Jürgen Habermas

translated by Barbara Fultner

Truth and Justification

Contents

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Jürgen Habermas

edited and with translations by Barbara Fultner

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Translator’s Introduction

To write an introduction to a volume to which the author himself has already written a lengthy introduction may seem superfluous. However, it is perhaps the very length of Jürgen Habermas’s own introduction to *Truth and Justification* that warrants a briefer preface. Moreover, given the nature of the essays collected in this volume, it is important to situate his work in relation to major current thinkers of the Anglo-American analytic—or, more aptly, postanalytic—tradition. This collection, perhaps more than any other by Habermas, is an intervention in and contribution to current debates in what he terms “theoretical philosophy,” that is, in epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of language. At the same time, these essays elucidate the connection between Habermas’s moral and practical philosophy and his epistemology and metaphysics. As such, the volume will be of interest to analytically oriented philosophers as much as to those who have followed Habermas’s work in social theory and discourse ethics.

Habermas continues to be one of the few thinkers today aiming to develop a comprehensive philosophy. Although his main focus in this volume is on questions of knowledge and objectivity, these are always reconnected to issues of moral, social, and political theory that have occupied Habermas over the last several decades. The essays cover topics as wide-ranging as epistemological and moral cognitivism, cultural relativism, legal theory, practical reasoning, and human rights. Most important, Habermas shows how all these different issues impinge on one another and how a thoroughgoing pragmatism can provide a unified account of a vast array of phenomena. In doing so, he bridges the gap between so-called continental and analytic philosophy. On

the one hand, he brings together the tradition of Humboldt, Hegel, and Heidegger with that of Frege, Quine, Davidson, and Dummett; on the other hand, he plays the two traditions against one another in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses. The result is a historically informed conceptual map and a trenchant diagnosis of the state of debate among contemporary, pragmatists. Finally, the present collection of essays marks certain shifts in his thinking, in particular regarding his conception of truth.

A distinctive feature of Habermas's work has been his defense of enlightenment reason even in the age of what he himself has called "postmetaphysical thinking." He has always treaded the narrow path between objectivism and subjectivism—be it in his social theory and practical philosophy or, as here, in his epistemology and metaphysics. That is, on the one hand, he has sought to avoid reducing social situations or moral issues to mere objectively observable phenomena but instead to theorize them from a participant perspective. On the other hand, he has been critical of social or ethical theories that accord too much constitutive authority to the subject or the linguistic-community.[1] Thus the purpose of the theory of communicative action has been to address problems of action coordination and social integration by developing an *intersubjectivist* theoretical framework that avoids the pitfalls of both objectivism and subjectivism. From the outset, Habermas has embraced the "linguistic turn" as the basis for such a framework: The theory of communicative action situates the roots of rationality in the structures of everyday communication and regards the critical power of reason to be immanent in ordinary language. Using the resources of speech act theory, Habermas understands communicative action in terms of the raising of criticizable validity claims. Following the publication of *The Theory of Communicative Action* in the early 1980s, he went on to

develop a cognitivist moral theory in the form of discourse ethics. The core of this theory is the so-called Principle of Universalization, according to which a moral norm is justified if all those affected would assent to it under conditions of an ideal speech situation.[2] Moral norms, unlike ethical values, have a universal and unconditional validity. At the same time, moral rightness is an *epistemic* notion. That is, it is defined in terms of what rational agents would agree on under (approximately) ideal conditions.

In this collection, Habermas turns to the implications of the theory of communicative action—and, more broadly, of the linguistic turn—for epistemology and metaphysics. He returns to the problem of representation and objectivity, an issue he has not addressed in detail since writing *Knowledge and Human Interests*. In particular, he distinguishes a *nonepistemic* notion of objective validity from the above notion of moral validity. Having worked out the linguistic and pragmatic turns in practical philosophy, that is, in the theory of action and rationality and in ethics, he wants to do the same for ontology and epistemology. In taking this route, he reverses what he takes to be the dominant approach in both analytic and continental philosophy, namely, to give primacy to theoretical over practical philosophy and, consequently, to develop practical philosophy in the light of theoretical philosophy, rather than the other way round—or, more appropriately, rather than developing the two in tandem. His goal, as these essays make clear, is to steer a middle course between the Scylla and Charybdis of much contemporary thought shaped by the linguistic turn, namely, between a pragmatist contextualism that gives up all claims to objective knowledge and a reductive objectivism that fails to do justice to the participant perspective of agents in interaction. This raises two central problems: How can the ineluctable normativity of the perspective of agents interacting in a linguistically

structured lifeworld be reconciled with the contingency of how forms of life evolve? And how can the assumption that there is an independently existing world be reconciled with the linguistic insight that we cannot have unmediated access to “brute” reality? Habermas wants to answer both questions from a thoroughly pragmatist perspective. Indeed, he believes that, for the most part, the pragmatic turn has still not been adequately realized, and that this failure accounts for the problems faced by other conetmporary pragmatists, as his engagement with them here illustrates.

1 Toward a Postanalytic and Postcontinental Philosophy

A major theme of this collection of essays is Haberinas’s continuing effort to mediate between the analytic and continental traditions of philosophy, which he regards as complementary and without both of which his formal pragmatics would not be possible. Here we find him engaging the views of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Apel, on the continental side, and Frege, Dummett, Davidson, Putnam, and Brandom, on the analytic. Towering above all, of course, are Kant and Hegel as the two main historical figures informing contemporary debate. He identifies two major currents in twentieth-century philosophy in the wake of the linguistic turn. The first is represented by Wittgenstein and Heidegger and emphasizes linguistic world-disclosure, that is, the idea that our access to reality is always filtered and indeed made possible by our language or conceptual scheme. As already indicated, this strand jeopardizes the notion of objectivity since it puts us at the mercy, so to speak, of “Being” or of the grammar of our

language games. The second is represented by Quine and Davidson and veers too far in the direction of objectivity; it embraces an empiricist outlook at the expense of doing justice to the participant perspective of language users (pp. 69ff., 112ff.). In addition, he identifies a third current, namely, that of Kantian pragmatism, represented by Putnam, Dummett, Apel, and others—including himself. This group takes the linguistic turn seriously not just as a methodological shift, but as a paradigm shift (p. 69). Proponents of this third strand seek to do justice both to the constitutive nature of language and to the objectivity of claims to truth.

The first essay explicitly takes up the complementarity of the analytic and continental traditions, with Wilhelm von Humboldt emerging in some sense as the historical hero of the collection. Although language has a constitutive function for Humboldt, he also emphasizes the possibility of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication and retains a notion of objective reference. Habermas does not make it explicit, but his reading of Humboldt—and especially of Humboldt's emphasis on the interchangeability of the dialogical roles of speaker and hearer—parallels on the continental side his earlier reading of Mead on the Anglo-American side.[3] Moreover, for Habermas, Humboldt lays the foundations of the kind of Kantian pragmatism he defends. Both the hermeneutic and analytic traditions, however, limit themselves to what Habermas calls the "semantic aspects" of language (p. 62) and treat pragmatics as secondary. Insofar as Humboldt argued that there are three aspects or levels of language, namely, world-disclosure (taken up by hermeneutics), representation (taken up by formal semantics), and pragmatics, his account goes beyond these two traditions.

What is missing from the continental tradition is an adequate account of the representational function of

language, of reference and propositional truth (p. 61). For this purpose, Habermas draws on the analytic tradition, particularly on the work of Hilary Putnam. He stresses that sameness of reference is a *formal pragmatic presupposition* of communication, and this presupposition is independent of the specific—and possibly divergent—descriptions that two speakers may associate with a term or referent. Indeed, for two speakers to disagree about the appropriate description of a referent presupposes that they are referring to the same thing.[4]

The most salient difference between analytic and continental thought, according to Habermas, is that the analytic tradition does not engage in cultural critique (p. 79). If we accept this characterization, then Habermas shows himself to be a decidedly continental thinker. Despite the focus on theoretical philosophy, there is a palpable sense of the political throughout the volume, starting with the introduction's concluding section of legal theory all the way to the final essay's observations on the relationship between theory and practice and on the philosopher's role as public intellectual. The connection between Habermas's epistemology and his social-political theory is increasingly foregrounded in the later essays. The final three essays are, albeit in different ways, intended to show how the main themes of the volume are connected to the bulk of Habermas's oeuvre in social theory and moral philosophy.

2 Kantian Pragmatism

Habermas is one of several contemporary "Kantian pragmatists." It is therefore not surprising that his debate with philosophers like Hilary Putnam or Robert Brandom is cast in terms of how to "pragmatize" or, as he puts it, "detranscendentalize" Kant. What follows, in other words,

from understanding the transcendental conditions of possibility of our experience as something *in* the world, of situating them in our practices (pp. 18, 20ff.)? The first part of essay 2 contains a detailed account of his appropriation of Kant. On the one hand, Kant's necessary subjective conditions of objective experience are transformed and given the "quasi-transcendental" role of *intersubjective* conditions of linguistic interpretation and communication. Yet on the other hand, if taken too far, this detranscendentalization leads to undesirable consequences. As the tides of essays 3 and 4 suggest, one might say that we must find a middle road between Kant and Hegel. Habermas argues that Hegel was right to historicize reason, but that he subsequently went too far in the direction of an "objective idealism" according to which objectivity is ultimately reduced to intersubjectivity. When "spirit" (Hegel) or "Being" (Heidegger) or simply lifeworlds or linguistic frameworks are given too much constitutive authority, the result is linguistic determinism and cultural and epistemological relativism. Situating transcendental features of experience in local forms of life raises the problem of how to theorize an objective world existing independently of our conceptual schemes or practices. If what we know depends not merely on universal structures of the mind, but on the conceptual articulation of our language—since this articulation is what gives us access to "reality" in the first place—there are as many ways of knowing as there are languages. If these languages furthermore are regarded as incommensurable, the concept of objectivity loses all bite and we are left with relativism. Even though Habermas, too, argues that we have no "uninterpreted" or direct access to reality, but that our grasp of how things are in the world is always mediated through language, he rejects relativism in epistemology as much as in moral theory.

Habermas argues the above problems follow not from the project of detranscendentalization per se, but from a (continued) privileging of the representational model of knowledge. According to this model, which has traditionally gone hand in hand with the correspondence theory of truth, knowledge is a matter of correctly *representing* the world. Habermas argues that this privileging is present even in authors who claim to have overcome this model. Indeed, Habermas makes the (strong) claim that even pragmatically oriented analytic philosophers from Quine and Davidson to Sellars and Brandom remain too caught up in the representational paradigm and thus do not fully take the linguistic-pragmatic turn (see his introduction, and essays 2 and 3). Even the most promising pragmatic approaches such as Brandom's inferentialism, he maintains, ultimately subscribe to what Habermas regards as an objectivist understanding of agency that does not do justice to the intersubjective, dialogical nature of communication (essay 4). The threats of relativism and its converse, objectivism, in other words, both follow from an insufficiently thorough pragmatism.

Habermas counters the representational model with a pragmatic conception of knowledge. The pragmatist deflation of Kantian transcendental analysis shows how the background structures of our life-world are embodied in our practices and activities and emphasizes the participant perspective. Just as Habermas's analysis of moral discourse involved the formal pragmatic presuppositions interlocutors must make, so the pragmatic presuppositions governing our epistemic practices play a central role here, first and foremost the presupposition of a single objective world that is the same for everyone. This presupposition lies at the core of our ability to refer to objects in the world at all and, as such, underlies the representational function of language. This representational function of language, however, for

Habermas, must remain tied to “contexts of experience, action, and discursive justification” (p. 26). Thus a strictly causal theory of reference is unacceptable to him. More important, in the present context, it means that our empirical knowledge of the world and our linguistic knowledge must be regarded as interdependent. Not only does language make possible our access to reality, but our coping with the world in turn has the power to lead us to revise our linguistic practices (essay 6). Language does not (fully) determine what we can know of the world or what the world is for us. Rather, we learn from experience, and this empirical knowledge can lead us to revise the meanings of the terms we use. This is why Habermas refers to the world-disclosure of language as “weakly transcendental.”

Crucial for accounting for the revisionary power of experience relative to language is the role Habermas accords to *problem solving*. It is the key activity underlying knowledge acquisition. We encounter the world first in our engaged coping, and—often—we encounter it as a source of resistance. That the world provides resistance when we deal with it means that “the way the world is” is not simply *up to us*. Father, reality constrains our practices in tangible ways, and this provides the foothold for a robust notion of objectivity. This is crucial for *learning*. The resistance of the objective world is analogous to the resistance we may encounter when others criticize the claims we raise in discourse, and Habermas uses this analogy to argue for the unconditionality of moral validity (essay 6).

This pragmatist conception of knowledge has ontological implications. Working out an adequate notion of objectivity leads Habermas to endorse a “weak naturalism” to complement his epistemological realism. Weak naturalism is a form of *naturalism* insofar as it views nature and culture as continuous with one another. Culture evolves naturally. Here, too, learning is a central metaphor: Our socioeultural

form of life has evolved from prior forms through natural learning processes. Habermas's is a *weak* naturalism because he wants to refrain from making any sort of reductionist claims about social practices (such as reducing them to merely observable behavior); they are to be analyzed from the participant perspective as norm-governed practices. Similarly, weak naturalism is supposed to be neutral with regard to the mind-body problem. The idea is that once we connect transcendental pragmatism with weak naturalism, we can give an account of how reality imposes constraints on our practices (p. 30). The paradigmatic representatives of "strong" naturalism, by contrast, are Quine and Davidson, who, according to Habermas, explain human behavior naturalistically, assimilating normative social and linguistic practices to observable events in the world. By seeking to eliminate all normative elements from its explanations, strong naturalism fails to do justice to the participant perspective, whereas weak naturalism takes seriously the normative self-understanding of agents in interaction.

3 Objective and Normative Validity: A Revised Conception of Truth

Most of Habermas's work following *The Theory of Communicative Action* in the 1980s and early '90s focused on developing discourse ethics. In terms of validity, this meant working out what is involved in raising and vindicating normative rightness claims. The focus, in other words, was on *normative validity* (*Sollgeltung*), on what one *ought* to do. The question of truth, in contrast, for him is a question about *objective validity* (*Wahrheitsgeltung*). Here,

the issue of normativity becomes tricky. Of course, the question of objective validity has to do with what one ought to believe or take to be true, and to that extent, it makes sense to speak of truth as a "normative" concept. However, truth, for Haberrnas, must not be assimilated to (merely) holding true. Ultimately, objective validity is a matter of what is, in fact, *true*, not of what we take to be true (despite the fact that we can confidentiy say that some of our truths have replaced earlier beliefs that we now know were false, and the fallibilist insight that, for all we know, our own beliefs may be similarly replaced in the future). Truth, in contrast to normative rightness, in other words, is not an epistemic notion—a point to which I return below.

References to truth, objectivity, and the cognitive or representational dimension of language, to be sure, have always figured in Habermas's accounts of language and communication as well as in his critiques of other approaches. Thus, for example, he criticizes analytic philosophy of language and in particular truth-conditional approaches to semantics for privileging the representational dimension of language.[5] However, at least since writing "Wahrheitstheorien,"[6] Haberrnas has not addressed in further detail the question of the nature of truth. Rather, he has generally confined himself to the view that in raising a truth claim, a speaker claims that some state of affairs or fact obtains. In "Wahrheitstheorien," Haberrnas already rejected both correspondence and coherence theories of truth, and he does so still in essays 5 and 6. On the one hand, correspondence is too strong a notion inasmuch as it assumes the possibility of direct access to "brute" or "naked" reality. On the other hand, a coherence theory of truth fails to capture important aspects of our concept of truth, even though it looks to be one of the implications of the linguistic turn: Once we grant that there is no direct, but only linguistically mediated access to reality, it seems that

any belief or statement can be corroborated only by other beliefs or statements and that thus a coherence theory of truth is the only kind available to us. Yet coherence is too weak a notion for truth inasmuch as, according to Habermas, statements are true not because they cohere with other statements we accept, but because the states of affairs they describe actually obtain (even though they can be *established* only by means of other statements).

In "Wahrheitstheorien," Habermas thus infamously coined the term "consensus theory of truth," which has caused a fair amount of confusion about and misunderstanding of his position. This early essay should be read as presenting not so much a theory of *truth* as a theory of *justification*.[7] Possibly fueling the confusion, Habermas himself did espouse what he subsequently called a "discursive" conception of truth until the mid- to late-1990s, according to which truth is ideal warranted assertibility—a view he shared with Hilary Putnam, among others. In response to criticism, Habermas has since abandoned this epistemic conception of truth. As he argues at length in essays 2 and especially 6 the discursive conception as formulated hitherto is inadequate. In particular, the discursive or consensus theory of truth misleadingly suggests that we take a proposition to be true because it is or can be agreed to by all those concerned, whereas in fact, we ought to agree to a proposition *because* it is true, not the other way around. This change of mind is in large part what has prompted him to return to epistemology and metaphysics in order to work out a better pragmatist conception of truth; he now takes it that "the discursive conception of truth is due to an overgeneralization of the special case of the validity of moral judgments and norms" ("Introduction," p. 8). The validity of the latter is *exhausted* by ideal warranted assertibility: A moral claim is normatively right if and only if all those affected would agree to it under approximately

ideal conditions of discourse. There are no facts independent of the (ideal) community of those affected to which normative rightness claims purport to refer. But talk of truth, in contrast to that of normative rightness, has certain specific ontological connotations: It presupposes reference to a single objective world that exists independently of our descriptions and is the same for all of us. This realization has led Habermas to acknowledge the need for a theory of reference to supplement the theory of communicative action. Hence he endorses a direct theory of reference as developed by Hilary Putnam, which allows for sameness of reference under different descriptions. This, too, is clearly a necessary presupposition of discourse about whether what we say is true.

Truth figures at different levels in Habermas. On the one hand, truth plays a role in discussions of the nature of the theory of meaning. Habermas is drawn to the analytic tradition because it can provide a theory of meaning that, in particular, accounts for the representational dimension of language, which the continental linguistic tradition tends to neglect. Furthermore, Habermas especially applauds the recognition, since Frege, of the internal connection between meaning and validity. Although truth, as one of the three validity claims, is indispensable to the theory of communicative action, Habermas has argued against taking truth as a semantic primitive. Rather, it is but one dimension of validity. A truth-conditional semantics as developed by philosophers of language from Frege to Davidson is too narrow, in his view, for it privileges the representational dimension of language over its expressive and communicative dimensions.[8]

For Habermas, communication, action, and representation are equiprimordial. This has been a hallmark of his conception of speech acts since the 1970s: In performing a speech act, a speaker represents a state of affairs,

establishes an intersubjective relation with a hearer, and expresses her intention. In other words, she raises three validity claims: a claim to truth, to normative rightness, and to sincerity. The insistence on these three mutually irreducible validity claims forms a cornerstone of Habermas's conceptual system. And it is this view that continues to set him apart from the analytic philosophers he discusses. In one way or another, it lies at the bottom of his critique of Quine and Davidson as well as of Brandom and even Putnam. All are seeking to find a common denominator or to level the conceptual landscape in ways that Habermas rejects. Quine and Davidson, in his view, err on the side of objectivism by turning the communicative actions of others into mere observable behavior; Brandom assimilates norms of rationality to norms of action; and Putnam levels the fact-value distinction by associating value judgments with "ought-implying facts."

On the other hand, Habermas also discusses truth at the level of metaphysics and ontology. This is the case, for instance, when he is trying to elucidate what is involved in truth as a validity claim. The question here is how should truth be defined? What *is* truth on a pragmatist account that nonetheless wants to embrace epistemological realism? For a pragmatist, of course, this very question is ill put. Indeed, one might argue that a major advantage of Habermas's present account over that he offered in "Wahrheitstheorien" is that he no longer provides a definition of truth or *equates* it with anything. Rather, not unlike Brandom in *Making It Explicit*, he directs our attention to how the concept of truth functions, both in everyday coping and in discourse. Whereas in the latter context, we are aware of the "cautionary" uses of the truth predicate and of the fallibility of our claims, the unconditionality of truth is most evident in practical contexts of ordinary coping. There, we presuppose certain truths, practical certainties, as unconditionally valid.

As Habermas succinctly puts it, “We do not walk onto any bridge whose stability we doubt” (p. 39). This unconditional acceptance is the pragmatic corollary of a realist conception of truth,

Habermas is an epistemological realist in another respect as well: The objects we can refer to may fail to meet the descriptions we associate with them. This is the core of his fallibilism; it is also where he draws on Putnam’s theory of reference. In defense of his version of a pragmatic conception of truth, he argues that the connection between truth and justification is epistemically, but not conceptually necessary (p. 38). In other words, truth may always “outrun” justified belief, even under (approximately) ideal conditions, but he nevertheless insists on the fact that from the agent’s perspective, practical certainties are and must be taken to be true absolutely at the risk of incapacitation. It is only in discourse that such practical convictions come under a fallibilist proviso.

Finally, Habermas considers himself to be a “conceptual nominalist” rather than a conceptual realist (p. 31). This follows, first, from his commitment to the revisability of language by experience. But it also means, second, that the world does not consist *of facts* but of *things*. A fortiori, then, for Habermas, facts are not things. This view is clearly reminiscent of Davidson’s claim that “nothing, *no thing*, makes our sentences true.”[9] Although facts, for Habermas, are what is represented in true statements, he does not mean to reify or hypostatize the notion of fact. In a sense, both Davidson and Habermas allow that facts—that things are thus and so—are what make sentences true; both endorse realist views about truth; and both maintain that there is a mind- and language-independent objective world. Moreover, both are antireductionists: Like Habermas, Davidson defends the mutual irreducibility and equiprimordiality of subjectivity, objectivity, and

intersubjectivity. Nonetheless, his epistemology is more strongly naturalistic and less pragmatic that Habermas's. On the other hand, he is more suspicious of "fact-talk" than Habermas and would rather do without it entirely. In this regard, Davidson is arguably more metaphysically abstemious if not postmetaphysical.

Much of the interest of the present volume lies in Habermas's clarification of the—often subtle—differences between his own position and similar approaches. One must, for this very reason, be careful to distinguish substantive differences from differences in emphasis between Habermas and his sparring partners. These are in a sense, to borrow Habermas's phrase, "domestic disputes." His and Robert Brandom's accounts of objectivity, for example, can and perhaps should be regarded as complementary. Brandom argues that there is a "structural objectivity" built into our practices of giving and asking for reasons; for him, the distinction between something's being true and being taken to be true is a pragmatic one, built into the structures of communication. To that extent, his account is compatible with Habermas's own pragmatic account of objectivity. According to the latter, the formal presupposition of a single objective world existing independently of us is, after all, also a structural feature of discourse.[10]

Another example is the disagreement with Putnam about truth. Habermas criticizes Putnam's account of the objectivity of value (as the inverse of the value-ladenness of facts) and his assertion that there are "ought-implying facts" and that, therefore, value judgments can be true or false. Against Putnam, Habermas argues that there are "different senses in which judgments can be correct" (p. 224). Norms must not be assimilated to facts, for the facts are not "up to us" in the way that moral or ethical norms are. The meaning of truth, as he puts it, is not exhausted by reaching consensus. At issue in this dispute is whether it is legitimate

to allow for different *types* of truth that in turn require different types of justification or whether "truth" is a notion that applies to statements about the objective world only whereas moral judgments, though they have cognitive content, are subject to a different kind of validity. Some have argued along these lines that, in the moral domain, Habermas has been defending a peculiar brand of cognitivism, since he has consistently denied that moral claims are truth-evaluable when truth-evaluability is generally thought to be the hallmark of moral cognitivism. What difference it makes whether we talk about, say, moral or aesthetic *truth* or moral lightness and aesthetic authenticity, as long as we recognize that they are subject to justification in terms of different kinds of reasons, remains an open question.[11]

Perhaps a more salient point of disagreement between Habermas and Putnam in their ongoing debate is their respective understandings of pluralism, as this collection's essay and especially Putnam's response to it show.[12] Putnam seems to have an almost instrumentalist conception of the value of pluralism. For him, it involves more than mere tolerance. A consistent pluralist cannot hold that some other form of life, religious tradition, or sexual orientation is "wrong." Above and beyond this "minimal pluralism," however, he also claims that a pluralist must accept that other forms of life, religion, or sexual orientation may have insights available to them that are not available to her, but that may be of use to her and to her own community.[13] This sheds new light on Putnam's dictum to "let a thousand flowers bloom." The value of pluralism—rather like the value of pluralism in scientific inquiry—is that it can help us in our discovery of the good life. But a Habermasian, according to Putnam, can approach a value judgment from another community or culture in only two ways: She can ask either (a) whether it is deontologically admissible, that is, whether

it violates any universal norms, or (b) whether it contributes to a collective form of life that is in the interest of all those affected.[14] This, however, is too narrow an understanding of cross-cultural dialogue according to Putnam. This is no doubt the case, but a Habermasian need not be confined to this narrow conception. Putnam does not consider Habermas's emphasis on learning processes, on the one hand, and on the dialogical nature of communication, be it intra- or intercultural, on the other. These at least prima facie surely allow for the possibility of our learning by interacting not only with the objective world, but also with others. Just as we are able to revise our linguistic knowledge in light of new empirical knowledge, so surely we must be able to revise our moral and ethical knowledge in light of our interactions with one another. Ultimately it is this ability that lies at the cognitivist heart of a realist epistemology and universalist moral theory.

Essays 1, 3, and 4 have been published elsewhere in translations by others. Habermas himself penned an English version of essay 7. While I have learned from each of these translations, I have revised all in an effort to give the volume unity of style and to correct for some discrepancies with the published German original. A few terms presented particular difficulties that should be mentioned here. (1) Habermas uses two terms for "validity," *Geltung and Gültigkeit* There is a latent attempt to use them to mark two distinctions, namely, on one hand, between the objective validity of a claim and its de facto "validity for us," its social acceptance or force, and, on the other, between objective and normative validity. The latter, in other words, is a distinction *within* the dimension of validity in general. However, Habermas does not draw either distinction systematically. (2) For the most part, I have rendered *Aussage* as "statement," though sometimes "proposition" or "assertion" were more appropriate. Thus, for example,

Habermas distinguishes between *moralische Aussagen* and *empirische Aussagen*, but also associates truth with *propositions* (*Propositionen*) and assertions as distinct from normative rightness and normative claims, which he explicitly distinguishes from assertions. As a result, it is somewhat awkward to speak of "moral propositions" rather than moral claims or statements. (3) The rather different connotations or, to put it in terms of the Brandom–Habermas debate, inferential relations of terms like *practical commitments* and *praktische Vorhaben* ("practical projects" or "undertakings") potentially lead to confusion in transposing a philosophical debate from one language into another, one philosophical culture into another, even challenging one's faith in the principle of translatability. For the sake of the English-speaking audience who may be familiar with Brandom's work, I have tried to cast the debate as much as possible in Brandom's original terms without distorting Habermas's criticisms.

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Introduction: Realism after the Linguistic Turn

The present volume brings together philosophical essays that were written between 1996 and 2000 and pick up on a line of thought that I had set aside since *Knowledge and Human Interests*. With the exception of the final essay ("The Relationship between Theory and Practice Revisited"), they deal with issues in theoretical philosophy that I have neglected since then. Of course, the formal pragmatics that I have developed since the early 1970s cannot do without the fundamental concepts of truth and objectivity, reality and reference, validity and rationality. This theory relies on a normatively charged concept of communication [*Verständigung*], operates with validity claims that can be redeemed discursively and with formal-pragmatic presuppositions about the world, and links understanding speech acts to the conditions of their rational acceptability. However, I have not dealt with these themes from the perspective of theoretical philosophy. I have pursued neither a metaphysical interest in the being of Being, nor an epistemological interest in the knowledge of objects or facts, nor even the semantic interest in the form of assertoric propositions. The linguistic turn did not acquire its significance for me in connection with these traditional problems. Rather, the pragmatic approach to language [*Sprachpragmatik*] helped me to develop a theory of communicative action and of rationality. It was the foundation for a critical theory of society and paved the way for a discourse-theoretic conception of morality, law, and democracy.

This explains a certain one-sidedness of my theoretical strategy, which the essays in this volume are meant to

redress. They revolve around two fundamental questions of theoretical philosophy. On the one hand, I here take up the ontological question of naturalism: As subjects capable of speech and action, we “always already” find ourselves in a linguistically structured lifeworld. Flow can the normativity that is unavoidable from the perspective of the participants in this lifeworld be reconciled with the contingency of sociocultural forms of life that have evolved naturally? On the other hand, I turn to the epistemological question of realism: How can we reconcile the assumption that there is a world existing independently of our descriptions of it and that is the same for all observers with the linguistic insight that we have no direct, linguistically unmediated access to “brute” reality? Needless to say, I deal with these topics from within the formal-pragmatic perspective.

I Communication or Representation?

Once Frege replaced the mentalistic *via regia* of analyzing sensations, representations, and judgments with a semantic analysis of linguistic expressions and Wittgenstein radicalized the linguistic turn into a paradigm shift,[1] Hume and Kant’s epistemological questions could have taken on a new, pragmatic significance. In the context of lived practices, of course, they then would have lost their primacy over questions in the theory of communication and action. Yet even within philosophy of language, the traditional order of explanation has persisted. As ever, theory takes precedence over practice, representation over communication; and the semantic analysis of action depends on a prior analysis of knowledge.

Still caught up in the tradition of Platonism, the philosophy of consciousness privileged the internal over the external, the private over the public, the immediacy of subjective experience over discursive mediation. Epistemology rose to the rank of a First Philosophy, while communication and action were relegated to the realm of appearances, thus retaining a derivative status. After the transition from philosophy of consciousness to philosophy of language, it seemed to make sense not to turn the hierarchy of explanatory moves upside-down, but rather to level it. After all, language is used to communicate as much as to represent, and a linguistic utterance is itself a form of action, which is used for producing interpersonal relationships.

After the linguistic turn, the relation between proposition and fact replaces the relation between representation and object. Charles Sanders Peirce already eschewed focusing too narrowly on semantics and expanded this two-place relation into a three-place relation. Thus the sign, which refers to an object and expresses a state of affairs, must be interpreted by a speaker and hearer.[2] Subsequently, speech act theory following Austin showed how, in the normal form of a speech act (*Mp*), the propositional component's reference to the world and to objects is interlinked with the illocutionary component's reference to other interlocutors. By creating an intersubjective relationship between speaker and hearer, the speech act simultaneously stands in an objective relation to the world. If we conceive of "communication" [*Verständigung*] as the inherent telos of language, we cannot but acknowledge the equiprimordiality of representation, communication, and action. As representation and as communicative act, a linguistic utterance points in both directions at once: toward the world and toward the addressee.

Nonetheless, even after the linguistic turn, the analytic mainstream held fast to the primacy of assertoric propositions and their representational function. The tradition of truth-conditional semantics founded by Frege, the logical empiricism of Russell and the Vienna Circle, the theories of meaning from Quine to Davidson and from Sellars to Brandom all start from the premise that the proposition or assertion is paradigmatic for linguistic analysis. Aside from the important exception of the later Wittgenstein and his unorthodox students (such as Georg Henrik von Wright),[3] analytic philosophy has meant the continuation of epistemology by other means. Questions pertaining to theories of communication, action, morality, and the law were as ever considered to be of secondary importance.

In the face of this fact, Michael Dummett explicitiy raises the question of the relationship between representation and communication:

> Language, it is natural to say, has two principal functions: that of an instrument of communication, and that of a vehicle of thought. We are therefore impelled to ask which of the two is primary. Is it because language is an instrument of communication that it can also serve as a vehicle of thought? Or is it, conversely, because it is a vehicle of thought, and can therefore express thoughts, that it can be used by one person to communicate his thoughts to others?[4]

For Dummett, this question is based on a false dichotomy. On the one hand, (a) the communicative function of language must not be rendered independent of its representational function since this would yield a distorted intentionalistic picture of communication. On the other hand, (b) the representational function can no more be conceived independently of the communicative function

since this would mean losing sight of the epistemic conditions for understanding propositions.

(a) By asserting *Kp* a speaker does not merely express her intention (in Grice and Searle's sense) of making her interlocutor recognize that she takes *p* to be true and that she wants him to know this. Instead of her own thought *p*, she wants to communicate the fact *that p* to him. The speaker's illocutionary goal is that the hearer not only acknowledge her belief, but that he come to the *same* opinion, that is, to *share* that belief. But this is possible only on the basis of the intersubjective recognition of the truth claim raised on behalf of *p*. The speaker can realize her illocutionary goal only if the cognitive function of the speech act is also realized, that is, if the interlocutor accepts her utterance as valid. To this extent, there is an *internal* connection between successful communication and factual representation.[5]

(b) This intentionalist emancipation of the communicative function of language mirrors the truth-theoretic privileging of its cognitive function. According to this conception, we understand a sentence or proposition if we know the conditions under which it is true. However, language users do not have direct access to truth conditions not requiring interpretation. Hence Dummett insists that we must have knowledge of the conditions under which an interpreter is able to *recognize* whether the conditions that make a sentence true obtain. With this epistemic turn, understanding shifts from solipsistically accessible truth conditions to conditions under which the sentence to be interpreted can be asserted as true and thus can be justified publicly as rationally acceptable.[6] Knowing a sentence's assertibility conditions is connected to the sorts of reasons that can be cited in support of its truth. To understand an utterance is to know how one *could* use it in order to reach an understanding with someone about something. If,