Semantics

My reply to Putnam's objection against Carnap's definition of an interpreted language also contains the reply to his second objection against Carnap's truth definition by semantical rules, i.e. to the objection that according to this definition the truth of a sentence depends only on its syntactic structure and on the way the world is, but not on its meaning, because, Putnam claims, whether a sentence has the property «S is spelled 'Schnee ist weiss' and snow is white» does not depend on the meaning of the sentence.

To prove that this objection is incorrect let us recall that the second member of this conjunction, i.e. the sentence «snow is white», gives us the interpretation of the sentence «Schnee ist weiss». If one changes the meaning of the predicate «ist weiss» so that it no longer means the property of being white but the property of being red, then one has changed the language, one has defined another language, let us say L_2 , and one shall hence have the following clause in the truth definition: S is true in L_2 if and only if S is spelled «Schnee ist weiss» and snow is red.

Putnam seems to see this way out from his objection. As mentioned, he claims that whether a sentence has the property «S is spelled 'Schnee ist weiss' and snow is white» does not depend on the meaning of the sentence and he adds:

«But to be 'true in L_1 ' was defined as to have the disjunction of this property and another similar property. Occasionally a philosopher of a Tarskian bent seems to be dimly aware of this problem, and then the philosopher is likely to say, 'Well, if you change the meaning of the words, then you are changing the language. Then of course you have to give a different truth definition.' (Note that this is just what Carnap said, in a less formal guise.) But what is 'the language'?»¹¹

Here Putnam asks the question «what is 'the language'?» because he thinks that he has refuted Carnap's definition of an interpreted language. An advocate of the semantical conception of truth should therefore formulate a definition of an interpreted language which is not empty and according to which the truth of the sentences of this language does not depend only on their syntactic structure and on the way the world is, but also on their meaning. However, I have argued that Carnap's definition of a language has that property. We have seen that according to his definition (and hence to the truth definition which is part of that definition) the truth of a sentence of the object language depends also on its meaning, since the sentence of the metalanguage which says how the world is to be for the sentence of the object language being true is the *translation* into the metalanguage of the

¹¹ Putnam, op. cit., p. 66.

sentence of the object language. A change in the meaning of a sentence of the object language implies a change of language (i.e. of the object language), and as a result of this change the sentence of the metalanguage that gave the truth conditions of the sentence of the old object language must be replaced by the sentence of the metalanguage which is *synonymous* with the sentence of the new object language. It is indeed a similar answer as Carnap's — Putnam himself admits.

In any case Putnam would still lodge the objection to Carnap's truth definition that it does not take into account many factors which are relevant to the meaning — and therefore to the truth or falsehood — of a sentence. So Putnam says:

«What is bizarre about these Tarskian 'truth definitions' is that so many factors which are obviously relevant to the meaning of a sentence (and hence to whether the sentence is true or false) do not appear in the definition at all: under what circumstances it is considered correct to assert the sentence; what typically causes experts and/or ordinary speakers to utter the sentence; how the sentence came into the language; how a speaker typically acquires the use of these words; etc.»¹²

However, it is not at all bizarre that these factors do not appear in Carnap's truth definition. On the contrary, it is *obvious* that they are not going to appear in pure semantics as Carnap conceived it.

In the definition of an interpreted language — of a language whose expressions have meaning — in Carnap's pure semantics one *abstracts* away from the speakers. The assignment of meanings to the primitive descriptive signs of the language proceeds by stipulation, although the definitions of the semantical terms must fulfill conditions of adequacy which guarantee at least a partial correspondence between the thus defined concepts and the intuitive semantical concepts. The circumstance that in pure semantics one abstracts away from the speakers in the sense just mentioned implies that, in this context, the questions which Putnam asks above do not have an answer or can only have a trivial one. But this does not constitute in itself an objection

¹² Ibid.

to Carnap's theory in the field for which he formulated it — the field of pure semantics.

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ARGUMENTATION, VALUES, AND ETHICS

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§1. Argumentation.

Peaceful conviviality, social cooperation, solidarity, and autonomy could be considered the most important values of public morality and political culture in this era of globalization.

Human rights are the incarnation of these values. They have been historically created, and their real existence in our time is the result of the dialectic between theoretical proposals and the experience accumulated by humanity in solving problems of social interaction in specific conditions of historical evolution in modernity. Under the presently unavoidable conditions of the spread of the market economy, the universalization of these values has permitted mitigation and will permit reduction of the disastrous consequences of the economic model, and will even make possible the creation of a culture whose moral, ethical, and political values have a certain liberating character for individuals and societies.

The acceptance of these values depends only on their proven ability to resolve conflict situations and to guarantee life and quality of life to all human beings. Rather than a theoretical foundation, we focus here on their practical function.

However, it is interesting to venture a possible theoretical interpretation compatible with their historicity and capability to resolve conflicts fairly and equitably. Other explanations are possible and in fact exist; but here we only want to contribute to this important discussion. To do so, first we will try to define what a value is from the point of view of argumentation.

To do so from this perspective is justified because both the choice of the values considered supreme and the specification of their content are questions that must be settled theoretically through the mechanism of providing reasons for and against, criticizing and responding, that is, arguing different conceptions, which evolve in just this way. But also because in real confrontations the different positions, often based on force, are always accompanied by argumentation. In all cases, these are based in turn on values. Consequently, the moral, ethical, and political theories are clearly argumentative in their configuration; and social interactions, at these levels,

are accompanied by arguments. Thus it is necessary to pay attention to what argumentation is.

§2. The characteristics of argumentation.

1) Chaim Perelman conceives it as the theory of persuasive discourse, which seeks the assent or agreement, both intellectual and emotional, of any singular or plural addressee (audience) to a thesis or a set of theses. Hence it concerns rhetoric in the original Greek sense of the word, employed by Aristotle, that is, a theory of persuasion, and which includes as a special case dialectic, understood as the set of techniques for controversy (1958; 1977, p. 177. See also Monsalve 1992, pp. and Gómez).

2) From this perspective, argumentation covers the whole field of non-formal thought: one does not seek assent for nothing. In reality, one who argues tries to influence the addressee through reasons in order to obtain a certain result; in addition, the reasons for or against make it possible to consider courses of action and/or make decisions, even to accept a theory. In this way we use argumentation not only to make reasoned decisions in everyday life, but also in law, philosophy, and the humanities, and even in situations of scientific revolution in the formal and empirical-deductive sciences. It is, in this sense, the theory of justificatory reason that works as a theory of practical reason.

With respect to justificatory reason, to defend a thesis is offer to another (who can be oneself in autodeliberation understood as a special case of dialogue) the arguments that justify assent to it. To refute a thesis is to present the arguments that justify rejecting it (dissenting from it)...it is a theory about what is reasonable to accept or to reject (Monsalve 1995, p. 578). The reasonable, then, is what is accepted or rejected using reasons that can in principle be disputed.

With respect to practical reason, unlike a scientific theory that tries to build a body of true propositions, argumentation tries to obtain agreement. And though one kind of agreement is about that which is considered true, there are others about what is desirable or preferable for a community or an individual, or about what is beautiful, or even about how to dress during this season, etc.

Another basic difference between deductive reason and justificatory reason is that the latter always admits argument to the contrary: a point of view or theory presented for agreement can be completely or partially accepted or completely rejected, which means that persuasion is a matter of degree. But precisely because of this gradual character, assent has to be reinforced if it is to be maintained. It always requires a meeting of the minds. In addition, there is the temporal character of the assent and agreement that argumentation produces: ideas accepted as indisputable in one epoch are rejected later, and vice versa. This is completely contrary to a demonstration in which, once the reference system and the rules of inference are fixed, the theorems follow impersonally, their truth is

unquestioned and independent of the flow of events in time, and the system is even objectively reproducible by machines designed to do so.

3) Argumentation, then, requires addressees or, to use the Perelmanian technical term, audience. There are two classes of audience depending on the level of assent that the arguer (orator, as he says) seeks relative to the number of individuals: the orator could try to persuade one or some, as when one tries to sell a product like a car, or try to persuade all human beings who are in a position to evaluate arguments of common interest.

In the first case, there is a particular audience, and in the second, the so-called universal audience. Moral and scientific arguments, and some aesthetic, ethical, and political ones, among others, would have this reach. Perelman defines it as the set of reasonable adult persons of a specific epoch (1983, pp. 41 and ff). He considers this audience to be a theoretical construction, because each orator conceives its universality based on his criteria for what should be universally accepted, so he excludes everybody who do not share his reasons (*ibid*, p.41); however, he tries to win them over to his point of view. If we introduce the modifications which we are about to present to the conditions of argumentative agreement presupposed by Perelman, the features of arguments of common interest do not coincide with the ideal community of speech conceived by Apel nor with the ideal conditions of dialogue on which Habermas' discursive ethics is based.

Perelman thinks that any argumentation presupposes a dialogical situation, the existence of a common language, and the renunciation of any use of force different from that of argument. And if one argues for the universal audience, it is necessary to add the condition of sincerity, that is, that one believe what one is proposing. Thus understood, the notion of a universal audience does coincide with the pragmatic conditions of dialogical discourse that Habermas locates at the base of his discursive ethics.

But in reality these conditions are not completely fulfilled, nor is it desirable that they be satisfied. In effect, given the conditions of dialogue in which real-world interests conflict, recourse to positions of force is often necessary to improve the chances of an agreement and even to require one of the parties to seek one. Hence it is possible to dialogue even if one of the parties does not fulfill the condition of sincerity: if there are mechanisms to require dialogue, agreement can be obtained although it is not desired. The use of force is not morally good or bad in itself; its moral value depends on the interests which it serves.

In the same way, we must arrive at an agreement, but this does not have to be legitimated through acceptance by all parties involved, not at the beginning and development of the dialogue nor at the culmination of the agreement, although it would be desirable. Of course, the use of force and the non-universality of the agreement have limits that will be presented below.

Conceived without Perelman's restrictions on argumentation of common interest, the universal audience serves to stress that there are arguments that claim universal validity and that each orator supposes that his argument satisfies this claim and also defines what would be reasonable to admit if its parameters are accepted, which in turn determines the set of persons considered reasonable. As the parameters of reasonableness can differ from one orator to another, and can occasionally be incompatible, it is not possible to define the universal audience as a legal construction other than that we have seen formulated by Perelman: the set of reasonable adult persons of a specific epoch. But this definition is ambiguous because it contains terms like 'adult' and 'reasonable' which are confused and controversial, which makes 'universal audience' a confused notion.

However, confused notions play an important role in argumentation, for they are the framework for the argument and the agreement. First, they serve the function of being a place of agreement precisely because their meaning has not been clearly fixed: everyone would agree that we must act reasonably. But what does acting reasonably mean? Once the different contexts in which it appears are specified, the differences appear. Yet in the ensuing discussion it is possible to reach agreements, generally partial, about its meaning, so there will be shared meanings that coexist with others that are not shared. And from the latter the process can be continued so as to augment the number of shared meanings.

If we apply this to the notion of 'universal audience', we can see that its confusion is positive because it permits the free play of proposals and possible agreements, together with their respective ranges of flesh-and-blood addressees who will finally opt for particular assents. In other words, over and above the universal audience as a theoretical construct, there are the real individuals who are the addressees of proposals of common interest and for whom the different versions of the universal audience are configured.

To continue, it is possible to explore a partial delimitation of the conception 'reasonable' relative to the universal audience. First of all, the universal audience is temporally relativized. What is justificatively accepted or rejected in a determined epoch is a more or less ample, more or less incompatible set of beliefs, values, ways of life, theories, etc., which interact, that is, coexist, compete, or are independent; but they all have in common some kind of social acceptance. Perelman chooses to call this set the 'common sense' of a determined society. This then relativizes the reasonable, because if this set is what is accepted or rejected with reasons (justificatively), as above, the acceptability of these reasons varies from epoch to epoch and society to society.

But this fact does not make the reasonable something arbitrary. On the one hand, the efficacy of all argumentative action, that is, the achievement of assent, presupposes that the orator knows the audience. So it must be understood that whoever argues must know what the audience accepts: his beliefs, values, traditions, and customs. This knowledge is the

starting point of all persuasive action. If this condition is not satisfied, we make the worst of argumentative mistakes by begging the question, which consists in presupposing that the audience accepts that about which his assent is sought.

In reality, the strategy of all argumentation consists in leading the audience from what he accepts to what it is proposed that he accept. The context in which it is exercised consists of argumentative premises, which Perelman (1958, pp. 50 & ff.) classifies into facts, truths, suppositions, values and their hierarchies and commonplaces. When arguments are addressed to the universal audience, the context is common sense.

However, common sense is not unquestionable, as one can infer from the foregoing, but in areas and fields (theoretical or practical) where it has not been questioned, it works like a decision rule, that is, as a precedent that comes from a model for the resolution of situations following the solutions which have been successful in similar cases in the past. In fact, precedent plays a key role in argumentation because one tends to treat similar situations (or people or problems, etc.) in similar ways. This constant, which Perelman calls the 'rule of justice', produces a very important feature in the mechanism of argumentation: if someone proposes or executes a solution other than the precedent for a situation, the burden of proof falls on him.

Given that beliefs, values, theories, ways of life, etc. at times coexist in conflict, it is necessary to question common sense through science, philosophy, and social practice to overcome prescientific conceptions and unacceptable values and social practices. Then a dialectic is produced between common sense and its reasonableness, on the one hand; and theories and critique, on the other, in which the former incorporate what the clarifying force of the latter produce. But, at the same time, the latter are contrasted with the unreasonable consequences often generated by these conceptions, completely opposed to what any individual could admit.

§3. Argumentation, values, and ethics.

1) When social practice has been distilled and formulated in theories, conceptions, or proposals, it provides decision criteria that are very important for resolving conflicts of social interaction. Through human rights, seen at present as something reasonable to admit for resolving such conflicts, we can achieve peaceful coexistence, social cooperation, and individual autonomy.

This is because what happens in social interaction is the privileging or ordering of a set of values and providing reasons for doing so. That is why it is very important to clarify the notion of «value» from an argumentative point of view. We have already said that values are argumentative premises, in the sense defined by Perelman, that is, implicit or explicit points of departure for all argumentative action. But they are also results if an audience assents to them after having accepted the reasons offered for them.

«Value» could be understood as «a collective or individual belief that determines certain parameters about what can be accepted concerning facts, behaviors, actions, or interactions to which it is applied» (Monsalve 1993, p. 109). In turn, a belief is «an idea admitted according to certain implicit or explicit procedures by an individual or a group» (ibid., p. 109). From this perspective, a theory is a belief system that is accepted according to procedures established by the scientific or knowledge community. But this idea can also be extended to justify moral, ethical, or political proposals that are presented with universal claims.

§4. An ethical proposal from argumentation.

Values like «justice» and «goodness» incarnate at present a set of beliefs and hierarchies that reflect particular conceptions which aspire to generalization in a global world. Besides, they are confused notions in the sense defined above, with all the argumentative characteristics this implies; they are the framework for the argumentation and the agreement because they are values about «the preferable». This is always disputable, but it also permits the construction of important convergences. That is the case of the concept of human rights, which can be justified as reasonable rules of interaction addressed to the present universal audience. If we accept them in this role, it is possible to advance through shared meanings that widen and deepen, leaving the points of disagreement open for discussion.

In consequence, we could establish some criteria of admissibility for these values. They should be understood as specificities that it is reasonable to globalize: for they function as an undeniable part of the common sense of our era. We will therefore need to look for shared meanings, and in a process without end, widen and deepen these meanings. In what follows we will propose some of them for discussion.

1) We are living in a global society impregnated by the market economy. This society has deep inequalities in the distribution of benefits and costs of social interaction at the national and international level. Political domination is exercised over peripheral countries that are externally and often internally culturally diverse. There are common human problems, unprecedented development, and an increase of scientific and technical knowledge with unforeseen technological applications. There are possibilities of immediate communication and global interrelation, etc.

2) Peaceful coexistence, social cooperation, and autonomy - values that imply human rights - have proved to be the best way to resolve conflicts of social interaction in this era, given the characteristics mentioned in 1), and in this sense they cannot be renounced. These values are the patrimony of humanity independently of their origins (they are a specificity that should be globalized) and they are a point of no return because a better society without them is unthinkable and their widening and deepening would permit better quality of life for all human beings. They are the conception of globalized society's common good. In principle, there is no theoretical

priority among the different types of human rights. Therefore, their enjoyment by all human beings must be guaranteed.

3) So that these goods can be enjoyed equitably by all, it is necessary to agree upon and put into practice criteria of distributive justice at the national and international levels. Equitable distribution is also a confused concept to which a shareable meaning must be assigned. Consequently, it is not necessary to establish maximum criteria of distribution but acceptable minimum parameters. There would be an acceptable minimum distribution if all human beings in their respective societies are assured of the set of rights according to present basic standards. Many of these standards are fixed internationally. For example, there are definitions of minimal income beneath which one is in poverty; in addition, the level of calories and nutrients beneath which there is malnutrition has been defined, etc. These rights cannot be renounced: the right to life, to the non-mutilation of one's body, to free thought, expression, and opinion, the right to have a government that guarantees these rights and the security of judicial procedures that provide for the right to defense and a fair trial; the right to participate actively in public life, and the right to preserve one's cultural identity.

4) Pluralism and tolerance are not arbitrary values. From the point of view of argumentation, they are derived from the fact that in the field of interaction an absolutely valid conception is impossible. Given the justificatory character of that which is preferable, argument to the contrary will always be possible. But if the claims of 3) are reasonable, then these values have two limits: on the one hand, the actions of those who take advantage of the benefits and opportunities of the present situation to further their own interests without «cooperating in the resolution» of the grave problems of distribution and recognition that afflict our world cannot be accepted. On the other, the actions of those who want to destroy a tolerant and pluralist society or to avoid constructing one in order to impose a totalitarian and dogmatic society are not acceptable.

5) It is enough to conceive of individuals as historically, socially, and culturally placed, taking part in a net of relations that creates identities and oppositions. They possess different degrees of autonomy, depending on the society in which they live, but in principle and in normal situations, all are persons with argumentative capacity, that is, the ability to discriminate among different reasons to decide courses of action.

6) The differences between countries and groups within a society are at times and in many places so deep that an effective way of resolving them, within the limits of pluralism and tolerance, is the strategic contract or agreement. With it the parties agree on distributions, rules and mechanisms that permit the elimination of differential recognition by each of them of their weaknesses and relative advantages. Consequently, the use of force, understood as a mechanism of exerting pressure on others that obliges or aids the realization that failure to agree may cost more than agreement, is

not excluded. From this perspective, strategic contracts are morally acceptable when they permit solutions to conflicts that produce access or improvement of individuals or groups previously without it to at least an aspect of the common good, without requiring that someone who reasonably possesses goods give them up. This idea of a strategic pact is applicable to the elaboration of international agreements, the elaboration of national constitutions, the resolution of specific conflicts, etc.

A special case of the application of force is the use of violence. A peaceful or at least nonviolent agreement to resolve conflicts is always preferable. But the definitive renunciation of violence by one party gives the other an unacceptable strategic advantage. Hence the use of violence to seek social justice is not morally unacceptable. But it must have precise limits. These would be:

a) It is legitimate to use it only in cases of serious, prolonged, and unacceptable violation of the highest values of peaceful coexistence, social cooperation, and personal autonomy.

b) It must cease once the objective has been achieved or the other party accepts the negotiation of an agreement.

c) It must respect international law concerning the treatment of civilians and combatants.

These are moral conditions.

d) Violent action must be approved by a majority of those affected by the violations. No one can legitimately act violently in the name of an oppressed or exploited group without its support. This is a condition of democracy.

e) Violent action may be resorted to only if all channels for conflict negotiation stipulated by the applicable laws have been exhausted or after repeated and failed attempts at peaceful negotiation.

These are conditions of juridicality and political correctness.

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FRAMEWORK OF AN INTERSUBJECTIVIST THEORY OF MEANING

Cristina Corredor

I.

Very recently, some internal criticisms have been directed towards core theses of the *Theory of communicative action* and some posterior modifications of them.¹ This theory aims at reconstructing the unavoidable and most general presuppositions, of a formal-pragmatic character, which underlie and are constitutive for our processes of human understanding (*Einverständnissprozessen*). One of the core theses in the theory affirms that the particular interaction form represented by the communicative use of language is the *original* modus of use of language; furthermore, this notion becomes the most basic one for a general theory of human rationality — understood as *communicative rationality*. This latter is considered to be a *universal* competence allowing to take part in processes of human understanding. These are claimed to share, from the point of view of their formal-pragmatic structure, a common triple reference to three validity claims — truth, rightness and sincerity, resp. correlated to the assertive, communicative and expressive uses of language — to the effect that these validity claims establish an internal connection between meaning and validity redeemable in rational argumentation, and entail a correlative triple reference to three «worlds» or dimensions of reality: namely, an objective world (of facts or states of affairs), an intersubjective world (of valid norms and values), and a subjective world.

In fact the *TkH* entails a wide *theory of rationality* in which — following its most recent formulation — three types (or roots) of rationality

¹ Reference is made here, in particular, to J. Habermas' following works: *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Ffm 1981 (from here on referred to as *TkH*); «Entgegnung», in A. Honneth u. H. Joas (eds.), *Kommunikatives Handeln*, Ff, 1986; *Vorstudien und Ergänzungen zur Theorie des komm. Handelns*, Ffm 1984; *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*, Ffm 1989; typescript of the *Vorlesung* held at the university of Frankfurt a.M., Winter Semester 1994.

are to be distinguished, the three of them being nevertheless connected to each other through the *discursive rationality* embodied by the process of argumentation in the sense stated above. These three types, internally related to knowledge, action and speech, are: *epistemic*, *strategic-teleological*, and *communicative* rationality. The present discussion deals in particular with *epistemic rationality* and its internal connection to knowledge. Within the framework of the *TkH*, an *epistemic* conception of truth as rational acceptability is assumed, according to which «Wissen (...) unterstellt die Möglichkeit einer diskursiven Einlösung entsprechender Wahrheitsansprüche».² This means that we can be said to *know* facts, provided we know *why* the corresponding sentential judgements are true. Thus the following claim can be seen as a definition of the notion of *epistemic rationality*: «Um eine Meinung als [epistemically, C.C.] rational zu qualifizieren, genügt es, daß sie im gegebenen Rechtfertigungskontext aus guten Gründen für wahr gehalten, d.h. rational akzeptiert werden kann».³ Yet rationality in a judgement does not presuppose its truth, but only its justified acceptability in a given context. In order to keep track of the fundamental distinction between been true and been accepted-as-true, a *reflexive* ascent is required. This is assumed to be possible, due to the *double propositional structure* (Austin, Searle) of epistemic claims within scientific theories — or in the epistemic use of language in general-. Nevertheless, the necessity and lack of a further detailed logical-semantic analyse of this structure is explicitly recognised.⁴

The criticism referred to above⁵ aims at showing that the internal logic in the *TkH*, together with an insufficient account of the epistemic use of language, have finished in a form of meaning holism and a subsequent relativism that threaten the universalism intended by the theory. This relativism is claimed to depend on the (maybe non-explicit, but acritical) acceptance of two theses: firstly, the preeminence of meaning upon reference, and secondly a form of meaning holism. Under these premisses, neither a reflexive revision of the *Welterschliessung* (world disclosure) we belong with, nor a critical distinction between our meaning-knowledge and our world-knowledge are to be possible. This conclusion becomes unavoidable, since the claimed internal connection between meaning and intersubjectively shared validity does not allow one to isolate the acceptability conditions of speech acts from the background knowledge determining them and making

² J. Habermas (1994), *Vorlesung*, Ms., p. 28.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

⁵ Esp.: C. Lafont, *La razón como lenguaje*, Madrid 1993; id, *Sprache und Welterschließung*, Ffm 1994, esp. pp. 262-326.

them possible. So long as any intelligible use of language, jointly with the corresponding validity claims and standards of rationality, are stated to come from the pre-reflexive, linguistically structured lifeworld of intersubjectively shared meanings and practices, it can only be claimed for the former the same contingent and historical character possessed by the latter — the very instance constitutive for them. Even a *discursive* use of language is condemned to such relativism, given the fact that the standards of rationality and validity criteria to be revised only become reflexively accessible by means of their own application.⁶ The conclusion to be drawn seems to be that of questioning the universality claimed by the *TkH* and which constitutes an unrenounceable premise for the *Diskursethik*.

In order to overcome these difficulties, however, the criticism stated above is accompanied by an explicit proposal. The suggested solution finds theoretical support in semantical theories of direct reference (Kripke, McDowell, previous works by Putnam) and, in Putnam's *internal realism*. The theories firstly mentioned emphasize the function of rigid designation fulfilled by certain terms and complex expressions, which are employed with a referential value in inductive epistemic contexts and learning processes, and such that it is not possible to associate to them, as their meaning, a complete linguistic description of all the properties, relations, etc that will be virtually predicated of the entities they name. Although in the *TkH* this epistemic use of singular terms is not ignored, the communicative use of language (especially the discursive one) does always suppose a previous understanding of sense that makes impossible, according to the commented criticism, to reflexively question and put under control the received *Weltanschauung* structures that constitute their own conditions of possibility. To this extent, a meaning theory of direct reference, re-elaborated within a form of *internal (pragmatical) realism* (Putnam) and the presupposition of an objective world entailed by it, appears to be — so the referred proposal assumes — the unique theoretical solution in order to avoid meaning holism and the subsequent relativism.⁷

⁶ This argument applies to a general philosophical-linguistic domain Gadamer's re-elaboration of Hegel's critic against Kant in the domain of ethics. According to this view, and in opposition to e.g. Prof. Apel's semiotics based on Peirce, reflexion can never transcend contextual dependency.

⁷ It should be made clear here that, although both proposals, a theory of direct reference and internal realism are referred back to Putnam, they represent two different moments in Putnam's philosophical developments. From the first one, as exposed in his works «Meaning and reference» (*The Journal of Philosophy* 70/19 (1973), pp. 699-711) and «The meaning of 'meaning'» (in *Mind, Language and Reality (Philosophical Papers 2)*, Cambridge, Mass. 1975, pp. 215-271), Putnam took a critical distance because of what he considered to be Kripke's «magical» (metaphysical) theory of reference. His second stance, *internal realism*, is to be found e.g. in his works *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge, mass.,

An important theoretical contribution implicit in this proposal seems to be the idea, already present in the *TkH*,⁸ that it is the breakage points or «breaches» between language (our theories or constituted meanings), on the one hand, and the objective world (supposed to be independent of the theory), on the other, what makes of these problematic situations the very constitutive instances for a new *Welterschliessung*. To the extent that these breakage points, or problematic contexts, as they become manifest in the course of epistemic practices (paradigmatically, in learning processes), are compelling for a critical revision of our background knowledge, they cannot be referred back to the *schon immer* of previously established senses arising from the lifeworld. For the problematic situation prompts the counterfactual, thus normative presupposition of a unique objective world. Moreover, the revision it motivates is underlied by a fallibilistic intuition concerning our knowledge and by a competence allowing us to distinguish between our knowledge of already constituted meanings and our knowledge of the world, the latter only counterfactually anticipated.

Yet there are in this proposal some other elements which I find more difficult to agree with. In particular, the stated criticism seems to adscribe to the *TkH* an acritical embodiment of a theory of indirect reference. This would be brought about by an explicit appeal to formal semantics, considered as the theoretical device adequate to analyse the structure of the propositional content element in speech acts and the referential function of language in epistemic contexts. A meaning theory of indirect reference and an attributive interpretation of designating expressions are seen as necessarily correlative to this Fregean formal semantics.

Nevertheless, to this argument it can be objected that the pregnancy of formal semantics is undeniable, given the fact that the most recent

1981; cf. pp. 46-48 for the criticism stated above) and *Representation and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass. 1988). The epistemic conception of truth here defended — as justified acceptability under ideal conditions — is abandoned later and critically qualified as a form of «moderate verificacionism» related to a kind of scientific realism. Since then Putnam has modified his position, first emphasizing the pragmatism component of what he went on calling internal realism, and most recently by approaching naturalism (cf. Putnam (1994): «The Dewey Lectures», in *The Journal of Philosophy* 91/9 (1994)). In the present discussion a somewhat «unorthodox» reading of Putnam's thinking has been accomplished, as later again adverted, to the extent that Putnam's first theory of direct reference (Putnam (1973), (1975)) is integrated within his posterior pragmatism (Putnam (1981), (1988)). — I am grateful to Manuel Liz for some remarks concerning this point

⁸ Cf., e.g., *TkH*, *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 583-593.

linguistic theories since Chomsky⁹ have made use of these formal-semantic developments in order to construct models intended to be adequate counterparts for their syntactical and grammatical accounts of natural language. These structural descriptions of linguistic expressions should be seen as strictly instrumental and just a useful device to make it explicit structural-semantic relations *among expressions*. A standard formal semantics is interpreted as related to a referential theory of meaning; the definition of a semantic model is carried out by introducing a set of «entities» (or semantic domain) and a set of properties and relations defined onto it; finally, the «meaning» of linguistic expressions is seen as a relation between the linguistic symbols and the set of entities, this latter being considered independent of the language. (No matter whether the logical proper names or constant symbols are interpreted as naming Wittgenstein's objects, Carnap's *Erlebnisse* or Putnam's stereotypes).

The formal semantics developed from the seminal works of Frege, Tarski and Montague (among others) does not convey as the theory of *direct* reference does, any «ontological commitment» in itself. Though it is undeniable that Frege, Russell or Carnap argued for a theory of indirect reference, they did it in a very different context. They were in search for a *vollkommene Sprache*, in which all names played the role of *genuine* proper names — what amounted to saying that the minimal linguistic categories should name the corresponding minimal categories of reality, the minimal expressions for predicates should name the most basic properties and relations, and so on. But the formal language in itself, the *semantics*, was just to be seen as an instrumental device, able to consistently and adequately model some theory. The *semantic* domain (or universe of discourse) and the set of relations and functions defined on it were not in themselves «ontological»; only when this instrumental device was applied in the pragmatic level as the formal correlate of a theory, could the meta-linguistic expressions be seen as intended to convey information on the «ontology» or «structure» of reality.

The fact that this semantic structure was read by its own authors as a «real» one has been denounced as an «ontological contamination of semantics».¹⁰ What is of importance here is that formal semantics is just a

⁹ These theories do not constrain themselves to classical or a particular logic, nor are they committed to assign psychological (or any other kind of) reality to the assumed underlying logic. Linguistic theories such as Generative Grammar or Categorical Grammar make use of an (extended) intensional logic, yet explicitly refusing to see this semantic model as different from just a descriptive account.

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. Ch. Thiel's interpretation on Frege. Although Thiel is a member of the Erlangen Schule and thus subscribes a constructivist view, his account on Frege's philosophy of language seems to me accurate and valid. This very problem underlies also Quines's proposal, according to which semantic models should be

useful device to describe structural relations among linguistic expressions, and its embodiment within the framework of empirical and theoretical linguistics validates them. Only a «realist» reading (remember that a semantical model is always defined «a posteriori» and fixes just the available knowledge on the matter) can assign to formal languages a different character, not intended by its creators. To a certain extent, the direct reference theorists have tried to exaggerate the consequences of such a realist reading, in order to emphasize what their own reconstruction is able to provide: i.e. the fact that, in *practical* contexts and for certain referring expressions, we cannot assume the interpretation function to be substantively given — this precisely because it is in course of elaboration. From this point of view, it seems essential to keep in mind once more that we are dealing with *actual* contexts of praxis, where some conflict opposes our previously established knowledge. If it is an undeniable fact that formal semantics is usually related to referential theories of meaning (whether direct or indirect), neither a realist reading of the model nor meaning holism should be seen as logical consequences of it; on the contrary, these count as previous theoretical assumptions guiding the introduction of a particular analysis and the preference for a definite basic logic.

These considerations send us back to the communicative (discursive) domain in which our own criteria of validity and meta-theoretical principles are reflexively accesible and critically revised. A refusal of such a possibility, the adscription of logical or theoretical priority to a particular use of language (the epistemic one) or to a particular semantical theory (the direct reference theory) is subject to an almost unavoidable risk: that of carrying out an objectivist or functionalist explanation, this fact in spite of all efforts to keep track of the normative dimension.

II.

The assert that the *TkH* acritically embodies an indirect reference theory of meaning (because of its explicit acceptance of formal-semantical analyses, its implicit substaining of the preeminence-of-meaning-upon-reference thesis and a subsequent meaning holism) finds legitime support in some of Prof. J. Habermas' writings — and in particular in the 1st volume of *TkH-*, as C. Lafont's critical reconstruction has clearly shown.

defined without introducing constant terms standing for proper names of individuals; instead, any referring expression should be accounted for in terms of quantified variables, these latter playing the role of «provisory» names for insufficiently-known entities — which could turn out to possess other properties or just not to «exist». It is evident that Quine has submitted to other epistemological and theoretical commitments; but this belongs again to the domain of theory of science (or ontology) and not necessarily to that of formal semantics, that is to say, to the development of formal languages to be applied as instrumental devices in order to *a posteriori* explicit the minimal or essential categories a theory does convey.

Nevertheless, there are also in the *TkH* asserts and analyses that seem to make it explicit the same kind of intuition motivating the criticism. Thus in the 2nd volume of this work, and in the course of an interpretive study on G.H. Mead, an explicit treatment of the *identity-of-meaning* problem is carried out — i.e. the problem of the intersubjective constitution of shared meanings. Here a re-elaboration of Wittgenstein's last meaning theory allows Prof. Habermas to formulate what is intended to be an intersubjectivist theory of meaning as use, as opposed to any referentialist meaning theory in general — no matter whether «direct» or «indirect». For, as it is explained, «Die bedeutungskonstante Verwendung desselben Symbols muß nicht nur an sich gegeben, sondern für die Symbolbenutzer selbst erkennbar sein. Und diese Identität der Bedeutung kann nur durch die intersubjektive *Geltung einer Regel*, die die Bedeutung eines Zeichens «konventionell» festlegt, gesichert werden.»¹¹

There are two ideas to notice here. The first one is that meaning identity or the intersubjective sharing of meanings do not possess the character of that *schon immer* given. It depends on the validity of rules which in a practical context fix or warrant the use of the term. In the case of a referential usage in learning processes, for instance, neither should a preeminence of meaning upon reference be assumed, nor the inverse. For what counts as reference and what counts as meaning are both dependent on the rules that are constitutive of the epistemic praxis. Here a conceptual distinction is assumed between what is constitutive of meaning (or sense) and to what justifies its validity — to put it in Prof. Apel's terms.

The second noticeable idea in the quotation is that meaning identity, as given through the validity of a rule, is not credited by the empirical fact of a continuity in its use, it is not something merely «given»; meaning identity requires the possibility of a reflexive access to it. The reason for that lies on the fact that these rules are *counterfactual*, that is to say, they have a *normative* character. This allows for mutual instruction and reciprocal criticism: «Indem sie die kritische Stellungnahme des anderen zur fehlschlagenden Deutung eines kommunikativen Aktes sich selbst gegenüber einnehmen, bilden sich *Regeln der Symbolverwendung* aus (...) Auf diese Weise bilden sich *Bedeutungskonventionen*, und bedeutungsidentisch verwendbare Symbole aus.»¹² Here the choice is made for a theory of meaning as use, as different from referential (direct or indirect) theories of meaning. Notwithstanding this, from the point of view of the discussed criticism this moving is not enough to avoid relativism. For it does not grant that a reached accord on the validity of a rule does not arise from standards *schon immer* given within the lifeworld background.

¹¹ *TkH*, vol 2, pp. 30-31.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

It is in fact difficult to find in the *TkH* an explicit discussion of this problem. The arguments against relativism seem to focus on another question, undoubtedly a core one: namely, the way in which «die formalpragmatische Analyse, die an hoch idealisierten, vereinzelt und elementaren Sprechhandlungen ansetzt», can be applied to factual, empirically given «kommunikativ strukturierter Lebensformen».¹³ I would say that, in an implicit way, the idea stated here is as follows. The risk of falling back to relativism lies on the step leading the way from intersubjectively identical meanings (as counterfactual presuppositions) to their effective performance (*Einlösung*) in a particular lifeworld context. Here Wittgenstein's notion of *eine Regel folgen* is applied to show how this is possible. For constant or «literal» meanings, and invariant semantical traits can be reconstructed as bearing a normative character: they constitute inevitable presuppositions for the participants in any linguistically mediated interaction.

Yet to «take as granted» — as it seems to be the case in the *TkH* — the intersubjective validity of shared meanings in this formal-pragmatic level of analysis, in which all conditions of possibility (the inevitable and maximally general presuppositions) are integrated, is not enough to grant universalism in the level of ordinaire communicative practices. For in this case «handelt es sich *erstens* um das grundsätzliche Problem, wie sie die situative Bedeutung eines Sprechakts zur wörtlichen Bedeutung seiner Satzkomponenten verhält.»¹⁴ Therefore the idealization of a literal meaning seems to overcome contextuality in *Einverständnis* processes, so long as this very presupposition counts as such for all participants and is reflexively accessible whenever a problem interrupts the process, so that the performances redeeming literal, warrantably shared meanings do not «open the door» to insuperable forms of contextualism or relativism. It is evident that the claim for universalism rests on the possibility to reach an agreement on this ideally presupposed meaning, when this is necessary for the subsequent interaction.¹⁵ Thus the problem was seen as a *de iure* problem, namely that of identifying what makes a justification of the validity of factual, constituted meanings possible — and that previously to, and with independence of, the particular contents to which this validity should be accorded.

¹³ J. Habermas, «Erläuterungen zum Begriff des komm. Handelns», in *Vorstudien ...*, *ibid.*, p. 600.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ To a certain extent, the *TkH* seems to have faced mentalist or intentionalist theories under the assumption that relativism would arise from the realm of subjectivity. At the same time, in an effort to preserve a critical perspective on society, the theory concentrated on the analysis of an archetypical society and lifeworld. This fact could have concealed the risk of meaning holism.

It may be in this sense that in the *TkH* it was argued: «Diese Relativierung der Bedeutung sprachlich standardisierter Ausdrücke *fuhr* freilich nicht zur kontextualistischen Auflösung semantischer Invarianzen, also zu einem konsequenten Bedeutungsrelativismus; denn die *particularen Lebensformen* weisen nicht nur Familienähnlichkeiten auf: in ihnen kehren vielmehr die *allgemeinen Infrastrukturen von Lebenswelten* überhaupt wieder.»¹⁶

The assert that *all* lifeworlds share a common lifeworld structure (the formal-pragmatic structure of communicative rationality) represents, as I see it, a «strong» thesis central to the *TkH*. Here lies as well the plausibility of its claim for universalism. Yet what the discussed criticism aims at showing from a philosophical-linguistic perspective is that meaning relativism does not only emerge in the transition from intersubjectively valid, identical meanings, to their effective realization in situative lifeworld contexts, in which breakages of human understanding take place. From this critical perspective, it is the very moment of constitution of intersubjectively valid meanings what is in need of further elaboration. The intuition and subsequent commitment to internal realism could be seen as an effort to answer this insufficient development in the restricted domain of the epistemic use of language. Nevertheless, in some respects this proposal seems to be in conflict with basic *TkH* premisses. Here, the fundamental remark is made that a «wahrgenommene Konstanz der Bedeutung» (or of the reference in epistemic contexts) is not enough; this constancy (or rigidity) can be seen as purely functional and identifiable just from an observer's perspective. In order to legitimately speak of shared meanings, a further step is needed: that leading the way to the constitution of *valid* rules for reference-fixing and herewith to the interactive sphere of meaning constitution.

In this point, however, it can be anticipated that an answer cannot come so much from the sphere of meaning constitution as from the *normative* sphere of validity justification. Here it is where these formal-pragmatic, unavoidable and general rules enter into play, including that of referring to (or anticipating) a common objective world. But for that it is necessary that some problematic situation make it compelling a questioning of the previous accepted validity and a searching for a new justification of it.

III.

The burden of the proof is now for the *TkH* to show that shared meaning, as based in the intersubjective validity of a rule, can escape the relativism of being immersed in a unassailable linguistic *Welterschliessung*. The commented critical proposal subsumes a double betting. Firstly, it posits a direct reference theory (as theoretical reconstruction of semantical

¹⁶ Ibid. [my emphasis, C.C.]

structures of language) as a possibility to overcome the «totality» represented by a particular *Welterschliessung* and its hipostatization. In order for that to be possible, it is necessary to identify some instance, of a normative or regulative character, not pre-determined by this linguistic world disclosure. What is required is that this instance, *counterfactually* operating as an inevitable presupposition in epistemic contexts, should encourage, make possible and regulate such a linguistic disclosure. This instance is identified as the *counterfactual presupposition of a common objective world* — which presents itself in epistemic contexts as previous and inevitable with respect to any symbolic mediation at disposal.

Henceforth the second betting subsumes an epistemic commitment with internal realism. If this position is assumed as valid, then — although this conclusion is not drawn as such by the discussed criticism — the epistemic use of language, which allows for an explicit treatment of truth claims implicit in the propositional component of speech acts and which is seen as based in a direct reference theory, inevitably becomes the anchoring point for a formal-pragmatic reconstruction of (maximally general and unavoidable) structures of speech aiming at overcoming the risk of meaning holism — i.e. the risk of not being able to distinguish our world-knowledge from our language-knowledge. This seems to highlight the insufficiency of a Wittgensteinian account of meaning publicity.

Yet I think — as advanced before — that something essential could turn out to be lost in this double betting. For in epistemic contexts it is not only the presupposition of a common objective world — not yet linguistically open — what enters into play. It is required as well the implicit assumption that the realization of such a linguistic disclosure — towards which the epistemic practice is directed — *can take place*. This amounts to saying that the objective world is accessible to linguistic disclosure, thus that the structure of reality is, together with the structure of language, *rational*. Or, equivalently, that the objective world can be counterfactually interpreted as articulated in a way similar to the semantical structure of language, i.e. the referential, predicative, attributive language structures. But now, even if the intuition differentiating world and language is preserved, it is so only by means of this structure — at once empirical and *quasi-transcendental*, for it prefigures the formal structure of a not-yet-disclosed world.

What the previous remarks attempt to show is the risk subsumed by the commented proposal and which it shares — paradoxically enough — with all referentialist theories of meaning. Namely, the risk of performing a realist reading that eventually absolutizes what is only a semantical function of language. If a direct reference theory is seen just as a descriptive reconstruction of the epistemic use of language in learning processes, then it is undoubtedly accurate and pregnant. So restricted, the theory can legitimately dispense with two necessary complementations: firstly, a global reconstruction of all syntactical and semantical structures of language to

which reference, attribution and predication belong, and secondly, a theory of knowledge accounting for the relationship between these structural elements and what counts as empirical evidence and/or phenomenological experience.

I think that it was this second, methodological perspective, and not the first, «absolutizing» one, what H. Putnam adopted in his initial formulation. But if he was far away from metaphysically absolutizing the referential function of language, his proposal could not help but turning his reconstruction of learning processes into a *functionalist* explanation.¹⁷ Among the core facts that convey the use of a word and help to fix reference are «pieces of empirical information», «purely linguistic information» and sometimes the extension of the word. What seems clear is that this assignment of semantical value, even for rigid designators, does not escape a linguistic mediation and a dependence of background knowledge and of a set of constituted practices. For the use of a referring expression is explained in its turn in terms of the function it fulfils — possibly from an observer's perspective — within a more comprehensive epistemic framework and thus in dependence of other elements within it.

Certainly, the critical proposal here discussed has a different character. A reconstruction of the (direct) referential function in purely semantic terms is here intended to count as a reconstruction of the inevitable rational presuppositions in epistemic contexts. However, in such a case it should not be enough to show that the result of such a reconstruction «does the work». The fact that this fixation of a direct reference fulfils or satisfies a function in our learning processes or inductive practices (or better: to be able to explain the latter in terms of the former) does not confer a *rational* character to these epistemic practices — if *rational* is to preserve its philosophical relevance here.

In order to clarify concepts, it could be of use here to make it explicit what is to be understood under «functionalist explanation»:¹⁸

¹⁷ Therefore the question «How do we come to understand a new word?» was to be answered by giving the «core facts» that show the function fulfilled by the use of a word — those core facts conforming its associated *stereotype*: «To sum this up: there are a few facts about 'lemon' or 'tiger' (I shall refer to them as *core facts*) such that one can convey the use of 'lemon' or 'tiger' by simply conveying such facts (...) *given the function* of a kind of word, it is not difficult to explain why certain facts *function* as core facts for conveying the use of words of that kind.»

H. Putnam, «Is semantics possible?», in S.P. Schwartz (ed.), *Naming, Necessity and Natural Kinds*, Ithaca, London, 1977, pp. 102-107, here 114, 118 [my emphasis, C.C.]

¹⁸ J. Elster, *Explaining technical change*, Cambridge 1983, p. 57; quoted in J. Bohman, «The completeness of macro-sociological explanations», *Protosozologie*

«An institution or behavioral pattern X is explained by its function Y for a group Z if, and only if,

- 1) Y is an effect of X
- 2) Y is beneficial for Z
- 3) Y is *unintended* by the actors producing X
- 4) Y or at least the *causal relation* between X and Y, is *unrecognized* by the actors in Z
- 5) Y maintains X by a *causal* feedback loop passing through Z.»

What makes a functional explanation different from the type of *quasi-transcendental* deduction brought into play is, firstly, that the kind of presupposition identified by the latter cannot be said to «fulfil» a function Y, but to constitute a necessary (inevitable) condition for this epistemic practice — there are, so to say, no «alternative models». Furthermore, they should be previous to, and independent from, the particular realizations to which epistemic rationality is accorded. Secondly, the relation between this practice and the presupposition making it possible should be accessible to the participants — if this linkage is not to be condemned to the pre-rational status of what is given in inherited practices (points 3. and 4. in the definition).

If this is right, then the discussed proposal is to be seen as involving two «strong» assumptions. On one side, a notion of rationality which should be different from mere operative or teleological «blind» rationality and able to acquire *reflexive* knowledge of its own conditions. On the other side, a universality claim which is not to be restricted to the contextual character pregnant in the quoted definition.

IV.

I think this latter idea is what the commented proposal attempts to show and therefore what puts it to the proof. In a recent paper,¹⁹ Axel Müller accomplishes a reconstruction, from a formal-pragmatic viewpoint, of the structural properties present in those epistemic contexts in which we talk of «learning by experience». After the linguistic turn in philosophy, this investigation can only be philosophical-linguistic. The author shows that there is a connection between certain predicates applied in inductive practices and singular terms for natural kinds when applied as rigid designators. This connection is claimed to lie on the *rational presuppositions* underlying the epistemic output of such expressions. These rational

5 (1992), p. 106 [my emphasis, C.C.]

¹⁹ A. Müller, «Referenz und Projizierbarkeit», Ms., Ffm 1994 (reprinted in the first number of *Sorites*).

presuppositions would have in themselves an aprioric character,²⁰ since they regulate normatively the correct usage of these singular and predicative terms in their empirical application. It is by means of presupposing a fixed reference in the case of singular terms, or the projectability of inductive predicates onto the domain of discourse, that this rationality underlying the epistemic use of language becomes effective. Thus both practices acquire a *quasi*-constitutive status when learning by experience, to the extent that they are underlied by two inevitable, epistemically rational presuppositions. A first, *quasi*-ontological one, is to the effect that the «entities» correlated to the concepts (a natural kind, or the class of all entities satisfying an inductive predicate) are legitimately supposed to be «real», no matter what method of identification has been employed. A second, meta-epistemic presupposition allows for a permanence of the objectual domain, notwithstanding the fact that a continuous change in the knowledge associated with the concept is to take place.²¹ Finally, it is important to notice that these presuppositions of epistemic rationality are to be reconstructed as a *universal* competence for following rules — precisely, the kind of rules that make the epistemic output of these concepts possible. Moreover, this competence permits to distinguish «zwischen Zeichen und Bezeichnetem, zwischen Wirklichkeit und Konstruktion und zwischen Bezugnahme und Mitteilung».²²

I think that this reconstruction of the pragmatic structures basic for the epistemic rationality represents precisely the kind of necessary complementation which a general Wittgensteinian account lacks, as stressed above; yet it is indispensable for the commented proposal to overcome the two mentioned risks. But the rigour of the analysis makes some difficulties in it manifest. The intuition I would like to make good here is that a reconstruction of learning processes in terms of a direct reference theory is not enough by itself to avoid meaning holism, i.e. to identify the linguistic game allowing for a distinction between meaning knowledge and world knowledge.

This in its turn amounts to questioning the sufficiency of the two presuppositions identified in A. Müller's analysis as constitutive for epistemic rationality. The expression *sufficiency* is not intended to put into question their mostly general and necessary character, but to suggest that, in order for the two presuppositions to effectively acquire such character, it is not enough to place them within the domain of epistemic rationality in its application to learning by experience in general. This move suffers from a certain ambiguity, since these processes, so far as they take place in a non-

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 16, 18, 21.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

²² Ibid., p. 21.

problematic way and following the usual patterns of scientific practices are not necessarily guided by counterfactual presuppositions but rather by the factual criteria at work in «normal science» periods (to speak along with Kuhn). At this stage, and as long as no reflexive or critical revision of these criteria is needed, a reconstruction in terms of underlying presuppositions of rationality is not different from a «reconstruction» (explanation) in functionalist terms. Only when a «breach» or a conflict arises, is there also a need for the rational, reflexive competence which bestows to these presuppositions their character. Yet this «screw turn» appeals for a discursive use of language and no longer for a mere «blind» epistemic rationality.

I would say that, to some extent, it is this moment of conflict which Follesdall's comment hints at, although not intendedly — in fact, with an opposite intention-, when he says: «All our talk (...) presupposes that we can keep our singular terms referring to the same objects. *To the extent that we fail*, these notions [change, causation, knowledge] become incoherent.»²³ Only in such moments does it become possible to reflexively identify the presuppositions of rationality «brought into play». Consequently, only then is it possible to adscribe to epistemic rationality the import of a universal competence, able to separate the referential function of language from the presupposition — now of a non-ambiguous normative character — of a common objective world. Insofar as no conflict interrupts the continuum of epistemic practices in normal periods, nothing transforms reference-fixing practices and inductive reasoning into an «anchoring point» for facing meaning holism. Contrary to it, and so long as these practices take place non-problematically within the framework of previously established practices, they do not escape either a falling back into the pre-instituted *Welterschliessung*.

The fact that this is so, i.e. that those presuppositions of rationality only acquire their character in the context of a reflexive revision forced by a «breach» or conflict, becomes manifest in the following sense. If these epistemic breakages are considered to be constitutive for the immediate («blind») epistemic rationality, their output cannot be separated from particular contents and from a contextual dependence on the epistemic asserts they contribute to establish — in the same sense as the corresponding reconstruction of the process cannot be kept apart from a functionalist explanation. I think that this becomes apparent in A. Müller's paper, and I will try to hint at some relevant points in his analysis in order to support this claim.

The first difficulty is almost terminological. For a post-metaphysical notion of *experience* is only to be understood as a result of linguistic mediations and as an abstraction — since to talk about «our» experience

²³ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 18 [the original italics are not respected, C.C.]

already presupposes intersubjectivity and linguisticity in its transmission and interpretation.²⁴ This problem is only an aspect of a more basic difficulty, as explained by the author himself: «Damit ergibt sich (...) die Notwendigkeit, den Sprachverwendern die Einsicht in die Möglichkeit der «direkten», aber *nicht unmittelbaren* Bezeichnung von etwas von Bestimmungswissen unabhängigen mittels eines Zeichens zuzumuten.»²⁵

It seems to me that the logical grammar of singular terms and inductive predicates is here accurately analysed, but it does not answer the question of how the application and correct use of these terms are communicated and acquire intersubjective validity, and in what way a particular (provisoire) fixation of reference turns out to be publically accessible and the correlated concept reaches intersubjectivity. If it is true that this reference-fixing is said to be accomplished through a variety of procedures (e.g. operational, contextual, ostensible, theoretical ones), nevertheless — as it happened in Putnam's first formulation — all these procedures are instances of established practices, linguistically mediated and context relative. The possibility of a reference-fixing is underlied by a presupposition not mentioned, namely the possibility of its public transmission and of some form of consensus with respect to it — herewith, the initial question on the constitution of intersubjective validity reappears once more. To the extent that introducing a rigid designator — and its associated concept — is guided by internal criteria, nothing in it guarantees an access to the difference between world knowledge and meaning knowledge. What to a «naive» intuition appears to be a new entity in the world, not reducible to pre-existing meanings, may turn out to be a result of our background knowledge and practices, methodological criteria, etc., to the effect that all these things together produce «new» objects of experience.²⁶

The fact that the crucial distinction between natural kind terms and general terms, as correlative to the opposition between a referential and an

²⁴ Similarly, to talk of «synthetic a priori» terms seems paradoxical, given the fact that (after the de-transcendentalization in philosophy related to the linguistic turn) language counts as the only *aprioric* instance in our experience and, henceforth, the pre-existing meanings become constitutive for the *Weltanschauung*. To this extent, talking of «a priori» terms seems to recover an *a priori* in our knowledge with respect to linguistic experience. But the inevitable «substantivation» carried out by this move questions the claimed universalism in the discussed proposal.

²⁵ «... die durch keine Gesamtheit an Wissen definitiv überbrückt werden kann.» Ibid., p. 18.

²⁶ Quine's remark that we introduce a «new» entity whenever we are unable to «descompose» it in pre-established relations among other, simpler ones, seems to have a point here. But he interprets it as an argument in favor of meaning holism.

attributive use of language, do not seem to rest on a wholly rational criterion — as the author himself notes-, makes this determination of reference to depend again on internal criteria coming from the concerned empirical theories and henceforth language-relative. (From this perspective, to distinguish between the assignment of content to a symbol and the structural *function* it fulfils within the epistemic practice is not enough, as previously remarked, since a functionalist explanation does not reconstruct the formal-pragmatic structures of the epistemic *rationality*).

This difficulty — and the subsequent fact that distinguishing between a referential and an attributive use of language does not depend on formal traits of linguistic expressions, but on their usage in the particular context in which they play such a role — is present again in the distinction between inductive (or projectable) and non-inductive predicates. Here, a risk of circularity — projectable predicates are identified precisely as those which «do the work» in learning processes — is only to be overcome if this identification is not formulated in formal terms — since in this way, no access to them exist — but by taking into account the particular context within which a predicate turns out to be inductive. In this sense, it seems correct the decision in favor of a precise notion of *induction*²⁷. For this notion supposes an empirical or experimental context where a hypothesis has been proposed, before the inductive process oriented to its checking and the assignment of a projectable character to the involved predicate can take place.

That a hypothesis has already been proposed means that some regular and (assumed as) *complete* event has been observed whose repetition is expected, and that some set of entities has been picked out as possible «universe of discourse» (therefore, as objectual set virtually satisfying the predicate), as well as some property or relation identified as that named by the predicate. In this respect, A. Müller critically discusses Goodman's paradox — a counterexample proposed by this author in order to show that we tend to use as projectable those predicates whose output in previous inductive practices has conferred them this character. Müller refutes Goodman's thesis by showing in his turn that Goodman's paradox is brought about by an incorrect application of induction in the case of a non-inductive predicate.

Yet it seems to me that the paradox can be solved even adopting Goodman's perspective. For his sophisticated counterexample can be said to lack the contextual determination required, if it is seen as a case of «too quick» induction — thus of «blind» epistemic rationality-, formulated before the *complete* sequence of events had taken place. In order to define his non-inductive predicate «grot», Goodman needs to adopt a «God's eye» perspective — or an observer's *a posteriori* viewpoint. The previous remarks

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

are intended to suggest that the attribution of an inductive (projectable) character to a predicate is epistemically reliable (therefore epistemically *rational*) only when one has successfully isolated the «correct» sequence of events. The burden of the proof for the validity of the induction — thus for the new knowledge it introduces — lies on the correctness in the synthetic moment of abduction, or formulation of the hypothesis. But this in its turn implies entering into the sphere of validity justification, hence of discursive-reflexive rationality.

What from the side of language counts as intersubjectively valid meaning includes, from the practical side, some procedure or criterion allowing to introduce such terms by a fixation of reference (in a communicable way) and/or by establishing (though provisionally) their application. So long as the implicit expectations do not become problematic — that is to say, as long as «we can keep our singular terms referring to the same objects», or we can keep our inductive predicates projectable-, the kind of epistemic rationality «set to work» follows the pattern of that given in our background practices. Furthermore, and unless we resort to a notion of experience previous to the linguistic turn, what counts as such is also a result of mediations that bring nearer the experiential and the experimental. Here, it seems difficult to distinguish between the *inevitable presuppositions of rationality*, in a normative sense, and what counts as functional, operative devices from a descriptive point of view.

The situation changes as soon as the concerned presuppositions (fixity of reference, projectability of predicates) become problematic. Only then is there a need for the kind of competence that makes a revision of the implicit presuppositions possible, hence an access — no longer unintentional or unconscious — to the rules of use which normatively guide the application of empirically interpreted terms. This problematic moment — that presumably will lead to a new hypothesis — acquires a constitutive character for the new synthetic terms to be introduced. Moreover, it makes legitimate attach to them the counterfactual, formal-pragmatic presupposition at stake: as A. Müller puts it, «die Fortsetzbarkeit and Festgelegtheit vorauszusetzen bedeutet nicht, etwas *über die Welt* gelernt zu haben, sondern die Differenzierung von Sprache und Welt *reflexiv* durchführen zu können.»²⁸ I think that in this sense it becomes possible to speak, in relation to learning processes in general, of *Prozessen des Verlernens*.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., p. 18. [italics under *reflexiv* are mine, C.C.] Although this passage interprets what has been accomplished by Goodman and Wittgenstein, I think it states also what could be seen as the core idea in A. Müller's critical analysis and what I have in my turn tried to reconstruct following him.

²⁹ J. Habermas, *TkH*, vol. 2, p. 588. Although the discussion here is concerned with the confrontation among different *Weltanschauungen*, the same expression reappears in *Vorstudien...* (ibid.), in the answer to M. Hesse's objections, and in

For these presuppositions have a double character. As far as they provide rules of use in the course of learning processes, within which the application of synthetic categories is non-problematic (since their reference/their unambiguous implementation is paradigmatically determined), these presuppositions belong to the competence that is to be attributed to the agents as epistemic rationality, so long as they are able to make a correct use of the correlative terms, empirically interpretable. These rules of use belong then to the background knowledge of the involved practices.³⁰ Nevertheless, at this stage a conceptual distance remains open between the participants' pre-understanding of the rules, on the one hand, and the normative and rational character to be attributed to them, on the other. This becomes apparent whenever their paradigmatical application turns out to become problematic, because the same questioning seems to affect (or be extensible to) their rationality — in the sense, e.g., in which the attribution of projectability to Goodman's «grot» happens to lose its «rational» character. Yet this problematic situation motivates a critical revision of the implicit presuppositions and a re-elaboration of the epistemic devices in question. And this is only possible through a form of reflexion that — within the framework of a practice enjoying intersubjective validity — is to take place uniquely as communicative rationality. Only in the context of a problematic situation — i.e., whenever the kind of «blind» epistemic rationality accounted for by a functionalist explanation happens to fail — do the rules of use corresponding to singular terms and projectable predicates acquire the validity of a *rational* presupposition. For only then are they to be reflexively recovered and a critical revision of the epistemic devices presently into play is made possible and necessary. Only then too does the un-learning process correspond to a competent (i.e. rational) decision.

I think also that these *reflexive* language games, in which the problems arisen in learning processes are revised, can be seen as *constitutive* for our learning of the difference between language knowledge and world knowledge. Yet this assert leads the way to a more complex question; namely, that concerning the status to be assigned to this shared objective world that we counterfactually presuppose — and to which we have access through *reflexion* in the referred problematic contexts. Finally, another difficulty arises in relation to the three basic concepts of *knowledge*, *reality*

other places as well, where the discussion is unambiguously epistemological. And the same idea is anticipated as well in the apparent paradoxe pointed at by A. Müller: «Es fragt sich also, was die in einer solchen Reflexion (...) zutage tretenden *normativen Voraussetzungen der Verwendungs-weise* von Prädikaten im allgemeinen sind, die ein Lernen aus Erfahrungen *nicht verhindern*.» (ibid., p.14 [last italics mine, C.C.]

³⁰ Here I closely follow A. Müller, ibid. pp. 14, 21, 16. The difference between the sign and that designed by it can also be seen as arising from the background of a problematic presuppositions.

and *truth*, and the relationship among them. This question is dealt with in two very recent papers by C. Lafont.³¹

V.

C. Lafont argues for a non-epistemic concept of *truth* and shows that the unconditional validity we attribute to it comes from its internal connection with the concept of *reality*, a non-epistemic one as well. So long as *true/false* are conceived of as exclusively dependent of the (absolute) opposition between *it is the case/it is not the case*, *true* can preserve its unconditional validity with respect to any epistemic criteria whatsoever of rational acceptability.³² The unconditional validity of truth rests, to this extent, on the logical condition expressed by the *tertium non datur*. By reconstructing this basic intuition, it is noticed that we are confronted with a formal aspect inherent to the concept of *reality* that is not exhausted by its epistemic counterpart, namely the absolute, totalizing character we assign to it. This character of the notion of *reality* becomes manifest in the inevitable presupposition related to the practices concerned with the revision of our beliefs: namely, the counterfactual presupposition of a unique, shared objective world.³³

This perspective necessarily entails a very critical position with respect to epistemic views on truth, which characterize this notion as «rational acceptability under ideal conditions». Among those are Putnam's, Dummett's and the *Diskurstheorie der Wahrheit* defended by Prof. J. Habermas and critically revised by Prof. A. Wellmer. C. Lafont's criticism seems to be based on the observation that, in order for an *epistemic* notion of truth to preserve the unconditionality we intuitively associate to the concept, we are forced to suppose some kind of *emphatic* knowledge that enters into conflict with the fallibilism we assign to ours.³⁴ This last fact implies, quoting Prof. A. Wellmer, that «es gegen das, was wir jetzt als wahr einsehen, auch in Zukunft keine triftigen Gegenargumente geben wird.»³⁵ According to the discussed criticism, this view unavoidably entails the presupposition of a consensus on that which is acceptable on rational

³¹ C. Lafont, «Dilemas en torno a la verdad» and «Verdad, saber y realidad», Ms, Ffm 1994 (henceforth referred to as *DV* and *VSR* resp.; the second is reprinted in the first number of *Sorites*.)

³² Cf. *VSR*, p. 14.

³³ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 12, 13.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁵ A. Wellmer, quoted in J. Habermas, «Entgegnung», *ibid.* p. 352; ref. to in *VSR*, p. 10.

grounds, a consensus which has to be seen as definitive or irrevocable.³⁶ This inconditionality, even if we understand it as counterfactual presupposition or strong idealization, cannot be brought into agreement with the fallibilistic reservation we maintain with respect to all factual knowledge and all factual rational consensus. If *truth* is to preserve its normative value in relation to our epistemic criteria, then it cannot be itself — so the discussed critical proposal runs — an epistemic concept, and this amounts to saying that it does not need embody the counterintuitive anticipation of the incorrigibility of such criteria.³⁷

Prof. J. Habermas has explicitly refused to assign a realist and non-epistemic import to the concept of truth. This refusal forces him, according to the commented criticism, to the presupposition — inherent to any epistemic view on truth — of a *final true theory* or a *ultimate opinion* that would be so metaphysical as incompatible with fallibilism. Certainly, if C. Lafont is right here, then this has also relativist consequences incompatible with the claimed universalism.

The criticism and its conclusions appear to be indisputable. Yet there are elements in the epistemic conception of truth that seem not to receive a wholly fair treatment. For, on the one hand, the speaker's intuitive pre-understanding of the concept seems to be underlied by something more than the formal-pragmatic presupposition of a unique objective world — with no need in this «something more» for a substantive rationality. This is to be observed in the different ways in which a statement considered as true can turn out to be problematic, henceforth in the kind of commitment assumed by asserting it. As C. Lafont shows, the statement held as true anticipates the obligation to correct it, whenever some pregnant *counterargument* arises. Yet what counts as *relevant counterargument* cannot always be formulated in terms of «it is the case»/«it is not the case» (as the discussed criticism claims) and prevents us from considering that the statement truth or falsity just depend on this opposition. For neither the search for a rational justification of it seems to adopt always the form of an exclusion of one of

³⁶ Cf. *VSR*, p. 11. Nevertheless, Prof. Wellmer's argument does not seem to be concerned mainly with a strictly *epistemic* notion of truth — as it becomes manifest in his consideration of the problem «in welchem Sinne ein *infiniter* begründeter Konsens nicht auch *wahr* genannt werden sollte» (A. Wellmer, *Ethik und Dialog*, Ffm 1986, p. 81.). Here *true* seems to mean *valid* in a wider sense. Prof. Wellmer's discussion is concerned with the *Letztbegründungsproblem* of the *Diskursethik*, namely the extent to which a *Konsenstheorie* (of truth, or validity in general), «die sich, wie gesagt, nicht mehr criterial verstehen läßt», makes possible «die starken Hintergrundannahmen rechtfertigen (...), die der diskursethischen Reformulierung des Universalisierungsgrundsatzes zugrunde liegen» (ibid.) In fact, in the course of the present argumentation these strong background presuppositions should be seen as playing an essential role.

³⁷ Cf. *DV*, p. 14.

the two cases (as the strictly logical bivalence of the *tertium non datur* would require),³⁸ nor should two different commitments be identified, namely that of correcting the statement if *relevant counterarguments* arise and that of revising the affected belief when confronted to the *opposite* one. A *counterargument* does not need to adopt the form of a *logical negation* of the statement in question, as a strictly formal identification of truth with bivalence, without regard to its epistemic import, would require, and as the commented criticism seems to assume.³⁹

On the other hand, and even if it is right that the epistemic view on truth introduces strong idealizations that it attributes to the participants in the epistemic game, these idealizations concern the inconditionality associated with the predicate *true* and this trait is also nuclear to the non-epistemic account.⁴⁰ Obviously enough, the difference lies on the justification for it; and the presupposition of a shared objective world — seen as constitutive for the epistemic use of language by this non-epistemic account — is not free from some idealizations either — as it is argued below.

In relation to the idealizations embodied by the epistemic view, in the explanation of truth as «rational acceptability under ideal conditions», these inevitable idealizations and the inconditionality associated with *true* are present in the two adjectives: *ideal* and *rational*. In the case of the expression «under ideal conditions», it becomes apparent that a determination of such conditions is not independent of the particular context and the theory («language») for which they are formulated. The referred idealization can be seen as purely internal and immanent — as Putnam's analogy with ideal conditions in physics or chemistry suggests. At the same time, however, the expression is intended to transcend this contextual dependence. For it expresses, from a formal-pragmatic perspective, our intuition that *our knowledge of the context suffices* to grant that the attribution of truth to the statement is not misled, that it has not «got astray». Perhaps this supposition represents another way to introduce a form of idealization. Yet this latter does not refer to our (substantive) knowledge as such, but to the competence allowing us to know the preparatory and general contextual conditions necessary and sufficient to assert the statement. And this knowledge presupposes in its turn the ability to distinguish between language-knowledge (that allowing for the enunciation of the statement) and world-knowledge (i.e. of the contextual conditions making the assert possible). So understood, the resort to «ideal conditions» is not intended to account for a presupposition of infallibility that we would attach to our knowledge, but for the independence that speakers attribute to their own

³⁸ Cf. *VSR*, p. 13.

³⁹ Cf. *DV*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Cf. *VSR*, p. 9.

competence in which concerns virtual situative and contextual conditions that could have an effect upon them, affecting their capability of judgement.

To realize this does not mean refusing the discussed criticism, but rather displacing its focus. For the competence referred to — if it is accepted as playing a role whenever a statement is held to be true — forms part of our epistemic rationality so much as the knowledge of the statement truth-conditions. Furthermore, this competence makes the burden of the reconstruction of the unconditional validity attributed to *true* rest on the adjective *rational*. And here again, if *rational* is assumed to belong to the domain of the epistemic rationality, then its universalism seems in danger, since we are sent back to a criterial rationality with restricted validity. Yet there is also a possibility that it belongs to communicative rationality. For — as it is evident in the *TkH* as well as in C. Lafont's papers — *true* enters explicitly into play in problematic contexts; and in such cases only some form of consensus or final accord, communicatively attained, can (provisionally) settle the question. Nevertheless, even if this communicative rationality is claimed to be restricted to the domain of intersubjective relationships and to a reference to the intersubjective world⁴¹ — henceforth, in the present context, to be oriented to a conjoint definition of the situation, its application (of communicative rationality) depends on assuming the competence and knowledge of the context conditions alluded to by the expression «under ideal conditions» — as analysed above.

This fact suggests that *rational* should be understood here in a wider sense, i.e. as referring to a competence capable of integrating both types of rationality, the epistemic and the communicative ones, and to articulate them. A «conjoint definition of the situation» should include not only an evaluation of the problematic statement and the concurring relevant counterarguments, but also the virtual revision of the criteria of rationality playing a role in these formulations, together with the competence that permits to jointly find a final accord on the matter. Yet this seems to mean «dividing» the notion of communicative rationality — to some extent, in analogy to Kant's two uses of *Vernunft*. In the present context, the strong commitment underlying the adjective *rational*, within the framework of the *Diskurstheorie der Wahrheit*, is concerned with formal-pragmatic traits (e.g. a knowledge of the rules for participating in a discussion) that a *quasi*-transcendental reflexion would find to be maximally general and inevitable conditions present not only in the epistemic use of language, but also in any forum of discussion of a reflexive character. From this perspective, the anticipation of a shared objective world cannot be distinguished from the presupposition of a possible consensus on the definition of the situation and a conjoint determination of the preparatory and general context conditions related to the problematic statement.

⁴¹ Cf. J. Habermas' typescript of the *Volesung* held in Ffm, WS 1994.

Although this picture undoubtedly subsumes a strong idealization, it does not entail the idea of a «great final theory» or an infallible knowledge «in the long run». For both things would have a substantive character, whereas the above idealization concerns the formal-pragmatic conditions in which the discussion is to take place.⁴² This presupposition, which points at a virtual final «substantivizing» — whereof the imputation of making appeal to a «great final theory», or an «infallible knowledge», or to a «definite consensus in the long run» seems justified — could only be seen as feasible if another strong, somewhat gratuitous assumption is introduced, namely that no ulterior problematic situation or questioning of our established knowledge will take place. Without this assumption, the fallibility in our knowledge and the necessity to renew the consensus w.r.t. its conditions of possibility cannot be brought to any final point, without a unjustified categorial «jump». (In such a case, even the «objective world» would lose its counterfactual character).

It is undeniable that, in the explanation of the discursive theory of truth itself, some elements are rightly susceptible of C. Lafont's criticism. Thus, as Prof. Habermas notices, with the *TkH* «*wird der scheinbar klare Unterschied zwischen der Explikation der Bedeutung von Wahrheit und der Angabe von Kriterien für die Feststellung der Wahrheit empfindlich relativiert.*»⁴³ What is more, «jeder, der ernsthaft einen theoretischen Satz aufstellt, findet sich unvermeidlich in der Rolle des 'letzten' Theoretikers.»⁴⁴ In spite of this risk of «substantivizing», thus of relativizing the notion of truth, as objected by the commented criticism, the final intention underlying the epistemic reconstruction of our pre-understanding of the notion, i.e. of the logical grammar of *true*, should not be accounted for — so do I think — in realist terms. For a realist interpretation and its alluded objection supposes the kind of categorial «jump» that only the disappearance of all epistemic breaks would permit. As I see it, the *Diskurstheorie der Wahrheit* makes the inconditionality of truth depend not on the presupposition of a non-fallible knowledge, but on the *competence* that allows for a revision of

⁴² The need to distinguish between the idealizations that a criterial notion of rationality does embody, and those concerned with the formal conditions in which the discussion is to take place and with the competence that allows us to participate in it, is taken into consideration in A. Wellmer's critical conclusion, when he writes: «Die Idealisierung erläutert hier in der Tat eine Sinnbedingung dessen, was wir 'rationales Argumentieren' oder auch 'rationales Überlegen' nennen (...) wir [würden] uns über den Sinn der notwendigen Unterstellung intersubjektiv geteilter Bedeutungen täuschen, wenn wir sie als Antizipation einer letzten, einer idealen Sprache verstehen.» (*Ethik und Dialog*, *ibid.*, p. 112) The same applies, in my opinion, to a non-fallible knowledge or a «last great theory».

⁴³ J. Habermas, *Vorstudien...*, *ibid.*, p. 554.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 561.

our own criteria of validity and for searching an agreement on them, whenever the arising of a problem demands it. This latter competence would make possible, in principle, to gain access to our own standards of rationality by a process of rational argumentation. And it is not different from the *unique type of knowledge to which the Diskurstheorie der Wahrheit bestows a non-fallible character*, namely «jenes vorgängige, von allen kompetenten Sprechen geteilte, freilich bloss intuitive, d.h. der Nachkonstruktion bedürftige Wissen, auf das wir rekurren, wenn wir sagen sollen, was es bedeutet, in einer Argumentation einzutreten.»⁴⁵

As I tend to see it, the intuition underlying this epistemic concept of truth is not only that *true*, with the inconditionality we attribute to it, allows us to reflexively distinguish between our beliefs and an objective world counterfactually presupposed; this predicate *true*, understood as «rationally acceptable under ideal conditions», makes it possible for us to assign a fallible character to the very criteria deciding its application.⁴⁶ But the idea underlying C. Lafont's proposal is — if I am not mistaken — that the counterfactual presupposition of a common objective world is in effect *constitutive* as well as normative of the epistemic use of language — and not merely the obligatoire reference embodied by any epistemic truth claim, as asserted within the framework of the *TkH*. Yet within the framework of the *TkH* it is only possible to attribute a *constitutive character* to language games, themselves part of the lifeworld. And, «weil sich alle Lebenswelten über das Medium verständigungsorientierten Handelns reproduzieren müssen, kommt in der Mannigfaltigkeit konkreter Lebensformen zugleich die Allgemeinheit kommunikativer Rationalität zur Geltung.»⁴⁷

My impression is that, by assigning a *constitutive* role to the common objective world, C. Lafont tries to avoid an anchoring of the epistemic use of language in a reference to or a theoretical dependence on intersubjectivity — thus avoiding the relativism that she sees as correlative to it. But attributing a constitutive value to the realist presupposition of a common objective world is not exempt of other consequences as well. If it is to fulfil a role at the same time constitutive and regulative of the epistemic praxis, then a conceptual precision seems to be required here on the meaning of the word *constitutive*. For according to Kant, and in relation to the *theoretische Vernunft*, *constitutive* is opposed to *regulative (normative)*; but in the opposition between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, *constitutive principles* become

⁴⁵ J. Habermas, *Vorstudien...*, *ibid.*, p. 555.

⁴⁶ In this sense do I interpret the claim: «Ich verstehe die Diskurstheorie der Wahrheit so, dass sie den diskursiv erzielten Konsens nicht (...) als Wahrheitskriterium auszeichnen soll.» (J. Habermas, «Entgegnung», *ibid.*, p. 352. Inconditionality and fallibilist reservation do not take place simultaneously.

⁴⁷ J. Habermas, *TkH*, *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 335.

regulative and are those fundamental principles that, as rules of the objective use of synthetic a priori categories and meaning postulates (either in the form of axioms or anticipations that can be constructed, or in the form of analogies and postulates that only in the discourse attain validity), such constitutive principles make the knowledge of the objects of experience possible.

Similarly, the presupposition of a common objective world appears to have to be considered more a postulate than an anticipation — if it is to remain as constitutively present and counterfactual; for, as anticipation to be constructed, it would send us back to the «big true theory» previously denounced. But this seems to entail, in its turn, that only through a *discursive-reflexive* use of language is it possible to gain access to this presupposition, together with the corresponding rules for its empirical interpretation. Hence, only in a discourse can this presupposition, as postulate, reach argumentative validity. It is this reflexive, communicative use of rationality, thus the discursive use of language — the «discursive game» — what is to be seen as *constitutive*: by Kant, of the thinking subject; and within the present framework, of the set of presuppositions playing a role for the epistemic use of language.

If the above conclusion is right, the reference-to-an-objective-world subsumed in the raising of a validity claim in general becomes a postulate of a kind that only acquires validity through discursive (reflexive) argumentation. And the corresponding process takes place precisely in contexts in which a previously established knowledge happens to be questioned. But this reading seems to imply for the commented proposal a risk of self-contradiction. Namely, that of assuming intersubjectivity to be constitutive not only for the standards of rationality, but even for the formal-pragmatic presuppositions that are present in the epistemic language game — and all language games in general. Nevertheless, dispensing with this perspective seems to imply the opposite risk, and one which — in my opinion — the commented proposal cannot avoid. Namely, that of absolutizing,⁴⁸ by attributing a normative and (at the same time) a constitutive character to the presupposition of a common objective world, a postulate that is only to be redeemed in certain contexts — in those contexts

⁴⁸ This imputation of «absolutization» could be applied not only to the realist assumption of an objective world, but to the non-epistemic concept of truth as well, if — on the basis of the above presupposition — this notion is identified with logical bivalence. For, as Quine has shown, a formal bivalence is always «translatable», although this possibility of translation does not warrant that the intuitive pre-understanding of the bivalent function and the intuitive pre-understanding of the notion of truth in correspondence with it are the same (from a pragmatical perspective) for the speakers of both natural languages, the translated and the translating one. This turns the possible *universalism* of this formal-semantic trait into almost impossible to falsify, but it is impossible as well to confirm its pragmatical universality — in the desired sense.

in which the questioning of a previous knowledge demands a reflexive, communicative use of language.

Here the commented proposal could object that even the discussion prompted by the problematic situation is guided by the realist thesis at stake — even more, that this latter is condition of possibility for the former to arise. And now the argumentation seems to bring up into a circularity difficult to overcome. For on the one hand, if the commented proposal is right — and the presupposition of a common objective world is anchored in the epistemic use of language and reconstructed by means of a theory of direct reference jointly with a realist view on truth-, then some form of (non-linguistic) *causality* is required to account for our relationship to this world,⁴⁹ together with some experience of the commensurability of different interpretations on it. Yet on the other hand, what is assumed to be a shared objective world needs to be anchored in the possibility (still counterfactual presupposed) of a shared experience, and in the communicability and possible public testing of this experience. This possibility can only be consistently supposed, in its turn, against a background of common and shared practices, within an intersubjectively validated linguistic context.

Henceforth the ‘uniqueness’ and objectivity of the world — understood as independence w.r.t. aprioric, «already given» meanings — is only accessible, as counterfactual presupposition, in the public context of the lifeworld we share — and which includes epistemic practices of fixation of reference in learning processes, whereof the causality relation is reversed: it is us ourselves who «act» upon the world. The presupposition of an objective world, as it is present in the intuition of speakers, can be seen as arising from these shared public practices linguistically mediated, thus from the «breach» between our practices (actions, activities, practical behaviour, etc.) and what constitutes their object. It is in the context of the problems brought about in the course of these practices where the possibility to distinguish between our meaning-knowledge and our world-knowledge is to be based upon. Likewise, the fact that practical problems cannot be produced «on purpose» does not allow us to see these epistemic discontinuities — in the continuum *constituted meanings / counterfactually presupposed world* — as arising from a pre-existing intersubjectivity. Furthermore, not any arbitrary form of intersubjectivity can be seen as constitutive for validity claims. Yet conversely, any reference to the counterfactual assumption of a *shared* world subsumes already the very idea of a form of *legitimately* (rational-communicatively) constituted intersubjectivity.

⁴⁹ A new difficulty arises here which should be dealt with, given the fact that the more recent scientific developments do not consider the «laws» of nature to be *causal* laws and even reject this very notion.

VI.

A theory of direct reference could be, as C. Lafont and A. Müller's analyses have shown, the best device in the formal-semantical level to account for our use of language in learning processes and epistemic contexts in general. This reconstruction would allow us to avoid the kind of meaning holism that prevents distinguishing between language knowledge and meaning knowledge. But this proposal embodies a risk as well, that of absolutizing the referential function of language and giving priority to the corresponding designative use of it, thus falling back into an instrumentalist (functionalist) view — something that Frege was trying to avoid when he introduced the distinction *Sinn/Bedeutung*.

Thus the presupposition of a common objective world that underlies these epistemic practices — and the epistemic use of language in general — can only be consistently introduced and considered as revisable (reflexively accessible) if it belongs to the sphere of communicative rationality and under the assumption that we are reflexively competent to gain access to our own «rules of the game». Yet this point of view, together with the idea that this reflexive competence can only be redeemed in the context of a legitimately constituted intersubjectivity, is close to claiming that the internal realism connected with the epistemic use of language becomes a sort of 'idealism of the intersubjectivity' on the level of the communicative rationality, on which it depends.

And yet a problem remains open, which must play the role of (or replace) any final conclusion. The central question underlying the present discussion concerns the universality claim essential for the *TkH* and threatened by meaning holism. On the one hand, any emphatical notion of rationality — thus substantive — or any approximation to it in terms of a notion of non-fallible knowledge appears to be not universalizable. On the other hand, however, the intuition related to the non-epistemic concept of truth, no matter how much it claims for its universality, does not grant what for the *Diskurstheorie der Wahrheit* seems a main concern: the possibility to 'substantivize' a consensus with respect to our interpretation on the objective world. For the universality claimed by the realist view, purely formal, can only be substantivized through linguistic mediations whose potential universality is dependent upon the universality of a virtual consensus, rational-communicatively attained.

A non-epistemic view on truth is *semantically* modelled. Its adoption from the part of the commented critical proposal, jointly with the correlated realist assumption, represents an attempt to reconstruct the domain of (factual) meaning constitution, granting from this domain on that universalism is preserved. Nevertheless, and as the present discussion has tried to show, this proposal carries with it other difficulties as well. The *TkH*

instead focused on a *de iure* question, namely what makes possible to justify validity for those already constituted meanings in problematic contexts.

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Madrid. April 10, 1995

(Updated December 31, 1996)

The **SORITES** Team

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