On the Pragmatics
of Communication

Jürgen Habermas
edited by Maeve Cooke

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Editor's Acknowledgments

The translations of many of the chapters have been based on earlier published translations, as follows:

A translation of chapter 1 by Thomas McCarthy was published in Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society,* ©1979 by Beacon Press, Boston and 1984 by Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.

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Editor's Acknowledgments

Introduction

Maeve Cooke

This anthology brings together for the first time, in revised or new translation, ten essays that present the main concerns of Habermas's program in formal pragmatics. Its aim is to convey a sense of the overall purpose of his linguistic investigations, while introducing the reader to their specific details. Habermas's formal pragmatics fulfills two main functions. First, it serves as the theoretical underpinning for his theory of communicative action, which is a crucial element in his theory of society. Second, it contributes to ongoing philosophical discussion of problems concerning truth, rationality, action, and meaning. Correspondingly, the aim of the present anthology is twofold. First, in providing better access to essays by Habermas that focus explicitly on language, it may help those interested in social theory to assess critically the linguistic basis for his accounts of communicative action and communicative rationality. Second, it may help those interested in more traditional philosophical problems to understand and to appreciate Habermas's treatment of them.

Habermas's original term for his linguistic research program was "universal pragmatics." The adjective "universal" was meant to indicate the difference between his linguistic project and other pragmatic analyses of language. Whereas earlier pragmatic approaches to language had tended to analyze particular contexts of language use, Habermas set out to reconstruct universal features of using language. This explains the title of his programmatic essay, "What

Is Universal Pragmatics?," first published in 1976. However, in a footnote to the 1979 English translation, Habermas expresses dissatisfaction with the label "universal" and a preference for the term "formal pragmatics." One advantage of the latter terminology, in his view, is that it reminds us that formal pragmatics is related to formal semantics. As we shall see, the nature of this relationship is particularly crucial in Habermas's accounts of meaning and truth.

What is meant by universal or, as we should now say, formal pragmatics? Habermas's starting point is that formal analysis of language should not be restricted to semantic analysis, for formal investigation of the pragmatic dimensions of language is equally possible and important. By the "pragmatic" dimensions of language, Habermas means those pertaining specifically to the *employment* of sentences in utterances. He makes clear that "formal" is to be understood in a tolerant sense to refer to the rational reconstruction of general intuitions or competencies. Formal pragmatics, then, aims at a systematic reconstruction of the intuitive linguistic knowledge of competent subjects, the intuitive "rule consciousness" that a competent speaker has of her own language. It aims to explicate pretheoretical knowledge of a general sort, as opposed to the competencies of particular individuals and groups. Formal pragmatics thus calls to mind the unavoidable presuppositions that guide linguistic exchanges between speakers and hearers in everyday processes of communication in any language. It makes us aware that, as speakers and hearers, there are certain things we must—as a matter of necessity— always already have presupposed if communication is to be successful. In focusing on the formal properties of speech situations in general, Habermas's program may thus be distinguished from empirical pragmatics—for example, sociolinguistics—which looks primarily at particular situations of use.

Habermas's formal-pragmatic investigations into everyday linguistic practices in modern societies are attempts to reconstruct the universal competencies that are involved when social actors interact with the aim of achieving mutual understanding (*Verständigung*).[1] Communicative competence is crucial for Habermas's social theory, which is based on the thesis that action oriented toward reaching understanding is the fundamental type of social action. His name for

action of this sort is "communicative," and his analysis of it turns on the thesis that everyday language has an in-built connection with validity. More precisely, linguistic utterances as they are used in everyday processes of communication can be construed as *claims* to validity. From his perspective, everyday linguistic interaction is primarily a matter of raising and responding to validity claims. Habermas does allow for other forms of linguistic interaction, such as strategic, figurative, or symbolic interaction, but he contends that these are parasitic on communicative action.

In its simplest terms, communicative action is action whose success depends on the hearer's responding to the validity claim raised by the speaker with a "yes" or a "no." Here, Habermas identifies three basic types of validity claims that are raised by a speaker with her speech act: a claim to the truth of what is said or presupposed, a claim to the normative rightness of the speech act in the given context or of the underlying norm, and a claim to the truthfulness of the speaker. In using a linguistic expression communicatively, the speaker raises all three of these claims simultaneously. In a typical communicative exchange, however, just one of the claims is raised explicitly; the other two remain implicit presuppositions of understanding the utterance. The three validity claims are described as "universal" by Habermas, in the sense of being raised with *every* communicatively used speech act.

The three universal validity claims—to truth, normative rightness, and truthfulness—provide a basis for classifying speech acts. Thus, communicative utterances can be divided into three broad categories according to the explicit claims they raise: constative speech acts are connected in the first instance with truth claims, regulative speech acts with claims to normative rightness, and expressive speech acts with claims to truthfulness.

The thesis of three universal validity claims has implications for both language theory and social theory. On the one hand, it is meant to provide a more convincing basis for classifying speech acts than, for example, the proposals of Austin and his followers or the more theoretically motivated typologies of Searle and his followers. On the other hand, it proposes that language has an in-built connection with validity claims, thereby giving rise to a particular

conception of social order as reproduced through communicative action.

   In showing that everyday linguistic interaction depends on raising and recognizing validity claims, Habermas presents a picture of social order as a network of relationships of mutual recognition that have two significant characteristics. They are, first, cooperative relationships of commitment and responsibility: participants in communicative interaction *undertake* to behave in certain ways, and the success of the interaction depends on the *cooperation* of both parties involved. Second, the relationships of mutual recognition characteristic for communicative action have an inherent *rational* dimension: the communicative actor undertakes an obligation to provide reasons for the validity of the claims he raises with his utterances, while his counterpart in action may either accept the proffered reasons or challenge them on the basis of better reasons. In this sense, everyday communicative action involves a rudimentary practice of "argumentation." Furthermore, these everyday practices of giving reasons for and against controversial validity claims—sometimes referred to by Habermas as naive communicative action—point toward the possibility of other, more demanding forms of argumentation, which he calls "discourse." Everyday communicative action normally operates on the assumption that the reasons supporting the validity claims raised are good ones. When this background consensus is shaken—as will happen more frequently in posttraditional societies—communicative action cannot continue routinely. Participants then have three options: they can switch to strategic action; they can break off communication altogether; or they can recommence their communicative activity at a different, more reflective level—namely, argumentative speech. In the processes of argumentation known as discourses, certain idealizing suppositions already operative in everyday communicative action are formalized. These presuppositions are unavoidable in the sense that they belong to the very meaning of what it is to take part in argumentation; they are idealizing in the sense that they are typically counterfactual and will not as a rule be satisfied more than approximately. Thus, Habermas claims, participants in argumentation necessarily suppose, among other things, that they share the common

aim of reaching agreement with regard to the validity of the disputed
validity claim, that no force except that of the better argument is
exerted, that no competent parties have been excluded from the
discussion, that no relevant argument has knowingly been sup-
pressed, that participants are using the same linguistic expressions
in the same way, and so on. These idealizing suppositions refer both
to the practice of argumentation and to its outcome. For Habermas,
the various idealizing suppositions unavoidably guiding argumen-
tation are what give meaning to the ideas of truth and justice as
ideas that transcend all local contexts of validity. To the extent that
the validity claims raised in everyday processes of argumentation
have a connection in principle with possible vindication in dis-
course, they have an inherent context-transcendent power. This
power is the rational potential built into everyday processes of
communication.

Habermas's picture of everyday communicative action thus has
important implications for critical social theory. For one thing, in
presenting social order as a network of cooperation involving com-
mitment and responsibility, it opposes models of social order that
take interactions between strategically acting subjects as fundamen-
tal, for example, models grounded in decision or game theory. For
another, in the context-transcendent potential of the validity claims
raised in everyday communicative processes, it locates a basis for a
"postmetaphysical" conception of communicative rationality and, ac-
cordingly, a standard for critique. As that conception refers to a
potential already built into everyday communicative action, it situ-
ates reason in everyday life: the ideas of truth and justice toward
which it points are grounded in idealizing suppositions that are part
of everyday human activity. Moreover, communicative rationality is
not reducible to the standards of validity prevailing in any local
context of communicative activity. Rather, the idealizing supposi-
tions on which it rests provide standards for criticizing local practices
of justification, both with regard to the outcomes of the agreements
reached and with regard to practices of justification themselves.
Thus the idea of communicative rationality is meant to provide a
postmetaphysical alternative to traditional conceptions of truth and
justice that nonetheless avoids value-relativism.

From a more strictly linguistic-philosophical point of view, Habermas's formal pragmatics offers an approach to questions of meaning and truth that radicalizes the linguistic turn within modern philosophy. In his view, traditional formal-semantic approaches to meaning have been guilty of three kinds of abstractive fallacies: a semanticist abstraction, a cognitivist abstraction, and an objectivist one. The semanticist abstraction is the view that the analysis of linguistic meaning can confine itself to the analysis of *sentences,* abstracting from the pragmatic contexts of the use of sentences in utterances. The cognitivist abstraction is the view that all meaning can be traced back to the propositional content of utterances, thus indirectly reducing meaning to the meaning of *assertoric* sentences. The objectivist abstraction is the view that meaning is to be defined in terms of objectively ascertainable truth conditions, as opposed to the *knowledge* of the truth conditions that can be imputed to speakers or hearers. For Habermas, pragmatic theories of meaning have the advantage that they focus not on sentences but on utterances (he is thinking here primarily of the use-oriented theories of meaning suggested by the later work of Wittgenstein, on the one hand, and the work of Austin and Searle, on the other). Furthermore, pragmatic theories of meaning do not emphasize only the assertoric or descriptive modes of language use; they draw attention to the multiplicity of meaningful ways of using language. Finally, such theories stress the connection between the meaning of utterances and social practices; they draw attention to the institutions and conventions of the forms of life in which communicative activity is always embedded.

In Habermas's view, however, existing pragmatic approaches to meaning have weaknesses complementary to those of formal semantics. The great strength of formal semantics has been its attempt to retain a connection between the meaning of linguistic expressions and some notion of context-transcendent validity. In the main pragmatic approaches, however, this connection either slips from view completely or is interpreted too narrowly in a cognitivist way. For example, use theories of meaning derived from the later work of Wittgenstein have in effect renounced a context-transcendent notion of validity by reducing it to the prevailing validity of local

language games and particular forms of life. On the other hand, pragmatic approaches that have attempted to avoid such a reduc- tion—Habermas mentions Searle's speech-act theory—typically have succumbed to the cognitivist abstraction, interpreting validity too narrowly as propositional truth. Habermas sees his own pragmatic theory of meaning as an attempt to combine the productive insights of existing formal-semantic and pragmatic approaches to meaning while avoiding their respective weaknesses. He regards speech-act theory as a fruitful starting point, but insufficient as it stands, and attempts to build into it the formal-semantic emphasis on truth or assertibility conditions. In a sense, then, Habermas's pragmatic the- ory of meaning can be regarded as the proposed happy marriage of Austin and Searle with Frege and Dummett.

From the speech-act theory of Austin and Searle (whom he praises for rendering Austin's theory more precise), Habermas takes over the emphasis on utterances rather than sentences as the central unit of analysis. He also associates himself with their move beyond the traditional narrow focus on assertoric and descriptive modes of lan- guage use to include—potentially on an equal footing—other ways of using language, such as acts of promising, requesting, warning, or confessing. In addition, he finds fruitful speech-act theory's empha- sis on the illocutionary force of utterances, that is, on the fact that a speaker in saying something also *does* something. However, it may be helpful here to notice Habermas's distinctive conception of illocu- tionary force, which goes beyond Austin's in a number of significant respects. Austin used the notion of illocution to refer to the *act* of uttering sentences with propositional content. For him, the force of an utterance consists in the illocutionary act—in the attempt to reach an uptake; he contrasted the force of an utterance with its meaning, conceived as a property of the sentence uttered. Haber- mas's objection to this is threefold: first, Austin's distinction between force and meaning overlooks the fact that utterances have a mean- ing distinct from the meaning of the sentences they employ; second, it is connected with a problematic classification of speech acts into constatives and performatives, whereby initially, for Austin, only con- statives are connected with validity claims; third, it neglects the ra- tional foundation of illocutionary force. By contrast, Habermas

proposes an account of utterance meaning that *brings together* the categories of meaning and force; he *extends* the notion of illocutionary force to all utterances that are used communicatively; and he emphasizes the *rational* foundation of illocutionary force. As we shall see, Habermas's pragmatic theory gives an account of the meaning of utterances as inseparable from the act of uttering them, and defines utterances as acts of raising validity claims. His definition of illocutionary force follows from this: illocutionary force consists in a speech act's capacity to motivate a hearer to act on the premise that the commitment signalled by the speaker is seriously meant. On this conception, illocutionary force is bound up with the speaker's assumption of a warranty, if challenged, to provide reasons in support of the validity of the claims she raises. So understood, illocutionary force is a rational force, for in performing a speech act, the speaker undertakes to support what she says with reasons, if necessary. Thus, although Habermas acknowledges speech-act theory as the most fruitful point of departure for his program of formal pragmatics, he engages with it critically, making use of some of its central categories in distinctive ways.

From the point of view of Habermas's program of formal pragmatics, the main weakness of speech-act theory is its failure to connect all communicatively used utterances with validity claims that are in principle context-transcendent. He attempts to make good this deficiency by drawing on Michael Dummett's account of understanding meaning in terms of knowing assertibility conditions. In analogy with Dummett's formulation of what it is to understand the meaning of an assertoric expression, Habermas proposes that we understand an utterance when we know what makes it acceptable. Truth-conditional semantics runs into difficulties when it explains the meaning of sentences in terms of their truth conditions without mediation through the *knowledge* the speaker or hearer may have of such conditions. Thus Habermas adopts Dummett's "epistemic turn" and criticizes Donald Davidson for offering an objectivist reading of Frege's and Wittgenstein's thesis that to understand an utterance is to know what is the case if it is true. He rejects this objectivist reading as tacitly assuming that for every sentence, or at least for every assertoric sentence, procedures are available for effectively deciding

when the truth conditions are satisfied. Such an assumption, he argues, implicitly relies on an empiricist theory of knowledge that regards the simple predicative sentences of an observational language as fundamental. Habermas then follows Dummett, who suggests replacing the emphasis on truth conditions with a consideration of what it is for a speaker to *know* when the truth conditions would be satisfied. This is what he refers to as Dummett's epistemic turn; he, however, wants to turn even further. As Habermas reads it, Dummett's theory of meaning has two main shortcomings that prevent his developing fully the inherent potentials of the epistemic turn. The first is a prioritization of truth claims over other kinds of validity claims: Dummett's notion of assertibility conditions accords priority to assertoric utterances. In order to make room on an equal footing for nonassertoric utterances such as promises, imperatives, or avowals, Habermas prefers to speak of *acceptability* conditions. The second is that Dummett's notion of assertibility conditions is insufficiently pragmatic: it remains on the semantic level of analysis inasmuch as it relies on an ideal of validity that is conceptually independent of discursive practices of redeeming validity claims. This last objection takes us to the heart of Habermas's pragmatic theory of meaning.

Before considering it, however, it may be helpful to clarify the status of the theory. Broadly speaking, it seems possible to distinguish between two accounts of its status. According to the first, a pragmatic theory of meaning is merely an extension of truth-conditional semantics in the sense that it broadens its focus. On this view, Habermas's theory leaves the basic assumption of the formal-semantic account of the meaning of sentences intact, while expanding its range, first, to include *nonassertoric* linguistic expressions and, second, to embrace *utterances* as well as sentences. His earlier essay "What Is Universal Pragmatics?" suggests this account of the tasks of a pragmatic theory of meaning. However, in most of his later writings, he seems to offer a more radical account. According to this, a pragmatic theory of meaning *undercuts* the formal-semantic approach to meaning. This view is suggested, for example, in chapters 2 and 3 in the present volume, where Dummett's assertibility-conditional theory of meaning is criticized for failing to carry through

completely the move from the semantic to the pragmatic level of analysis. In a recent response to objections raised by Herbert Schnädelbach (see chapter 7), Habermas clarifies the status of his pragmatic theory of meaning in a way that suggests that both of these interpretations are correct. Starting from a distinction between the communicative and noncommunicative use of language, he acknowledges that epistemically used propositional sentences and teleologically used intentional sentences have a meaning content that is in some sense independent of the illocutionary acts in which they can be embedded. In order to understand propositional sentences that serve purely to represent states of affairs or facts, it is sufficient to know their truth conditions. In order to understand intentional sentences that serve to calculate action consequences monologically—without reference to a second person—it is sufficient to know their success conditions. Such sentences, which are used noncommunicatively, can be analyzed exhaustively with the tools of formal semantics. However, they are special cases of language use, due to a feat of abstraction that suspends their pragmatic dimension: the possible communicative situations in which a speaker would *assert* the proposition "*p,*" or declare the intention "*p,*" with the aim of finding agreement with an addressee are abstracted from. As a rule, however, propositional sentences and intentional sentences are embedded in illocutionary acts in the form of assertions and announcements. The meaning of assertions and announcements, which are part of the communicative use of language, can be explicated only pragmatically. From this we can see that Habermas does not reject the formal semantic approach to meaning, for he acknowledges its ability to account for the meaning of noncommunicatively used propositional and intentional sentences. At the same time, he does challenge the claims of formal-semantic theories to explain the meaning of *utterances* such as assertions and announcements, or more generally, of communicatively used linguistic expressions. Moreover, if formal-semantic theories of meaning can account only for the noncommunicative use of language, then their restricted scope suggests that this approach to meaning is itself limited.

We have ascertained that a pragmatic theory is required to explicate the meaning of communicatively used linguistic expressions. It

remains unclear, however, in what sense such a theory is pragmatic. As indicated, in his earlier essay on universal pragmatics, Habermas had justified his preference for the category of acceptability conditions, as opposed to truth or assertibility conditions, on the grounds that it avoids the prioritization of the assertoric mode of language use implicit in the latter categories. In these later writings, however, his objection to truth or assertibility conditions seems to go beyond this. They are said to rest on faulty pictures of truth and justification that fail to recognize internal, conceptual links with *pragmatic contexts of justification* and thus remain trapped in abstractive fallacies of a cognitivist and semanticist kind. In Habermas's view, validity and justification—and hence utterance meaning—are inescapably pragmatic notions. They cannot be explicated independently of discursive processes of redeeming different kinds of validity claims. While Dummett's notion of assertibility conditions pushes in the direction of a pragmatic account of justification and validity, it does not quite arrive there; it remains a semantic theory to the extent that it fails to explicate these notions as *conceptually* linked to discursive processes of redeeming disputed—assertoric and nonassertoric—validity claims.

Habermas proposes that we understand the meaning of a speech act when we know what makes it acceptable. We know what makes a speech act acceptable when we know the *kinds* of reasons that a speaker can offer, if challenged, in order to reach understanding with a hearer concerning the validity of the disputed claim. In everyday processes of communication, the kinds of reasons that a hearer must know in order to understand a given utterance are circumscribed contextually. Let us imagine a request to a passenger by an airline steward to stop smoking. In order to understand this request, the passenger has to be able to reconstruct the kinds of reasons that the airline steward could provide in order to justify his request, if necessary. These reasons might include the argument that smoking is unpleasant for other passengers or that it is against the regulations of the airline or against an international code of airline practice. These reasons are of certain kinds. If other kinds of responses were offered as reasons—for instance, that it is raining outside, or that *Finnegans Wake* is James Joyce's best book, or that there are no snakes

in Ireland—the context in question would render them irrelevant and, indeed, unintelligible. Thus, although the set of reasons constituting a given *kind* of reasons is always in principle open-ended, in everyday contexts of communication contextual considerations act as a constraint on the kinds of reasons that are relevant to justification.

The hearer not only has to know the kinds of reasons the speaker could adduce in a given instance, he has to know how the speaker might use them in order to engage in argumentation with a hearer concerning the validity of a disputed claim. This focus on knowing how the speaker might *use* reasons to support a disputed validity claim clearly recalls Dummett's epistemic turn. Like Dummett, Habermas also stresses that the validity of these reasons can never in principle be decided once and for all. Rather, their validity must be construed fallibilistically, that is, as always in principle subject to revision in light of new arguments based on new evidence and insights. This is one sense in which the question of validity is tied to pragmatic contexts of justification, and it constitutes a further reason for describing Habermas's theory of meaning (and, indeed, Dummett's) as pragmatic. However, there is a second, possibly more contentious sense, in which Habermas ties validity to pragmatic contexts of justification. In this second sense, validity is not only always subject in principle to discursive reevaluation, it is *in itself* pragmatic. The pragmatic dimension is not something attached to the idea of validity externally, as it were; rather, it is internal to the very concept of validity. A theory of meaning that sees itself as pragmatic in this stronger sense must therefore offer a pragmatic account of validity itself. To this extent, Habermas's pragmatic theories of truth (empirical and theoretical validity) and justice (moral validity)—and, indeed, his accounts of ethical and aesthetic validity—are crucial ingredients of his pragmatic theory of meaning.

Habermas's theory of moral validity has been the subject of extensive commentary and criticism. From the point of view of the theory of meaning, our question is the following: how is the conception of moral validity it proposes internally connected with processes of discursively redeeming validity claims? A norm or principle is morally valid (right or just), for Habermas, if it is the possible object of

a discursively achieved consensus to the effect that it is equally in the interest of all affected. Therefore, agreement reached in discourse—idealized rational acceptability—contributes constructively to the validity of moral norms. It is clear from this that Habermas conceives moral validity as internally linked to the idea of discursively achieved consensus and hence to pragmatic contexts of justification.

Habermas also proposes a pragmatic theory of truth. Discussion of this is complicated by the fact that he significantly amended the account he originally presented in the 1973 essay, "Wahrheitstheorien," without subsequently presenting a fully revised version. However, a recent essay on Richard Rorty's neopragmatism (included here as chapter 8) can be seen as an attempt to rectify this deficiency. For our present purposes, what is most interesting about these recent remarks is their continued insistence on the pragmatic nature of truth. Habermas associates himself with Rorty's aim of radicalizing the linguistic turn within modern philosophy by moving to a pragmatic level of analysis. He criticizes him, however, for drawing the wrong conclusions from his critique of the philosophy of language. Rorty reduces truth to practices of justification, thus losing sight of the potential power of validity claims to explode actual contexts of justification. Habermas, by contrast, wants to hold onto the moment of unconditionality that is part of the idea of truth, while retaining an internal relation between truth and justifiability. His aim, in other words, is to work out a theory of truth that is inherently pragmatic yet retains the idea of an unconditional claim that reaches beyond all the evidence available to us at any given time. What would such a theory look like? In the 1980s, Habermas defended a view not unlike Hilary Putnam's conception of truth as idealized rational acceptability: a proposition was said to be true if it could be justified under conditions of an ideal speech situation. Truth, on this account, is a regulative idea, the anticipation of an infinite rational consensus. In the recent essay, however, Habermas acknowledges convincing objections to this earlier conception. One set of objections is directed against some conceptual difficulties with the very notion of an ideal speech situation, in particular, the paradox involved in aiming for "complete" or "conclusive knowledge." The objection has been raised, for instance, that it would be paradoxical

for human beings to strive to realize an ideal, the attainment of which would be the end of human history. Another set of objections draws attention to the difficulties involved in conceptualizing the connection between truth and justified acceptability. On the one hand, if there is an unbridgeable gap between de facto and ideal acceptability, the idea of an idealized rational consensus seems so far removed from actual human practices of justification as to undermine the regulative role ascribed to it. On the other hand, such a gap seems to be necessary in order to preserve the intuition that truth has a moment of context-transcendence.

In the face of these and other difficulties, Habermas no longer conceives truth as idealized rational consensus. He now focuses on the idealizing suppositions guiding the *process* of rational argumentation rather than on the idealizing suppositions marking its *outcome*. The former idealizations pertain to the conduct of discourse rather than to the agreement to which participants in discourse aspire. They include the idealizing suppositions that participants are motivated only by the force of the better argument, that all competent parties are entitled to participate on equal terms in discussion, that no relevant argument is suppressed or excluded, and so on. It is from such idealizations, which guide the process of argumentation, that the idea of truth draws its power as a regulative idea. This power is expressed in the idea that a claim, if true, could withstand all attempts to refute it under ideal discursive conditions. The idea of truth has a "decentering" function that serves to remind us that what is currently regarded as rationally acceptable may conceivably be called into question in the future, as the limitations of our current understanding of argumentation become apparent.

It is important here to beware of confusing Habermas's explication of the idea of truth with an explanation of what makes a proposition true. The thesis that a proposition, if true, can stand up to attempts to refute it under the demanding conditions of rational argumentation explicates the pragmatic meaning of truth. It is not, however, an explanation of what makes the proposition true. As to the latter, Habermas's position is the standard one that a proposition is true if and only if its truth conditions are satisfied. Although we can *establish* whether the truth conditions of a given proposition are

satisfied only in argumentation, their satisfaction or nonsatisfaction is not itself an epistemic fact. Whereas, as we have seen, idealized rational acceptability *constitutes* the validity of moral norms, it merely *indicates* the truth of propositions. Nonetheless, it is clear from the foregoing that, on Habermas's account, the *concept* of truth must be unpacked pragmatically; we have no access to truth except by way of a concept of validity explicated in terms of how we talk about truth, that is, in terms of an idealized practice of argumentation.

A further concern of Habermas's program of formal pragmatics is to argue that the communicative use of linguistic expressions is the basic mode of language use on which other modes, for example, strategic or fictional ones, are parasitic. Otherwise, in ignoring these other modes, the demonstration that everyday communicative action has an in-built connection with context-transcendent validity claims would be seriously limited. In arguing for the derivative status of the strategic use of language, Habermas initially drew on Austin's distinction between illocutions and perlocutions (see chapter 2). In response to criticisms of his interpretation of this distinction, however, Habermas subsequently modified and clarified his understanding of Austin's categories (see chapters 3, 4, and 7) while continuing to insist that the strategic use of language is parasitic on the use of language with an orientation toward reaching understanding. His argument for the parasitic status of the symbolic, the figurative, and the fictional modes of language use is that the everyday communicative use of language fulfills indispensable problem-solving functions that require idealizing suppositions not demanded by the world-creating and world-disclosing use of language characteristic for the aesthetic realm. The idealizing suppositions of, for example, consistency of meaning or a shared orientation toward mutual understanding are suspended in the fictional use of language, and with these, the illocutionary binding and bonding power of everyday speech acts (see chapters 9 and 10).

Finally, Habermas's pragmatic theory of meaning attempts to do justice to the relations between utterances and the situations and contexts in which they are embedded. For to understand an utterance is always to understand it as an utterance in a given situation, which in turn may be part of multiple, extended contexts. Here,

Habermas draws attention to various kinds of background knowl-
edge: for instance, knowledge of the speaker's personal history or
familiarity with the (culturally specific) contexts in which a given
topic is normally discussed. These kinds of knowledge, although
usually only implicit in acts of understanding, are relatively close to
the foreground and can be rendered explicit without difficulty. Thus
they can be contrasted with the deep-seated, prereflective, taken-for-
granted background knowledge of the lifeworld that, as a horizon of
shared, unproblematic convictions, cannot be summoned to con-
sciousness at will or in its entirety. This background knowledge of
the lifeworld forms the indispensable context for the communicative
use of language; indeed without it, meaning of any kind would be
impossible. It also functions to absorb the risk of social disintegra-
tion that arises when a social order is reproduced primarily through
mechanisms of communicative action. It is thus a necessary comple-
ment to Habermas's theories of meaning and communicative action
(see, in particular, chapters 2, 4, and 8).

The essays collected in this anthology were selected with the aim
of providing general access to Habermas's treatment of formal prag-
matics, from his earliest programmatic essay (chapter 1) to his most
recent attempts to resolve some perceived problems with his ac-
counts of meaning and truth (chapters 7 and 8). Whereas, in the
process of translating, revising existing translations, and retranslat-
ing, every effort has been made to ensure terminological consis-
tency, no attempt has been made to impose consistency on the
arguments as they are presented in the various essays. We have seen,
for instance, that Habermas's earliest proposal for a pragmatic the-
ory of meaning differs in some respects from his subsequent propos-
als, and that he himself has modified his distinction between
illocutions and perlocutions as initially drawn. In later writings (see
chapter 7) he introduces a distinction within the category of *Ver-
ständigung* between a weak and strong orientation toward consensus,
and (see chapter 8) he takes on board objections to the conception
of truth hinted at in chapter 3 of the present volume. With the
exception of the last two pieces, which are not directly concerned
with the question of meaning, the anthology presents the essays in

rough chronology in order to show developments and revisions; the reader is encouraged to look out for them.

In chapter 1 we are introduced to formal pragmatics as a research program aimed at reconstructing the universal validity basis of speech. The procedure of rational reconstruction is elucidated through reference both to empirical-analytic approaches and to Kantian transcendental analysis. This is followed by a sketch of a theory of speech acts, which diverges from Austin's and Searle's theories in several important respects, and in which speech acts are characterized in terms of claims to validity.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 6, though situating formal pragmatics in relation to Habermas's theory of communicative action, focus on the theory of meaning. The coordinating power of speech acts is explained through an account of understanding utterance meaning in terms of knowing acceptability conditions. This pragmatic theory of meaning is presented as an attempt to overcome the limitations of semantic theories through drawing on Karl Bühler's schema of language functions and on speech-act theory. In addition, a typology of speech acts based on their connection with one of three universal validity claims is set up in chapter 2, forming the background for Habermas's discussion in subsequent chapters. The concept of life-world as a kind of deep-seated, implicit, background knowledge is also introduced in chapter 2 and developed, in particular, in chapter 4. Habermas stresses the importance of this concept, on the one hand, as a presupposition for understanding utterance meaning and, on the other, as a risk-absorbing counterpoise to the potentially disintegrative effects of action oriented toward reaching understanding. Further, Austin's distinction between illocutions and perlocutions is a thread running through these chapters, and is used by Habermas to support his thesis that the strategic mode of language use is parasitic on the communicative use. This involves him in discussion about the status of simple imperatives (for example, threats), which as a type of utterance not apparently connected with validity claims, seem to undermine his claim that strategic utterances have a derivative status.

Chapter 5 is a critical discussion of Searle's theory of meaning as developed from the late 1970s onwards. Habermas exposes some

problems attached to Searle's view, which he reads as a modified intentionalist one, arguing that his own pragmatic theory is better able to account for the meaning of, in particular, imperatives and promises.

Chapter 7 responds to Herbert Schnädelbach's criticisms of Habermas's concept of communicative rationality. Accepting Schnädelbach's criticism that he has hitherto accorded it a privileged position, Habermas now identifies three core structures of rationality; this leads him to make some new distinctions between different modalities of language use. One noteworthy modification here is his introduction of a distinction between action oriented toward reaching understanding in a weaker sense and action oriented toward agreement in the strict sense and, correspondingly, between weak and strong communicative action. Some implications of these distinctions for the theory of meaning are also discussed.

Chapter 8 examines Richard Rorty's neopragmatism, interpreted by Habermas as an attempt to carry the linguistic turn through to its conclusion, and criticizes it for its assimilation of truth claims to justified assertibility.

Chapter 9 focuses on the relation between the fictional or poetic use of language and language as it is used in everyday communicative action; it criticizes Derrideans for faulty accounts of everyday and poetic language, for a consequent problematic leveling of the distinction between literature and communicative action, and for a failure to appreciate the distinctive mediating roles of philosophy and literary criticism.

In chapter 10, Habermas responds to several criticisms of his theory of communicative action. Against Rorty, he defends his view of philosophy as guardian of reason, while acknowledging that this role must be defined in a new way. He then clarifies his position with respect to modern art and the validity claims connected with it, reaffirms his position that interpretive understanding inescapably involves evaluation, clarifies his idea of the unity of reason as an interplay of validity dimensions, and concludes with a discussion of the objection that his theory concentrates on justice at the expense of happiness.

Note

1. *Verständigung* (n.): "reaching understanding," "mutual understanding," or "communication." The corresponding verb is *sich verständigen*. As Habermas acknowledges, this term is ambiguous even in German. Although it embraces linguistic comprehension (*Verstehen*), it goes beyond this to refer to the process of reaching understanding, in the sense of reaching an agreement with another person or persons. However, despite having previously used the two terms interchangeably, Habermas now distinguishes between *Verständigung* and *Einverständnis,* agreement or consensus in the strict sense (see chapter 7). Finally, *Verständigung* can also be used as a synonym for "communication"; thus, for example, communicative rationality is occasionally rendered by Habermas as *Verständigungsrationalität.*