

XIV-1 | 2022

Experience, Interpretation and Meaning: A Dialogue between Hermeneutics and Pragmatism

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/2688>

DOI: 10.4000/ejpap.2688

ISSN: 2036-4091

Publisher

Associazione Pragma

Electronic reference

Vinicio Busacchi, Anna Nieddu and Johann Michel (dir.), *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, XIV-1 | 2022, "Experience, Interpretation and Meaning: A Dialogue between Hermeneutics and Pragmatism" [Online], Online since 13 May 2022, connection on 15 May 2022. URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/2688>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.2688>

This text was automatically generated on 15 May 2022.



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Symposia. Experience, Interpretation and Meaning: A Dialogue between Hermeneutics and Pragmatism

Introduction to Experience, Interpretation and Meaning: A Dialogue between Hermeneutics and Pragmatism

Vinicio Busacchi, Anna Nieddu and Johann Michel

1.

- 1 This issue of EJPAP represents a new step forward in the comparison between two great philosophical traditions, Pragmatism and Hermeneutics. It recalls and mirrors the lines highlighted in the international conference held in Cagliari, Italy, in May 2019.¹ On that occasion, scholars from different disciplinary fields pertaining to the two different traditions discussed the key themes of subjectivity, historicity and representation. They were understood as key thematic-problematic terms for a productive comparison between Pragmatism and Hermeneutics. The results of this dialectic, later expressed in the volume *Pragmatismo ed Ermeneutica* (Busacchi & Nieddu 2019), distinguished themselves for the plurality of accents, reflecting marked differences, including the specificity of the problems dealt with and within the approach used. However – both by addressing classical authors of the two traditions and by turning to authors on the margins of these traditions or to contemporary developments close to them – the various contributions seemed to turn towards a common horizon that shuns the extreme opposites of nihilistic relativism and any form of absolutism and dogmatism about reality, knowledge and what governs human action.
- 2 The conference, where – in fact – subsequent study projects in contiguous fields were grafted,² explored, as already mentioned, the relationships and connections of Pragmatism and Hermeneutics in the three areas of subjectivity, representation and historicity. The question of subjectivity and the Self was seen – and is still to be seen – as the starting and ending point of the itineraries traced by the two traditions. In this issue, the problematic transversal character of the subject and subjectivity remains,

becoming the point of origin of an articulated philosophical anthropology (in which Pragmatism and Hermeneutics can find a happy union, based on the expression of a possible reciprocal transformation). In reality, the question of the subject remains in many ways in the shadow of broader questions to which Pragmatism and Hermeneutics link: i.e., the question of action, the knowledge of the world and understanding of phenomena, the question of one's own self, of the other and of the internalised other, and the question of experience. When planning the project for this issue, we wanted to emphasise the notion of experience, as a more extensive theoretical-thematic component. In addition to the strictly inherent question of knowledge and subjectivity, it embraces the equally fundamental issue of the relationship with the other, with oneself and with the world. From different perspectives, for both Pragmatism and Hermeneutics, experience permeates the search for truth and the search for meaning, the formation of the individual and the creation and development of knowledge and arts, ethical and aesthetic norms, practices and communicative interaction, and social living. The theoretical choice that lies ahead is expressed in an original re-elaboration of the subject-object relationship in connection to an idea of subjectivity that is no longer static and unique, that is, it is not conceived of according to a unilateralising paradigm (naturalistic or spiritualistic). The Self emerges as a multiple and dynamic reality, where being a person does not seem so much anchored to an external relationship with the other and with nature, but rather to a processual design ("reflective subjectivity," "to *become* a person") that includes the dimension of internalised otherness and responsibility. The latter seems to come from the overcoming of the idea of obedience to duty or mere compliance. From the side of the pragmatist tradition, attention is strengthened to the profound constitutive nexus of sociality and self-realisation. At the same time its connection with Hermeneutics can favour a remodelling of the natural dimension of the Self towards an ethical translation of duty into responsibility. In short, individual action overcomes the stalemate of mere compliance with duty and turns towards a *personal* assumption of one's duty, understood as responsibility (or replying to the other from oneself, which is first of all *in itself*); the individual is fully involved and responsible for the deliberative processes. From the perspective of the Hermeneutical tradition, various possibilities open up for a rethinking of the dialectic of "nature" and "freedom"; at the same time, its connection to Pragmatism avoids the evanescence of endless interpretative itineraries (around the world, values and meaning), rather pushing towards a mediative and tensional dialectic between "being" and "having to be."

- 3 Furthermore, at the conference in Cagliari, the theoretical-practical dilemma of representation came into play in relation to a dynamics connected to the dimensions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, or in connection with cognitive, communicative and social interaction processes. The idea that reality is in constant motion and that truth is located at the ideal limit of an infinite verification process is combined, particularly in Dewey's thought, with an attitude of profound trust in the scientific method. This method is applied precisely, as is known, to all fields of human thinking and acting. These are the components that represent in the pragmatist context the fundamental criteria of a co-constructive subject-object relationship and never of an absolute type, as an antidote to both dogmatism and nihilism. Although this picture may not find full and direct correspondence with the developments of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, some aspects do resonate with it – especially in authors such as Gadamer. Even if the terrain is different, Gadamer too advances the idea of the close

invincible union between truth, experience and interpretation. His concept of “fusion of horizons” focuses precisely on a mobile dialectic between (1) a subjectivity understood as a fragmentary mirror where the self-reflection of the individual is but a glimmer in the compact flow of historical life, and (2) a cognitive-interpretative process always implicated in the historical (and linguistic) characterisation of the subject knowing and aiming at progress. Even Ricœur – rejecting the hidden shifts behind the idea of “an infinite hermeneutics” – expresses more markedly than Gadamer the critical and interdisciplinary vocation of the hermeneutic work, joining a new procedural model (for philosophy and sciences) called “the hermeneutic arc.” From this theory, explanation and understanding are linked under interpretation and are at the service of the advancement of knowledge and human emancipation.

- 4 Finally (again referring to the conference) historicity found room through the examination of the epistemological issues relating to scientific knowledge on human beings and the very questioning of reality and human experience. Hence the strong interdisciplinarity and the openness to the contribution of scientific disciplines: social theory, philosophical anthropology, ethics, epistemology, semiotics, philosophy of language, ontology, philosophy of mind and historiography. Such a presence of disciplines and multidisciplinary openness is certainly a reflection of the opening of the theoretical-problematic field determined by the dialectics between Pragmatism and Hermeneutics. It is an indirect testimony of the significance and importance of the operation that was intended to be carried out and which is enriched now with new perspectives. Although in a different formulation, a similar multidisciplinary openness can be found in this issue: the presence of social theory, philosophical anthropology, phenomenology, ethics, epistemology, semiotics remains; and aesthetics, artistic experience, political theory and law are now more marked.
- 5 On closer inspection, attention to scientific problems and openness to the sciences have characterised in different ways the very history of these two great traditions. Philosophical hermeneutics stems from hermeneutics as a technique and as a discipline at the service of linguistic-philological research, and then of the human sciences; Pragmatism affirms itself as a real method of the natural and human sciences. From the epistemological point of view, it is necessary now to recognise a strong opposition between the founders of Pragmatism and the founders of Hermeneutics. Pragmatists tend to defend an epistemological monism. This is true, for example, with Dewey, who seeks to transpose the methods of investigation of the experimental sciences to the whole of social and moral life. By contrast, hermeneutics tends to defend an epistemological dualism. This is true, for example, with Dilthey when he opposes *understanding* (for the sciences of the mind) and *explanation* (for the natural sciences). The opposition will be even more radical with the advent of Heidegger’s ontological hermeneutics and his critique of science. This tendency is confirmed in Gadamer who opposes truth to methods coming from the sciences (including methodological hermeneutics itself).
- 6 Since the second half of the twentieth century, Pragmatism and Hermeneutics have moved, in a way, in the direction of mutual openness and, in general, an opening beyond their own spheres and horizons. In the Anglo-Saxon world, we have witnessed a progressive disintegration of the “monistic” ideal of analytic philosophy in favour of a pluralism of methodical orientations and research topics and themes which retroactively produced a positive effect also on Pragmatism. It is true that originally, in

Europe (to be precise in England) a reason for Pragmatism's greater openness to the sciences came with its intertwining dispute between idealists and realists, precisely as a result of the push of the realists on the terrain of specific logical-gnoseological issues. In authors such as Bertrand Russell, for example, the problem of the objectivity of knowledge, the centrality of logical functions and linguistic-propositional syntheses, and therefore the dilemmas of interpreting the data, assumed even more centrality. This, we know, did not lead to a hermeneutical turn but to a form of critical realism open to the philosophy of language. On the American front, however, the reference to hermeneutics and the work of interpretation seems clearer and more immediate, mainly due to the important and original input given by Richard Rorty who – with his work *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) – has not only been able to configure philosophic work in close connection with the theoretical-scientific horizon, but recalled and proposed such speculative connection as productive and saw it as a heterogeneous part of the continental tradition. In Rorty's perspective, authors such as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Gadamer, Foucault, Derrida, and others contribute to document the change of perspective of theoretical and specific research with respect to any foundationalist claim and at the same time to strengthen the classical tradition of Pragmatism.

- 7 From a different point of view, Rorty's original proposal – that is, as he himself claims, combining Pragmatism and Hermeneutics – can be coupled with the matrix of interdisciplinary openness and vocation in the classics of Pragmatism (Peirce, Mead, James and Dewey), as is attested by the studies that have emerged both in the conference and in this EJPAP issue. Rorty added to it a stronger pluralist tendency with a relativistic character, but already in the classics we can see elements belonging to a research horizon that can be qualified as hermeneutical. In Europe, a movement with a similar pluralist/relativist tendency has invested philosophical hermeneutics, originally anchored to problems of the technique of interpretation and then gradually expanded to the dispute over scientific methods, the reflection on the subject, the dilemmas of social theory, of anthropological philosophy, ontology and metaphysics. Since the 1960s, however, Hermeneutics has increasingly lost the configuration of a unitary field to assume that of a composite archipelago characterised by different styles, approaches, and models, some of which invite interdisciplinary work (Gadamer, Ricoeur, Betti), others that push for sectorial closure (Bultmann, Szondi) and others that push toward nihilism (Vattimo, Severino).
- 8 To date, Ricoeur's hermeneutical phenomenological approach seems to represent one of the most promising avenues for a productive comparison and collaboration between Pragmatism and Hermeneutics on the front of anthropological-philosophical studies, regarding the scientific status of the human and social sciences, procedural issues, critical sociology, linguistic-ontological issues, questions of psychology and philosophy of mind, moral philosophy and social ethics. The lesson of this philosopher encourages us to read the tendency to openness of both traditions not as a quality aimed at their respective internal theoretical-speculative needs, but as a means and a way towards the constitution of a new holistic perspective on human beings, their possibilities of realisation, and the reality in which they live. In fact, today, the differentiation of knowledge has produced unprecedented advancements but has also thrown the human into unprecedented forms of vagueness and uncertainty, that risk turning into roads with no return.

2.

- 9 This issue collects seven contributions which are an expression of different thematic-problematic orientations and interests. In the first contribution (“Readdressing Objectivity: From Peirce to Betti, and Return”), Vinicio Busacchi delves into the question of the objectivity of scientific knowledge, proceeding from the rethinking of the experience-interpretation link in Peirce, Gadamer and Betti; in his contribution, the connection of the pragmatist perspective with hermeneutics favours in particular the broadening of the question of objectivity beyond the horizon of the human and social sciences, associating it with a component of critical realism.
- 10 In the second contribution (“Dewey and Pareyson’s Aesthetics: A Dialogue between Pragmatism and Hermeneutics”), Andrea Fiore offers an introductory perspective aimed at probing the possible analogies between John Dewey and Luigi Pareyson’s aesthetics; the aim is not to lay one perspective on the other but to bring out the productivity of the elements of convergence, both on the theoretical side of art as well as that of everyday life.
- 11 In the third contribution (“Dewey’s Denotative Method: A Critical Approach”), Andrii Leonov pursues the objective of a critical examination of the reconstructed denotative method as genuinely empirical and scientific through a confrontation on Dewey’s work including a hermeneutic point of view.
- 12 In the fourth contribution (“Meaning and Experience: For a Pragmatic Hermeneutics”), Johann Michel aims to lay the foundations of a pragmatist hermeneutics by taking the relationship between meaning and experience as a common thread. The challenge is to analyse this relationship from three distinct angles: immediate experience, acquired experience and creative experience. From each of these perspectives, the aim is to grant a meaningful place to non-verbal – and specifically bodily – experience, which calls for a somahermeneutics.
- 13 In the fifth contribution (“Heidegger and Dewey: Art and the Horizons of Meaning”), Nicola Ramazzotto opens a dialogue between Heidegger and Dewey on the role and possibilities of art in establishing horizons of meaning, mainly highlighting points of convergence.
- 14 In the sixth contribution (“From a Remote Pedestal to Everyday Life: The Social Role of Art in Gadamer and Dewey”), Elena Romagnoli develops a documented correlation between Dewey and Gadamer on aesthetic experience; also in this case there is no evenness but the research responds to an exploratory need of a clear theoretical and practical value.
- 15 In the seventh, final contribution (“Utilitarianism as Exercise of Suspicion? A Challenge to Pragmatism and Hermeneutics”), Ernst Wolff examines pragmatism and hermeneutics as kindred approaches to action, as they face the persistent influence of utilitarianism in social life. The originality of the approach consists in articulating Hans Joas’s pragmatism with Paul Ricœur’s hermeneutics in a common front against utilitarianism.
- 16 In light of the potential that this research has envisaged, as recalled at the beginning, and in light of the results achieved so far, this series of contributions gives significant

but certainly not exhaustive answers. Hence the usefulness and the opportunity to continue the research along a path that has proved to be promising.

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NOTES

1. *Comparing Philosophical Traditions: Selfhood, Historicity and Representation between Hermeneutics and Pragmatism*, International conference, University of Cagliari, 14th-16th May 2019. The conference was organised by Anna Nieddu and Vinicio Busacchi; Hans Joas and Johann Michel were keynote speakers; and Marcelino Agis-Villaverde, Rosa M. Calcaterra, Carla Canullo, Rossella Fabbrichesi, Brendan Hogan, Giovanni Maddalena and Giancarlo Marchetti were among the participants.

2. See, for example, Côté & Huebner 2021.

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Readdressing Objectivity

From Peirce to Betti, and Return

Vinicio Busacchi

1. Introduction

- 1 A few contemporary philosophical schools placed the discourse of experience at the center of their research and theoretical elaborations: pragmatism, phenomenology, existentialism, and hermeneutics. Certainly, the theme of experience has been increasingly the object of attention since the modern era with Descartes and his evil genius, with the empiricists and their anti-sensism, and with the turning point of modern science beyond dogmatic positions up to the present day. In some way, contemporary philosophical problematization reflects the centrality of the scientific paradigm (within which experience plays a leading role) as a term of comparison or contrast. It emerges with great evidence in such approaches as Husserl's phenomenology, Peirce's pragmatism, and Dilthey and Betti's hermeneutics. In them, although in different ways, the theoretical speculative elaboration is performed in response to a need for the rigor of content and procedure that reveals the internalization of the scientific paradigm in philosophy. Even in many "alternative" and "contrasting" paths, polarization exists in the scientific question due to the search for an alternative and a "different" answer. It clearly emerges, for example, in Gadamer's hermeneutics turning point, we see the lessons and positions beyond the discourse; and moreover, the strictly philosophical ontological implications have a direct impact on the theory and methodology of scientific knowledge, of understanding and explanation, and experience and truth.
- 2 During the 20th century, various models and approaches gained ground and whose ultimate meaning is referable precisely to scientific-justifying needs. However, according to the dynamics on which "other" speculative instances are grafted and new approaches are used, conceptualizations and theorizations (also on important canonical terms) take shape. The rethinking of the concept of experience and its redefinition perhaps represents one of the most emblematic and important cases, not only because of the importance assumed in the modern philosophy and science

mentioned above but also for the originality of new perspectives, elaborated especially by philosophical hermeneutics and pragmatism. The framework of contemporary theoretical philosophical research offers a rich variety of analyses and points of view on experience, recognizing its absolute centrality in the context of knowledge and its absolute problematic nature in relation to the problem of the objectivity of scientific knowledge. However, many believe that the criticality of the relativistic risk of interpretative/evaluative arbitrariness remains; moreover, the cultural distance between schools and traditions, including the intradisciplinary hyperspecialism, continues to hinder reasoning on unifying proposals or on solutions that can connect different contributions. Up until almost the end of the 19th century, the differences between experience as an everyday fact, of action, practice, and learning linked to participation or personal intervention; and between experience as transmitted knowledge, known as indirect learning; and as a repetition of acts, phenomena and states of affairs which are observed, measured, and transmitted during the cognitive processes implemented in knowledge, did in fact still remain sufficiently clear and distinct. It is a differentiation which has roots going back to ancient and medieval philosophical thoughts – with, on the one hand, Plato and Aristotle as representatives of an idea of experience linked mainly to the knowledge of details and concrete life, and on the other hand, Roger Bacon and William Ockham as representatives of a line that places experience as its foundation of knowledge, as an intuitive way to know the causes of phenomena. This difference, although elementary, that seems to indicate a still valid starting point for distinguishing between the subjectivity and objectivity of knowing, is destined to fall within Gadamer's hermeneutics and Peirce's pragmatism. Both approaches, in different ways, place objectivity at the center as a question that lies between experience and interpretation, or rather as an epistemological and scientific question. They are two itineraries that reflect a marked distance and difference, almost to the point of being impracticable. This choice is not casual: in different ways, Gadamer and Peirce revolutionize the idea of experience and its theoretical, scientific, and philosophical relevance to produce a new concept of true knowledge. However, this factor seems to remain entangled, for different reasons, within the mesh of the problem of interpretation and its objectivity. These two philosophers immediately cast doubt on the possibility of distinguishing between acquaintance and experience or knowledge by acquaintance and the role/functioning of experience in scientific knowledge or even between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* according to the distinction of Husserl (i.e., respectively, “experience object of analysis and description” and “lived experience” or “experience that one lives”). However, observing their philosophies from the outside without a clear theoretical and procedural direction that inconsistently engages the speculative dimension, i.e. philosophical faith, the experience interpretation movement seems to assume the configuration of an intrinsic short-circuit in Gadamer and Peirce.

- 3 Starting from some cornerstones of these philosophies may be useful in attempting to see if hermeneutics can still make a substantial contribution to the problem of cognitive objectivity by linking itself to the pragmatist lesson. To illustrate the extent of this problem and of the operations implemented in the context of contemporary hermeneutics, we choose to take up Betti's theoretical scientific work. Without a doubt, the interpreter in contemporary philosophical hermeneutics has studied the problem of cognitive objectivity in these fields of knowledge, where the hermeneutic operation is procedurally and content-wise pervasive. Betti, referring to Schleiermacher and

Dilthey's tradition, reaffirms that in the 20th century there is the need for philosophical hermeneutics as a methodology of humanities and social sciences. The internal conflict within 20th century hermeneutics considerably sharpens but at the same time brings the strengths and limits of the Gadamerian approach into full evidence. Betti proposes an alternative way which, however, still shows the limit of an "only hermeneutics" approach, perhaps not entirely dissolved by a certain idealistic prejudice.

2. Peirce and the Reconfiguring of the Idea of Experience in Pragmatism, that is, the Centrality of Interpretation

- 4 We hint at an opposition, but from a certain convergent point of view in Gadamer and Peirce. If the cognitive problematic proceeds in Gadamer from the level of reality of *Dasein* and the movement of understanding that characterized its interrogation and advancement in knowledge and meaning in Peirce, then it proceeds from the world and its events, from the reality as such: it causally characterizes and influences human experience but neither determines nor limits the possibilities of meaning and interpretation. Gadamer remains polarized on the dimension of the concrete subject of experience and of experience as a phenomenon that affects the subject or *Dasein* in its entirety. Meanwhile, Peirce never sees the cognitive process separable from the cognitive outcome, the known object or the elaborated knowledge, from the interpretative movement: not even once the highest degrees of abstraction have been reached and the best demonstrative and representative syntheses are built, achieving an absolute outcome is possible, that is, an outcome "free" from the intrinsic bond of the interpretative or interpretative-experiential relationship. Such a relationship is intrinsic because it belongs to human knowledge, to its existence and to act in accordance with certain cultural skills and certain creative possibilities. The system of signs reflects this reality: semiotics cannot be understood as representational; it is constitutively *interpretative*, endowed with a degree of (re-)modulatory that responds to the possibilities of discovery and knowledge, innovation and creation that are always possible for us humans. The well-known triadic relationship among sign, object, and interpretant speaks as much of the causal primacy of reality with respect to the subject as of the potentially creative character of the movement among sign, object, and interpretant. The world is known *in/through* the relationship; at the same time, the very way in which the relational movement finds expression each time determines how reality is known. Undoubtedly, Peirce is dominated by scientific interest and therefore by questioning how to ensure and legitimize the scientific nature of knowledge and cognitive processes. Beyond this factor, his model also lends itself to the idea of an open semiotic interpretative process, for which the possibilities of error and interpretative distortion are well contemplated, much more than any representation, even the most rigorous, but interpretation remains however. To continue the critical front can open from the interpretant and from the object side: the distinction between "immediate object" and "dynamical object" of semiosis is not without implications: in the first case, the object is understood as it is known in its sign representation; in the second case, we mean the possibility or the effectiveness of representational transformation, that is, the determination of a sign or series of signs.

- 5 At the center of Peirce's semiotic theorization lies the sign: it is structurally the mediator between the interpretant and its object (CP.8.332) or among, for example the dimension of interest, disposition, specific knowledge, skill, cultural orientation, and value of the subject and, yet on the other hand, the reality of the thing, of reality, and the phenomenon. The sign contains the same structure as human thought; conversely, it is a means of objectivity: "it is something knowing which we know something else": "a sign is an object that is on the one hand related to its object and on the other in relation to an interpretant in such a way as to bring the interpretant into a relationship with the object corresponding to its own relation to the object." At this basic level of presentation of Peirce's theory, without going into the technical merits of the semiotic process according to Peirce, one can recognize the importance that the subjective, experiential, and historical dimensions of man is assumed in his theory of knowledge: objectivity is objective ideal or regulative to aim for according to a process, whereas responding to the best scientific axioms and rules remains in its cultural characterization, or rather in being an expression of the triadic sign-object-interpretant movement. The foundation is largely cultural and presuppositional: the fact that principles are also spoken of in the scientific field as "something convenient" (Poincaré 1905) is not a coincidence. Peirce himself defines a principle or, better, the leading principle as the principle that it "must be *assumed* to be true to support the logical validity of any argument" (CP.2.168; italics mine). However, with this perspective, Peirce neither drags semiosis onto the ground of the endless hermeneutic operation, which can tend toward the *pensiero debole* of infinite semiosis as the only truth of certainty, nor tends to absolutize the experience of an individual: it always has value, even when unusual, but "it is out of individual experiences that general experience is built" (*Letter to Paul Carus*, prob. end of April 1892).¹ The fulcrum of Peirce's research is not the problem of the relativity of knowing but that of scientific certainty: not only is he a scientist before being a philosopher, but in his vision, "Human intelligence is, however, predominantly scientific intelligence in its most rudimentary form; for it is "an intelligence capable of learning by experience" [CP. 2.227] (Colapietro 2006: 15).

In accord with Peirce's own principle of continuity, we should not suppose that there is a sharp dichotomy between instinctual and scientific (or experiential) intelligence, for (as we have already seen) our very capacity to learn from experience attests to the beneficial operation of instinctual tendencies. Scientific intelligence is rooted in our instinctual drives. Our capacity to learn from experience is closely connected to our capacity to subject our conceptions, assertions, and inferences to criticism. (*Ibid.*: 15-6)

- 6 This vision establishes a link of close connection and "tendential unity" between the sphere of the world-environment and the bio psycho-social sphere, that is, between the reality of the natural world and the historical cultural dimension of man. This way, Peirce's philosophy of knowledge can partially, similarly to Gadamer's hermeneutics, be related to the problematic terms of social epistemology (although in Gadamer, this connection is broad). Undoubtedly, the dilemma of scientific objectivity is marked in Peirce, whereas the Gadamerian hermeneutic conveys, in his model, a strongly contesting component of the scientific paradigm. Here a characterization of the interpretative process comes into play which, although for Gadamer as for Peirce the cognitive outcome to the relationship of the interpretant with the object, turns out to

be significantly divergent even more so that Peirce is more sensitive to the question of knowledge of the outside world than of values, motives, and dimensions of *praxis*.

- 7 The problem of interpretation in Peirce is the problem of the right knowledge of the world through the interpretation determination of signs or through the achievement of its correct representation in a semiotic way. The world as such is, in fact, unreachable in a Kantian view, and the character of “immediate object” lies in the “immediate interpretant” as the “dynamic object” is to the “dynamic interpretant.” The first stage of interpretation is one with the experience of immediate emotional recognition; it cannot be thought of as totally pre-reflexive, but it is certainly anchored to the sphere of instinct and natural behaviour. From here, it triggers the reflexive intellectual process, that is, the dynamic interpretative phase that leads to the logical outcome, characterized as a habit, that is as “the effect that would be produced on the mind by the Sign after sufficient development of thought” (EP.2.482). It is here that the paradigmatic function of habit finds expression, which limits the interpretative operation to the need to know as such, that is, to the need for the objectivity of knowledge, but without chaining or silencing the semiosis with respect to the human phenomenon of experience or to human action. As Massimo Bonfantini explains, no human exists without involving interpretation: “Human action is intrinsically inferential and interpretative in the sense that an action never derives from anything other than interpretation itself, and so on, ideally ad infinitum” (Bonfantini 1987: 20). In Peirce’s semiotics, interpretation is an essential rational question; it is considered by its nature as an intellectual, logical process. “All that we know or think is known or thought by signs’ [...] and a thought ‘itself is a sign’” (Buczynska-Garewicz 1988: 59). The manuscripts of 1904 and 1907 are clear in this regard: They help fully highlight the importance of interpretation. However, Peirce’s semiotic theory rejects its hierarchical superiority: “Sign and interpretation are equi-primordial” (*ibid.*): “The meaning [...] can be grasped only by interpretation in another sign. However, that does not mean that the meaning of the sign is constituted by interpretation. Meaning is *in* the sign, not between signs. Interpretation discloses only the intrinsic meaning since, according to Peirce, it is the sign that *determines* its interpretant” (*ibid.*: 60).

3. Idea of Experience in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics, that is, the Gadamer Betti Debate

- 8 As is known, the concept of “experience” substantiates the philosophical course of *Truth and Method* right from the start. In the introduction, its meaning is conveyed in regard to hermeneutic research and to the strictly epistemological dilemma that invests the ancient question of the scientific statute of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Gadamer proceeds to rethink the idea of truth and the way to achieve it: it is essentially accessed not through a technical procedural and cognitive way but through an experiential one. In the introduction, we also read that the hermeneutic study seeks, starting from the experience of art and historical transmission, to clarify the hermeneutic phenomenon in all its scope. Beyond the fact that for Gadamer, it is a question of recognizing in this phenomenon an experience of truth (*eine Erfahrung von Wahrheit*) as a form of philosophy (*eine Weise des Philosophierens*) (Gadamer 1986: 3), a contestative, radical rethinking clearly emerges in his vision concerning the way we approach and develop historical social knowledge. The experience of the historical

social world cannot be raised to the level of science through the inductive procedure of natural sciences (*ibid.*: 10). The reason is that the ideal of this knowledge lies in knowing the phenomenon itself in its unrepeatable and historical concreteness. Here, Gadamer explains that another degree of general experience may well enter, to arrive at the knowledge of a law; however, the purpose is not to confirm and extend these general experiences but to understand how a particular individual or state has become as it has become; in short, how it could have happened that it is what it is (*ibid.*). The differentiation of the modes of experience, therefore, jumps into Gadamer, and the singularity assumes central importance during the cognitive process. Yet, Gadamer does not assume a simplifying position in regard to the phenomenon of experience. In the second part (on the relationship between the problem of truth and the sciences of the spirit), section two (on the elements of a theory of hermeneutic experience), of *Truth and Method*, he qualifies it among the less clear concepts we possess. Given that in the logic of induction, it has a guiding function for the positive sciences, it has ended up being enclosed withingnoseological schemes that seem to mutilate its original content. The whole theory of experience, which also included Dilthey, suffers today from the fact that it is conceived on science, thus forgetting the intimate historicity of experience (*ibid.*: 352). The fundamental critical position of Gadamer is rooted here and overturns the problem of objectivity. The purpose of science is to objectify experience to such an extent that no element of historicity acts with it anymore, and something similar is achieved in the sciences of the spirit through the method of historical criticism. As in science, an experiment must be verifiable; thus, the entire procedure must also be able to be controlled, in the sciences of the spirit. In this sense, science can make no room for the historicity of experience, or for historical objectivity. However, Gadamer also recognizes that the scientifically critical moment of repeatability and confirmation of experience derives from the intrinsic property of human experience as such; its dignity lies in its substantial repeatability (*ibid.*: 353). In this sense, the fact that the theory of experience is determined in a rigorously teleological way regarding the truth that experience has to reach is not a casual one-sidedness of the modern philosophy of science, but a fact founded in the very nature of the thing. A dialectical approach, in Hegel's style, to historicity and experience significantly changes the intention of the teleological aim to the truth; it is not the goal of the cognitive process but is one with the progression of consciousness or spirit. Thus, the repeatability of the experience is eclipsed by the phenomenon of experiential novelty, always tense on the present, new and upcoming circumstances. The Hegelian approach thinks about the essence of experience in advance on the model of a moment in which experience is outdated. Experience, as such, can never be science. It stands in irreducible opposition to knowledge and to the acquisition of knowledge that is connected with theoretical or technical universality (*ibid.*: 361). The truth of experience always contains references to new experiences. Therefore, the one we call an expert is not only one who has become such through experiences but also who is open to other experiences. Thus, the dialectic of experience does not have its fulfilment in knowledge but in that openness to experience that is produced by the experience itself (*ibid.*). Here, a dynamism of understanding and interpretation is generated that in many ways recalls the Peircean model. Even Peirce's philosophy recognizes the centrality of experience for a human being and beyond semiosis, he embraces, as a psychic, a decidedly holistic vision of human experience. Gadamer does the same, yet tying the holistic element of experience to human historicity more closely. From its new perspective, the concept of

experience does not only mean experience in the sense of information that one possesses about something but also experience as a whole, as something that belongs to the historical essence of man (*Erfahrung ist hier etwas, was zum geschichtlichen Wesen des Menschen gehört*). Precisely on this point Gadamer engages his hermeneutic of tradition and brings to full development a project for the revolution of philosophical hermeneutics which goes well beyond the epistemological foundational dilemmas characterizing the hermeneutic debate preceding him.

- 9 However, this philosophical turn triggers a conflict in the heart of contemporary hermeneutics because it ends up welding the hermeneutic operation too tightly to the subjective dimension, interpreting to living. Gadamer is strengthened by the fact that in contemporary times, the problem of scientific objectivity has lost its epistemic value, significance, and theoretical centrality (it emerges following the lesson of the “masters of suspicion” [Ricoeur]; and considering the course of events and sociocultural and political transformations [Ripanti]). The approaches and needs with which the great Italian philosopher and jurist Betti is associated, who ponders the intrinsic problems of the insuperable hermeneutics critically of the subject-object relationship in the field of human and social sciences, make a difference. Gadamer too, of course, thematizes this problem but, given his vision, with the existence of defusing the knot of the scientific need for objectivity. First, Gadamer denounces the naivety, of the position according to which it is possible to read the data as a given, on the basis of the pure value of perception: already with the Heideggerian circle, the nonimmediate nature of knowing/understanding is demonstrated. Second, he criticizes the claim of neutral knowledge, decontextualized and free as an act of the subject and that knowing contrasts understanding as a *Dasein*'s way of being. Finally, it links the concept and conceptualization processes to language, thus binding knowledge to the hermeneutic operation (see Ripanti 1977: 493-4). The difference between the two thinkers cannot simplistically be explained in terms of diverging perspectives. In Gadamer's hermeneutics, a philosophical problem and a perspective unfold, touching key aspects of scientific theories. In Betti's hermeneutics, the whole technical and procedural problem of hermeneutics unfolds in various disciplinary fields, remaining firm on the problem of scientificity; hence the broad treatment of the canonical question of hermeneutics, as has been pointed out, perhaps a little too hastily, already in the seventies of the last century (e.g., see Vandenbulcke 1970). In reality, not only does the reason for the profound connection with Dilthey's lesson and the polemical comparison with Gadamer's perspective arise from these needs and demands for scientificity but also the philosophical characterization of this enterprise is progressively strengthened, and done precisely in the effort to delineate a pregnant solution, well-anchored culturally, responding to the risks of relativism.
- 10 As Franco Bianco explains, since the time of the elaboration of the *General Theory of Interpretation*, Betti has been fighting every subjectivistic and relativistic approach to knowledge in general, “but he has also explicitly distanced himself, with specific reference to the interpretative process, from any conception narrowly vitalistic and materialistic of an egocentric subjectivism”; moreover, not only for strategic procedural reasons, he comes “to place as his first canon, the principle formulated in the maxim *sensus non est inferendus, sed efferendus*, meaning by this to underline the need, ‘against all subjective will,’ to respect the object in its particular ‘way of being,’ and therefore to measure it ‘with its own meter’” (Bianco 1991: 34).² From here a

program began, aiming at a methodological development useful for the *Geisteswissenschaften*; a cultural and philosophical research project was also conducted, aiming to provide a general theory of all the objectifications of human experience susceptible of interpretation and a philosophy of knowledge capable of framing and justifying the possibility of interpretative truth when it responds to the characteristics of historical objectivity.³ Despite conducting the program and the project, Betti's explicit affiance to the lineage of Schleiermacher and Dilthey is equivalent to a clear distance from the ontological enterprise of Heidegger and Gadamer. This undertaking is neither accepted by Betti nor fully understood as an effort (with its own significance and strength) to root the interpretation on a new, speculative basis; it is also aimed at resolving the conflict (and relativism) of the interpretations or rather to carry out the Diltheyan purpose in different ways.⁴

4. Strength and Weakness of Betti's Solution for the Problem of Objectivity or Rather Toward a Solution Between Hermeneutics and Pragmatism

- 11 Picking up the legacy of the Heideggerian turn, Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophical point of view becomes inadmissible for Betti. However, not a few aspects of the theory of the former (but also of Peirce) find a certain correspondence and confirmation in the latter, starting with the close correlation between the levels of common experience and experience knowledge or rather between the historical cultural dimension of knowing and subjective experiential reality.
- 12 With the formulation of the *Aktualität* canon of interpretation and understanding, Betti shows that he recognizes, similar to Gadamer and Bultmann, that the interpreter of a cultural object, of a piece of work, of a historical product of the past, is moved to the understanding of it from one's own *experience of the present*. The interpreter is therefore in a certain sense influenced, if not also constrained, in understanding the *current* historical context. Specifically, "his understanding of the past is in some way predetermined by his present historical situation, from which he can never completely free himself" (Mura 2022: 290). In one way or another, Betti accepts the principle of hermeneutical preunderstanding, "according to which the interpreter is never essentially and personally in the interpretative process of the past, in which his experience of the present, psychology, culture and historical *context* inevitably converges and works" (*ibid.*). However, Betti rejects the idea that the interpretative process has essence and foundation only in the inner dimension of subjective being (exactly as he rejects the scientist idealist claim of pure, anonymous, unhistorical knowledge that can be extended in the field of historical and social sciences). "Detaching the canon of *contextuality* from that of the *autonomy of the object* in Betti can seriously compromise the whole Bettian approach of the hermeneutical question" (*ibid.*). The *canon of immanence of the object* or the *canon of the hermeneutical autonomy of the object* is certainly put in the first place (albeit *primus inter pares*), indicating an important (even if tenuous) principle of realism in Betti's theory.
- 13 Yet precisely, the objectivity of interpretative knowledge, which represents the fundamental counter-element to the Gadamerian approach, collects a certain degree of problematicity, despite the innumerable theoretical speculative efforts made by the

Italian philosopher efforts which, however, clearly raise its hermeneutic systematics to the full degree of a philosophy. As Mura points out,

Betti shows constant concern and repeated interest in respecting and guaranteeing the “object” of interpretation, as it is a product of man’s spirituality. Note that at this point Betti uses the term “spirituality” not in the sense of Spirit (*Geist*), which Hegel understands as the supreme and unique mediator of all historical forms, but in the precise meaning of concrete historical achievements because man is a being who has a spirit, but he is neither the Spirit nor a determination of the Spirit. “Spirituality” for Betti is the concrete expression, in history, of all the “spiritual” activities of man artistic, literary, poetic, philosophical, juridical, religious which clearly manifest his being endowed with “spirit,” and which are the foundation of his particular and unique way of transcending the laws of pure instincts of nature, in accordance with a world that man creates in his own image and likeness, interwoven with ideals and values, be they literary, poetic, aesthetic, philosophical, legal or religious. Therefore, spirituality is also synonymous, for Betti, with “historicity,” because only man has a history, that is, only man builds a world in which he expresses his own spirituality, a world of concretely spiritual works, such as those of art, law, thought, culture, up to the highest religious meditations. (*Ibid.*)

- 14 In his effort to justify and explain the validity of the extension of the claim of cognitive objectivity to the *Geisteswissenschaften*, Betti studies closely numerous important philosophies apart from Schleiermacher and Dilthey, also Vico, Kant, Scheler, Husserl, and Hartmann assuming some aspects and theoretical points, such as the important Hartmannian distinction between real and ideal objectivity, grafted into a problematic, Kantian perspective. The perspective is Kantian, but Betti does not arrive at a transcendentalism external to the hermeneutical process itself. Here, he seems closer to the spirit of Peirce than Gadamer’s: the interpretative process, which aims to solve the problem of knowing understanding, is unique and always the same in its essential moments, despite the necessary differentiation of its applications and cases. It is a need that mobilizes the interest or, better, the “spiritual spontaneity” of the interpreter (see Betti 2022; cap. VI, “L’atto di interpretare come processo triadico,” in press). The object to be interpreted solicits, in some way this (re-)action and becomes the cause of a need collected by the interpreter, who becomes the bearer of it by proceeding from *representative forms* (i.e., from the ground of the objective spirit) to the most proper experience of the living spirit or rather of the spirit moved by interests for the present life, which can be variously oriented. The hermeneutic phenomenon, therefore, has the character of a triadic processuality according to a dynamism that develops between two poles: on the one hand, that (1) of the interpreter and (2) of the living spirit; on the other hand, (3) that of the spirit, which has found objectification in the representative forms. Thus, and only in this way, in Betti’s understanding, the interpretative movement is given as a means and as a scientific problem. Here, the distance with authors such as Peirce is strong. For Betti, interpretation is not only an essentially hermeneutical problem (although it neither excludes nor marginalizes the semiological problem) but also concerns the universe of the objective spirit. In the absence of this bipolar dynamism, and according to a triadic processuality, no hermeneutical problem exists as a scientifically relevant problem: the interpretative movement of self-reflection or subjective self-reflection pertains to the sphere of private facts. As does the problem of knowledge of the external world as a natural and phenomenal world, although it poses dilemmas of understanding, it does not pose a scientific problem of such a nature to require the application of the canons of hermeneutics or a completely hermeneutic problematization. Betti explains that the subject and object of the

interpretative process, that is, the interpreter and the representative forms are the same that we find in every act of understanding; but here, they appear with the different, particular qualification of “objectifications of the spirit.” Therefore, in this case, the task of the knowing subject is not resolved in the perceptual and cognitive dilemmas (“What am I seeing?”). It consists rather in “returning to know,” in recognizing, and in reconstructing a sense, “and with the sense a spirit recognizable through the forms of its objectifications and which speaks to the thinking spirit that feels akin to it in common humanity” (Betti 2022).

- 15 Even before the *Teoria generale dell’interpretazione*, Betti openly reconnects to the Hartmannian lesson. In his 1949 short essay, *Posizione dello spirito rispetto all’oggettività. Prolegomeni ad una teoria generale dell’interpretazione*, he analyses and repropose Hartmann’s distinction between the set of phenomena experienced as phenomena and the very presuppositions of experience. The ideal objectivity of ethical and aesthetic meanings and values indicates a dimension of reality with an ontological status that is independent of the dimension of the phenomena of the psychical biological world and the psychological dimension of individual subjects as subjects. The particularities and differences in interest, disposition, training, culture, and historicity linguisticity are certainly to be understood as elements of the interpretative process and elements to the critical problems of true interpretation and cognitive objectivity in the field of historical and social sciences. One cannot think that the hermeneutic methodology alone, understood as a procedural technique, can solve the difficulties leading to the suspension of judgment and subjective position or by harnessing the spirits. The way is not that of the unilateral application of a technique but of the use of the hermeneutic technique within a certain procedural modality, where the interpreter is confronted simultaneously, and dynamically, with the object of interpretation and with the representative forms, that is, the (related) spiritual objectifications. If, on the side of the object, Betti betrays a certain degree of realism, on the side of the representative forms he champions a certain degree of idealism. In his vision, values cannot be subverted: they remain *axiologically* in their *phenomenological* change. The Hartmannian lesson returns as a response to Kantian transcendentalism. Betti too assumes “the analogical derivation of the transcendentalism of values from the transcendentalism of logical categories”; he still assumes the Hartmannian idea (of Platonic stripe) of the bridging function of the *sentiment of value* between the sphere of the ideal, the sphere of reality, and the recognition of an intrinsic tendency of values to “exist” (to auto-determine as existents), to express themselves in reality, in connection to the given contexts and specific concrete experiences (Bianco 1978: 22-4). In any case, a principle of reality holds still. It may perhaps also be thought of as analogous, or related, to pragmatic realism in the field of the sciences of the spirit. A position of a more marked realism, or better still interrelated with a form of critical realism can perhaps overcome some critical issues that seem not to be overcome by Betti.

5. Conclusion

- 16 On close inspection, a systematic evaluation of Betti’s vast study is still lacking today. An adequately broad and in-depth attempt to try out his philosophical project, and eventually completing it, is missing. Many references and theoretical intertwining pervade his work, testifying not only his great erudition but also his strive for

clarification and the need to perfect his ideas and positions. Betti does not seem to get to a superior synthesis, with respect to the great theoretical and philosophical “laboratory” that he opened. At the same time, an insuperable difficulty seems to be rooted in his polarization on the problem of historical and social sciences. In this way, according to Betti’s premises and the frameworks of his major philosophical references (first of all, Hartmann), his hermeneutic objectivity does not seem capable of overcoming a certain idealistic limit and, in any case, does not seem to fully resolve the problematic of subjectivity objectivity of the interpretation even more for the need he puts forward, to keep together, in some way, the demands of scientificity and the needs of uniqueness of subjective interpretative experience (see Bianco 1991: 85). In short, to a certain extent, Betti seems to remain caught in a vice that can be compared to the Gadamerian one.

- 17 Reserving ourselves to treat this aspect in a more systematic way in the future, the aporetic nature of Betti’s position seems to find great emphasis due to the overly unilateralizing focus of the problem of cognitive objectivity on the question of the epistemological status of the historical and social sciences. Its hermeneutical perspective can find new life if extended to the problematic field of knowledge in general. In this regard, it can profit greatly from Peirce’s pragmatist perspective (which, in turn, seems to be deficient in terms of meditation on the status of human sciences), first, by seeking ways to connect the hermeneutic interpretation with the semiotic interpretation; and secondly, by extending the epistemological investigation to all fields of knowledge to which we grant scientific status, that is, in need of objectivity. To the extent that Peirce generalizes the process of sign-object-interpretation and conveys the idea of semiosis as a perpetually interpretative dynamism, the possibility of extending interpretation, *even* a hermeneutical one, to all areas of knowledge makes its way; without running the risk of falling into relativism, Peirce’s pragmatism advances a more marked realist instance than the hermeneutic one and embraces Betti’s need and scientific dilemmas while lending itself to his use to placing on the same level or in any case, in close proximity, ideal and real objectivity or better, the scientific problems connected to ideal and real objectivity. They are all problems of representation; regarding them, interpretation can operate at multiple levels, from decoding and clarification to understanding and appropriation, from qualification and judgment to the determination and creation of meaning. If the hermeneutic semiosis combination appears difficult to practice, then one can always look at different models, which also maintain a clear anchorage to a pragmatic realism. In this regard, an interesting alternative is offered by Bertrand Russell’s theory of knowledge, whose vocation for intellectual operation and logic can well be harmonized with Betti’s critical rationality. The same can be said for his focus on a particular case and the predilection for a detailed examination and for an analytical realist approach. On a different and distant scale, even Russell, with his gnoseology, recognizes the essential bridging-function of human knowledge (many reasons explain the connection with Peirce’s lesson). Among logic, reality, and psychology, he relocates every problem of objectivity and truth of knowledge, and, similarly to Peirce, he overcomes the dichotomous distinction between the real and ideal objectivity; and bringing all the operations and gnoseological problems back to a single source.
- 18 As is known, Russell’s approach, as an analytical realist, stems from an actively anti-idealist position (as in G.E. Moore) and jointly from his research in the field of logic and

mathematics. In general, Russell is of the opinion that many paradoxes and fallacies are hidden in many of the ordinary conceptions of reality and the world. Therefore, the transparency/efficacy/validity of thought and language cannot be “trusted”; it cannot be argued that we are endowed with the ability to directly/immediately grasp the content of our experiences and assertions. While maintaining a fundamental reference to the logical construct, to the referentiality of meaning, Russell embraces a holistic comprehensive point of view on human reality that is fully reflected in the theory of knowledge that he profiles. Moreover, Russell progressively deepens and modifies his position, significantly diluting his strong starting realism (he comes to affirm realism at the semantic level, for which the meaning of an expression is the object of an expression; he embraces the idea that certain expressions can be significant without being referential or being non-univocal; he assumes the possibility of the existence of noncomplete/incomplete signs or symbols). Naturally, experience plays a significant role in Russell’s approach, even though he too doubts the significance and clarity of the concept and phenomenon, asking himself questions that clearly reveal the critical dilemma of the relationship between subjective and objective spheres, that is, the problem of the objectivity on knowing. Directly or indirectly, the conclusions Russell reaches in his *Theory of Knowledge* (1913) focuses entirely on the issues of scientificity. They throw light on the meanings and implications of the fundamentally interdisciplinary approach to his theory of knowledge. In the passage that thematizes the relationship between psychology, logic, and philosophy (or epistemology³) we must not grasp a pure and simple need for a precise terminological and analytical argumentative reference: it rather reflects the idea of the constitutively triadic character of the cognitive dynamism, among the subject of experience (by extension, “interpreter”), object (in Russell, the reference of pragmatism is paradigmatic), and logical linguistic representational construct. A marled reference to the dialectic between the subjectivity and objectivity of knowing derives from the fact that Russell rethinks, beyond the reasons for uncertainty, about the emergence of discourse and the scientific mode from common philosophy. Therefore, he can say

We may define epistemology in terms of this problem, as: the analysis of true and false belief and their presuppositions, together with the search for criteria of true belief. But practically this definition is somewhat wide, since it will include parts of psychology and logic whose importance is not mainly epistemological; and for this reason, the definition must not be interpreted quite strictly. (Russell 2005 [1913]: 46)

- 19 The reflections above adds up to the “Bettian laboratory.” We also observe that the discussion developed here offers some suggestions for the possibility of following the path of a close collaboration between hermeneutics and pragmatism in view of a general theory of interpretative knowledge equally valid, in legitimacy and epistemic procedural force, in the fields of natural sciences and the historical social sciences.

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NOTES

1. Quoted from: Houser (2010: LXXVII).

2. Tr. from V.B. First quote from Betti (1955: 251); second quote from Betti (1954: 97, 100).
 3. See Bianco (1991: 34). Bianco makes explicit reference to Palmer's *Hermeneutics* (1969).
 4. As Bianco states: "It is [...] again the background of a particularly complex theoretical situation and in a cultural moment characterized by a real 'conflict of interpretations' that Betti's speculative and methodological effort must be seen, if the intent is as in our case grasping its peculiar elements and ascertaining, in the light of today's problems, their validity and limits. For this reason, on the one hand, the reference made by the *General Theory of Interpretation* to Schleiermacher and Dilthey's tradition can certainly be accepted at the level of a genealogical reconstruction of the line of thought which Betti intends to bear; on the other hand, however, the opportunity to examine the reasons that dictated the attempt to overcome the ontological methodology that in recent years has returned to the center of attention of a large part of our culture should not be excluded. In the light of these reasons, it might appear that Heidegger's ontological approach to hermeneutics responds to the need to ensure a foundation for the innovative intuitions of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, even if in this effort, he and his school ended up abandoning the concern to make interpretation a procedure that can be considered universally valid." (Bianco 1991: 37).
 5. See, e.g., Russell (1913: 46).
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ABSTRACTS

This study focuses on the important epistemological question of the objectivity of scientific knowledge by comparing the analyses and theories developed in the two different schools of hermeneutics and pragmatism. To justify the feasibility of the comparison, we proceed from the observation that, albeit in different ways, authors such as Gadamer and Peirce revolutionize the idea of experience and its theoretical scientific relevance issuing in a new conception of cognitive truth bearing fruits to the problem of objectivity. This comparison is intertwined with the critical resumption of Betti's theoretical scientific research, which is useful for illustrating the articulation of this problem and the scope of the operations implemented in the context of contemporary hermeneutics and for probing the problem of scientific objectivity beyond the fields of the historical and social sciences. This possibility can be glimpsed by absorbing Betti's approach to the problem of humanities into a theory of knowledge where a position of critical realism is associated with an interpretative component in hermeneutic and pragmatic keys.

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Dewey's and Pareyson's Aesthetics

A Dialogue between Pragmatism and Hermeneutics

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1. Deweyan Resonances in Pareyson's Aesthetics

- 1 John Dewey (1859-1952) and Luigi Pareyson (1918-1991) are two different philosophers in many respects. As is generally known, the former is one of the most significant representatives of the pragmatist tradition, while the latter is a leading figure in existentialism and hermeneutics. Differences notwithstanding, their aesthetic theories appear strikingly similar. On this ground the opportunity opens up for pragmatism and hermeneutics to interact and share ideas.
- 2 The connections emerging from the dialogue between Dewey's pragmatism and Pareyson's hermeneutics about aesthetics strengthen the idea that experiencing the world aesthetically is a way to make human life full and satisfying.
- 3 *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (first published in 1954) is one of Pareyson's most important writings, containing the main elements of his aesthetics, which were already sketched out in his mid-1940s works and furtherly defined in the 1960s and 1970s in connection with his existentialist and personalistic outlook (Finamore 1999: 18-20). Another feature of *Estetica* is its fundamentally hermeneutic character, anticipating the founders of post-Heideggerian hermeneutics, Gadamer and Ricoeur (Tomatis 2003: 47). In the *Preface*, Pareyson explicitly acknowledges his debt to Dewey in aesthetics (Pareyson 1988: 8).¹
- 4 The key concept in Pareyson's aesthetics is *formativity*, a word coined by Pareyson himself to indicate a specific kind of doing. The importance of doing is the first clear element Dewey and Pareyson share (Simonini 1968: 225-31). Formative doing "*creates the way of doing while doing*" (Pareyson 1988: 59). This means that rules in the process of forming are not external or previously established, being embedded in the activity of forming. In this way, Pareyson's formativity is peculiar to all human experiences and this is in line with the Deweyan idea of the aesthetic character of the whole experience.

- 5 In art, formativity has a special meaning, even though art is not considered, either by Pareyson or by Dewey, as a separate field of experience. Rather, the notions of “pure” formativity (belonging to art) and “overall” formativity (belonging to the whole experience) allow us to distinguish (both in Pareyson and, retrospectively, in Dewey) what is specifically art from what is not, without severing the strong ties between art and experience. For Dewey, what is actually related to art is “artistic,” whereas the term “aesthetic” certainly encompasses works of art but has a wider meaning, including all (both objects and deeds) that might make our experience deeper, richer, wider, more refined and intense. According to Dewey, the artistic experience is paradigmatic of all experiences that are understood as aesthetic. Similarly, for Pareyson formativity has specific importance in art, where it is prevailing and intentional, so rendering the work of art an end in itself with its own rules whereas in other activities not specifically artistic the formativity is an element which gives a work whose ends are extrinsic greater sense and value (*ibid.*: 23).
- 6 The accomplished work emerging from doing permeated with formativity is not, according to Pareyson, a “result,” but a “successful completion” (*riuscita*), that is, “something having found its own rule, recognizing it as such, instead of applying one previously established and generally accepted” (Givone 2008: 154). Furthermore, a work of art features an important trait, that is, its infinite interpretability. Here the formativity acquires a fundamental hermeneutic character, because interpreting a work of art is an open process very similar to forming it. Both come about through attempts, and the outcome might be a success or a failure (Restaino 1991: 229; D’Angelo 2011: 70). Both the notions of successful completion and attempting constitute another important correspondence between Dewey and Pareyson (Finamore 1999: 28), because attempting is included in all human activities and is a characterizing element of successful completion.
- 7 In *Experience and Nature* (1981: 18, 280) Dewey defines experience as a unitary and integrated whole of elements. Human life does not exist either before or independently from the experience of the world, but it emerges and builds itself within that experience. As mentioned above, for Dewey the aesthetic dimension can enhance the experience as long as it is not considered an area detached from other human activities and from human existence. For Dewey, this would cut off the connection with “the materials and aims of every other form of human effort, undergoing, and achievement” (1987: 9).
- 8 According to Dewey, an experience is aesthetic when realized in a whole that comes to form a perfect and organized integration of means and ends starting from the need to overcome an obstacle or a fracture requiring attempts and errors to find a solution (*ibid.*: 42-3). Moreover, that whole of experience is anchored to the past and future dimensions of time, and has a specific emotional character. Art fosters and disperses the aesthetic experiences, keeping alive all human capacities, as we will see below. These traits of Deweyan aesthetics also resonate in Pareyson’s *Estetica*, assuming an existential character, in the general sense of referring to human life in its many social and individual aspects. We notice these resonances, for example, when the Italian thinker writes that also “in art occurs what happens in human experience in general, that one *learns* to be himself only discovering himself in others” (Pareyson 1988: 158) or when he claims that “in a work of art parts have a twofold relation with each other: everyone with the other, and everyone with the whole” (*ibid.*: 107), likewise the

situation of experience described by Dewey, and again when he highlights the role of emotion in the aesthetic experience (*ibid.*: 200, 211-2).

- 9 The Deweyan resonances in Pareyson's aesthetics can be connected to the question of the relations between American Pragmatism and Italian philosophy, particularly to the reception of Dewey's thought in Italy. It is worth noting that both Dewey and Pareyson had a conflictual relation with Croce's aesthetics (Vercellone 2011; D'Angelo 2011; Copenhaver 2017).² Since the correspondences between Pareyson and Dewey are ascertained, as well as the influence of the latter on the former in aesthetics (Perniola 1972: 223-4; 2007: 131), it can be said that some characteristic elements of Deweyan pragmatist aesthetics have seeped through Pareyson into the Italian post-Crocean aesthetics contributing to its renewal.

2. Aesthetics as Education and Interpretation: Towards a Fulfilled Life

- 10 The discussion of Croce's aesthetics might be the starting point for considering both Dewey's pragmatist and Pareyson's hermeneutic aesthetics in a eudemonic perspective. In fact, both converge towards the idea that aesthetic experience (including the artistic as a model of fully accomplished experience) strengthens and deepens the connections between human beings with each other and with the world, in this way creating the conditions for a fulfilled existence.
- 11 Croce detached art from the concreteness of life.³ Pareyson, on the contrary, considers both art and formativity included in the whole experience. The same goes for Dewey, who integrates "artistic" and "aesthetic" dimensions in the experience, so getting rid of the dualisms in which Croce was still entangled (Copenhaver 2017: 67).
- 12 Dewey's claim is not a mere theoretical statement but corresponds to a philosophical proposal with a concrete operating value. Reality is a complex of objects, people, and events that presents itself as a continuous unity. Human beings are to be educated to grasp that continuity in their own experience and to put it into effect. Taking into account the general meaning of "aesthetic" for Dewey, indicating what the term αἰσθητικός meant for the ancient Greeks (i.e. to be able to sense and understand the world intellectually and emotionally), it becomes apparent that the artistic/aesthetic element in education can promote the activation of all the components of human nature and their participation at the highest level of complexity and use in the organization of capabilities and energies. For example, the biological structure of the eye is in continuity with the environment. However, *seeing* does not suffice for us to be able to take advantage of the eye at the highest level of meaningfulness and relationality. Besides the mere biological machinery, further resources are to be activated (intentionality, emotion, cognitive assessment, and so on) so that the *quality* of experience is enhanced, rendering the experience itself dense and fulfilled. This corresponds to the "aesthetic sensibility," which allows human beings to acquire a sharpened and multi-perspectival attitude to look at the world, thus clearing the way for more profound interactions between human beings and their social and natural environment. Dewey summarizes this as follow. "The hasty sightseer no more has an aesthetic vision of Saint Sophia or the Cathedral of Rouen than the motorist traveling at sixty miles an hour *sees* the flitting landscape. One must move about, within and

without, and through repeated visits let the structure gradually yield itself to him in various lights and in connection with changing moods.” (Dewey 1987: 224). This passage shows that the development of the aesthetic sensibility enhances our lives to a satisfactory and perhaps noble level. In order to achieve this, for Dewey, it is important to give art a key role in education (cf. Dewey 1976: 52-3).

- 13 In Pareyson, too, there emerges the educational value of art in order to develop the aesthetic sensibility, although the Italian philosopher does not recommend structured educational proposals as Dewey does. Certainly, this is a trait that marks the difference between Dewey and Pareyson. The former is action-oriented (think, for example, of the Laboratory School in Chicago), whereas the latter tends to move in theoretical terms. On closer analysis, however, it is also possible to find in Pareyson’s view the educational role of art, that is, its capacity to develop the aesthetic sensibility. Apart from the training the aspiring artist must follow as illustrated in *Estetica* (Pareyson 1988: 156-63), the educational value of art lies in its hermeneutic character.
- 14 According to Pareyson, a piece of art requires interpretation, that is, to be judged and considered capable of promoting other “forms” (*ibid.*: 139; Finamore 1999: 66). In this perspective, the piece of art is a model, and its *rule* (in the sense we have seen at the beginning) “presents itself in terms of operational effectivity being able to be integrated and carried, reinvented and transferred, instead of being [simply] translated into a norm” (Pareyson 1988: 146). A piece of art stimulates those who come into contact with it. Thus, not only does an artwork become a model, but its users become “interpreters” or “performers.” These terms are synonymous, because in the hermeneutic perspective Pareyson neither distinguishes so neatly the professional performer from the amateur nor indicates a different meaning for the role of listener or spectator compared, for example, to an instrumentalist or an actress/actor. All of them are interpreters, and their interpretation mutually involves receptiveness and activity (*ibid.*: 183). In this sense, the piece of art corresponds to a stimulus that disrupts our experience and needs it to be rearranged at a new level. Thus considered, this point looks like Dewey’s *Circuit of Inquiry*. According to Dewey, non-reflective experience is disrupted by a problem that stimulates inquiry. We can solve that problem by testing a hypothesis through the use of physical tools and data. This experiment leads to the realized object, which returns to and enriches the non-reflective background (Ryan 2011: 28). We should add that for Pareyson, too, interpretation involves sensory knowledge, not being only an intellectual and abstract process (Pareyson 1988: 190).
- 15 To clarify how close Dewey and Pareyson are on this key point, it is worth highlighting that the interpretation is an “encounter.” One among the potentially infinite points of view of the interpreter encounters one of the revealing and infinite aspects of the artwork (*ibid.*: 227-8). This entails the interpretation being tentative and having an experimental character. Pareyson seems to confirm it, defining the interpreter as a person who knows (the “knowing”) and the interpreted as a “known,” namely a form (*ibid.*: 180). In this way he suggests that there are no predetermined elements or rules in interpretation.⁴ Of course, the artwork is something accomplished, but for Pareyson this means that it is infinite and inexhaustible in its interpretations (Pareyson 1988: 238). In addition, since the interpreter is a person, and the person is placed in a unique and particular point of view, then the interpretation is a constitutively open and infinite process.⁵

- 16 To confirm the closeness of Pareyson's hermeneutics to Dewey and its importance for the fulfilment of human life it may be helpful to take into account the example of play, which is considered one of the most primordial aspects of human existence (Graham & Kirby 2016: 8), strongly connected to art and the aesthetic dimension. Play cannot be considered as an abstract activity or category, because its mutually integrated elements arise from playing itself (*ibid.*: 14; Stoller 2018: 49). In a Deweyan perspective, play shows a strong experimental nature when it enters the *Circuit of Inquiry*, forming thereby new habits (cf. Fiore 2022). Its aesthetic and artistic value lies in the fact that it leads human beings to develop a deeper sensitivity towards the world, and it helps to creatively build new habits. This can be described through the following example.
- 17 Think of a child taking a walk next to a lake or a shore with a calm sea. She spontaneously picks up a stone and throws it towards the water. The stone bounces on the surface, then it splashes and sinks. The gesture of throwing has given a new meaning to some elements of the situation (stone, water surface, arm, hand, and their movements) whose meaning and function were different before that gesture. Let us imagine that this event occurs for the first time in the child's life. She will do it again and again, trying to make the stone bounce as much as possible. To succeed, she will get flat and light stones, learn to coordinate her movements and know how much effort to make. Thus, a non-reflective behaviour generates a problem to solve through an experimental outlook that requires a new habit, consisting in the skill of throwing bouncing stones and, more important, of seeing and experiencing in some objects of the world something she has never seen and experienced before. Through the gesture of throwing stones in the water, the child's quality of experience has been transformed, making her aware of "some of the connections which had been imperceptible" (Dewey 1980: 83). In addition, her behaviour has become an organized activity with "a directing idea which gives point to the successive acts" (*ibid.*: 211; Vanderstraeten 2002: 235).
- 18 Play transforms the quality of experience, and this is what play and art share (Patton 2014: 244). Both art and play are always a matter of constructing and re-constructing the world, producing something new. Every artist, as well as every player, re-elaborates objects and situations, giving them new meanings and eliciting an emotional response (Dewey 1987: 73).
- 19 In *How We Think*, Dewey says that "scientific observation does not [...] merely replace observation that is enjoyed for its own sake. The latter, sharpened by the purpose of contributing to an art like writing, painting, singing, becomes truly aesthetic, and the persons who enjoy seeing and hearing will be the best observers." (Dewey 1986: 322). The development of intelligence and knowledge depends upon carrying out observations in the way Dewey describes. Play, in its aesthetic and artistic sense, involves this process (Henricks 2015: 51). Here Dewey seems to be not only close to Gadamer, who claims that play more than science offers the key to disclose "the full context of any given situation by promoting a freedom of possibilities within the horizon of one's own life-world (that is, the world directly and immediately experienced)" (Graham & Kirby 2016: 9); but also to Pareyson, who considers art a process of interpretation in which persons with their intelligence and sensitivity are involved. Pareyson also seems to recognize, like Dewey in *How We Think*, that the interpretation requires a balanced mixture of the familiar and the unexpected (Pareyson 1988: 244).

- 20 So described, play can surely be understood as a process of performance and interpretation in the broad sense Pareyson holds. If we consider play, for example, as a drama or playing an instrument, it can be noticed that all the people involved (performers as well as spectators) contribute to constructing the meaning of the artwork through interpretation. In play, understood for example both as a drama or a football match, spectators participate and are not merely detached and neutral observers (Eberle 2014: 214).
- 21 The example of play shows that, ultimately, for Dewey as well as for Pareyson both the artist and the public act in view of a balance of elements in a dynamic whole of experience. Therefore, the aesthetic education promotes habits to realize that balance in an ever-changing world. Art plays a fundamental role in this process that, when achieved, creates the conditions to allow persons to better know and enjoy the possibilities of reality, so that it becomes possible to have a fulfilled life. It is worthwhile here to underscore that, from the educational point of view, the distinction between “artistic” and “aesthetic” is important for setting the right tone with the aesthetic sensibility and elevating taste (Pareyson 1966: 10). In this perspective, the dialogue between Dewey and Pareyson can be connected to some contemporary issues and inquiries involving aesthetics and everyday life, particularly so-called “everyday aesthetics.”

3. Dewey and Pareyson: Aesthetics and Everyday Life

- 22 According to the definition given by Jonathan M. Smith, everyday aesthetics is to be understood “both as an extension beyond the traditional domain of the philosophical study of aesthetics, usually confined to more conventionally understood works of art, and as a step into a new arena of aesthetic inquiry – the broader world itself” (Light & Smith 2005: ix). One of the main assumptions of everyday aesthetics is “that aesthetic objects do not constitute a set of special objects, but rather are determined by our attitudes and experiences” (Saito 2001: 87). Therefore, the goal of everyday aesthetics is to educate human beings to appreciate and enjoy the little, ordinary, and familiar things in their lives, even though it is not limited to the aesthetic experience of humble objects and quotidian acts (Leddy 2005).
- 23 Dewey is an important and acknowledged source for everyday aesthetics (Dreon 2021: 8; Leddy 2005: 20), mainly due to his claim of the aesthetic character of the whole experience (Haapala 2005: 40). As we have seen, Pareyson and Dewey share this trait. Accordingly, it is also possible to establish a connection between Pareyson’s aesthetic theory and the everyday aesthetics. In addition, key notions of both Pareyson’s and Dewey’s thought appear to be important for finding solutions to some difficulties arising from everyday aesthetics.
- 24 Let us start with the hermeneutic character of Pareyson’s aesthetics, particularly from the perspective of people who experience art not as artists or professional performers do. This trait of Pareyson’s aesthetics affords to define certain aspects of everyday life as aesthetic, but it is also useful for distinguishing the specific field of art from other human activities or experiences. In short, not every human activity and product is art, but many things or activities can be made or performed *with art*.

- 25 People reading a book, listening to music, or looking at a painting are certainly involved in an aesthetic experience. In this way they become, Pareyson holds, interpreters/performers because they draw new life from the artwork they are experiencing. We have also seen that a person who comes into contact with a piece of art is stimulated to reorganize her/his experience. This kind of aesthetic experience is clearly common in our everyday life, but it appears problematic to be strictly categorized as everyday aesthetics due to its somehow extraordinary character. The relation ordinary-extraordinary is a dilemma in everyday aesthetics. Indeed, when the aesthetic potential of the ordinary is discovered, its meaning and value increases and this jeopardizes the fundamentally “everyday” nature of this kind of experience. Saito (2007) notices the contradiction, and tries to find a solution by emphasizing the role of custom and familiarity with spaces and objects of daily life (Saito 2017).⁶ However, Saito considers Dewey’s aesthetics not helpful for solving the problem (Saito 2007: 44-5; 2017: 21). On the contrary, I believe that Dewey can offer a way to find a solution, but it is to be looked for elsewhere than in *Art as Experience*. This is connected to Pareyson’s ideas.
- 26 Instead of the direct experience of artworks, a better connection with everyday aesthetics can be found in the experience of what Pareyson calls “natural beauty” (1988: 204-18). In chapter 5 of his *Estetica*, the Italian philosopher writes that “all our experience is studded with aesthetic situations suddenly and unexpectedly emerged” (*ibid.*: 204), and that to really know the world it is necessary to look at things “with interest and respect” (*ibid.*: 210; 2009: 99). Thus, the aesthetic character of everyday life emerges in a successful process of interpretation, directed to other ends than the contemplative (i.e. not strictly artistic) and involving the natural environment as well as the social one, that is, every person in her original and unique life. In this sense, even though Pareyson does not explicitly refer to them, it is possible to include in his discourse ordinary actions and objects. Pareyson, however, recognizes the importance of structured and aware interpretation, instead of one that is totally spontaneous and unexpected, to make an experience truly aesthetic (Pareyson 1988: 206-7). He uses the term “beauty” as synonymous with “form,” and claims that grasping the form in the environment corresponds to knowing the very nature of the world. Pareyson suggests that objects should be treated the same way as persons, that is, with a hermeneutic attitude and without the bias that leads us to think of persons as being “mobile and open, whereas things seem closed and definite” (*ibid.*: 207; 2009: 95). On the contrary, it is possible (and, for Pareyson, desirable) to speak with and question objects in order to familiarize with and deeply understand them (Pareyson 1988: 208-9; 2009: 96).
- 27 Knowing the environment requires an experimental attitude permeated with emotion. The experimental nature of existence Dewey cherished is joined here to the hermeneutic character of aesthetics held by Pareyson. The Italian philosopher tells us of the farmer’s love for the land he works or the committed attitude of a mountaineer who questions the mountain to climb (Pareyson 1988: 215). This sounds like Dewey’s passage in *Experience and Nature* about seeding and harvest, as well as the work of the farmer and his emotions, all included in a whole of experience (Dewey 1981: 18). Being embedded with the environment, as well as questioning and understanding it, corresponds to a hermeneutic attitude and an aesthetic sensibility. It requires a continuous adjustment of one’s perspective on the world in order to grasp the meanings and relations of reality, just as one has to find the best light and viewpoint, and adjust the focus to take a good photo.

- 28 Besides these correspondences, Dewey and Pareyson may help to solve the dilemma of the opposition ordinary-extraordinary. As mentioned above, one of the main problems of everyday aesthetics is how to balance the relation between what is usual, routine, quotidian, and what is special, extraordinary, astonishing. If something ordinary becomes extraordinary, we leave the quotidian, thus making the word “everyday” in combination with “aesthetics” meaningless. For example, if participating in a party or celebration is a quite common situation, rendering this a “special” event means detaching it from ordinary life. This implies that participating in such an event is to live and experience it more deeply and intensely, leaving the rest of life in a blurry and dull background.⁷ In this case, does it still make sense to talk about everyday aesthetics?
- 29 Pareyson and Dewey can help us to find an answer. According to the former, the whole human experience can be permeated by formativity. This means that even activities and situations not specifically understood as artistic can be performed or experienced with aesthetic sensibility, as Pareyson himself tells us through the examples of the farmer and the mountaineer mentioned above. In this perspective, the problem is not *how to render the ordinary extraordinary* but *how to render the aesthetic sensibility a leading principle in our lives*. In order to answer this question, Pareyson’s formativity can be supported by the Deweyan notion of “habit,” as described in *Human Nature and Conduct*. According to Dewey, habits are functions that connect the self to the environment. They are tools to be used in an organized and active way to successfully deal with the environment (Dewey 1983: 22). “The essence of habit is an acquired predisposition to ways or modes of response, not to particular acts except as, under special conditions, these express a way of behaving. Habit means special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions, rather than bare recurrence of specific acts.” (*Ibid.*: 32). Therefore, to render the aesthetic sensibility a leading principle in our lives we need to make it a habit, that is, an attitude of experiencing the world, grasping the great varieties, shades of meanings, and connections in the world itself.
- 30 Dewey reminds us that “repetition is in no sense the essence of habit” (*ibid.*), because what really matters in habits is attitude, not repetitiveness. Therefore, even an action that happens only once may result from a habit. However, he recognizes that “mechanism is indispensable,” and highlights the importance of intelligent repetition in certain activities (*ibid.*: 51). If we understand repetition in this positive meaning, that is, for example, the daily training of a violinist, or the craftsman’s work, the term acquires a *qualitative* meaning. “How delicate, prompt, sure and varied are the movements of a violin player or an engraver!” (*Ibid.*).
- 31 Thus, the term “craftsman” encompasses different people and activities, such as the carpenter, lab technician, conductor, and in a broader sense all the people who would like “to conduct life with skill” (Sennett 2008: 11). These people “are all craftsmen because they are dedicated to good work for its own sake” (*ibid.*: 20). To conduct life with skill (or *with art*) involves the development of an aesthetic sensibility within a frame in which repetition is functional to habit, that is, based on doing that fosters attitudes directed to a more effective integration with the environment.
- 32 Repetitive behaviour such as the example described above of the child throwing stones in the water can foster good habits. Sennett claims that people who develop sophisticated manual skills do not experience repetition as routine and boredom. On

the contrary, “doing something over and over is stimulating when organized as looking ahead” (*ibid.*: 175). This is the experience of rhythm, and it gives us pleasure “like a swimmer’s strokes, sheer movement repeated becomes a pleasure in itself” (*ibid.*). If we combine together formativity and habit in the light of repetition as understood by Sennett, we might affirm that everyday objects and activities can be potentially performed and experienced *with art*, and this is truer if the capacity to see and produce forms becomes a habit that guides our daily existence.

- 33 A conclusive example drawn from Sennett may show briefly the extension of this discourse to the social sphere. After the Second World War, the Dutch architect Aldo Van Eyck (1918-1999) filled with playgrounds a number of empty and forlorn spaces in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities. “The designer’s aim for these small places was to teach children how to anticipate and manage ambiguous transitions in urban space.” (*ibid.*: 232). There were edges, but not sharp separations between the elements forming the park, such as sand and grass, paths to toddle or climb. The task of every child was to find for herself/himself the best way to interact with the environment and with other children, helping one another. In some cases (e.g. the Van Boetzelaerstraat playground in Amsterdam) all the users, “children, adolescents, and adults learned to use it together” (*ibid.*: 234). Van Eyck’s creations can be considered works in which the search for form is combined with an educational aim, that is, the improvement of the aesthetic quality of the experience through the integration of the individual with the urban and social environment. This example is highly significant, showing the aesthetic character of human works and their high social value. Such playgrounds were conceived to be forms that could habituate people to experience the environment in an aesthetic way, strengthening at the same time social bonds in daily matters. This is the background Dewey, Pareyson, and the theorists of everyday aesthetics share.

4. Conclusion

- 34 In the spirit of Pareyson’s hermeneutics I have attempted to interpret his aesthetic theory by having it dialogue with Dewey’s and vice versa, thus showing a number of similarities between them. Therefore, it can be said that pragmatism and hermeneutics have important points of contact in aesthetics, not only theoretically, but empirically too. Moreover, they are related to present questions in aesthetics with significant consequences on human life. However, to accurately situate my reflections about their aesthetics it is important not to neglect some fundamental differences between Pareyson and Dewey, summarized as follows.
- 35 1) Pareyson’s aesthetics is closely bound up with transcendency, as is his whole thought. It is important to keep in mind this point in examining similarities and resonances with Dewey. 2) Although Dewey’s thought is an important source for Pareyson, it is neither the main nor the sole one, and therefore the Pareysonian approach to aesthetics is to be considered completely original. 3) In comparison with Dewey’s, Pareyson’s aesthetic theory is more focused on problems of art, and this is probably because of his hermeneutical and transcendental-ontological interests in philosophy. 4) The notion of “aesthetic emotion” occupies a key place in Dewey’s aesthetics. I have not dealt with that notion, because it does not represent, in my opinion, a strong point of contact with Pareyson, even though the latter takes into

account the emotions in art and aesthetics. Unlike Dewey, Pareyson neither appears to give specific room to them nor does he develop a sound theory of the emotions.

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NOTES

1. Some of Pareyson's writings have been translated into English and collected in a volume edited by Paolo Diego Bubbio (Pareyson 2009). When quotations are drawn from this book I indicate it with the double reference to the original Italian text and to the English translation (e.g. 1988/2009). When quotations do not refer to that book the translation into English is mine. In this case, I have only left the reference to the original Italian text (e.g. 1988).
2. For further details about the Croce-Dewey controversy it is helpful to read their interchange (Dewey 1989: 97-100, 438-44). Pareyson comes to define as "Crocean censorship" (Pareyson 1988: 7) the cultural dominance of Croce's aesthetics in the first half of the 20th century.
3. Because of conceiving art as intuition, Croce neglected many fundamental aspects belonging to art, such as technique, practice, and materials (Pareyson 1966: 79-86; Vercellone 2011: 36-7; Eco 2011: 42-4) as well as the concrete work of the artist that leads to an artwork (D'Angelo 2011: 65). In addition, it should be highlighted that Croce denied the importance of sensations, emotions, feelings, and impulses, so depositing "the vital organs of Dewey's aesthetics in the morgue of nothingness" (Copenhaver 2017: 63).
4. Insofar as the "successful completion" of a work of art and of its interpretation depends on a set of balanced and integrated elements in a whole, through Pareyson's discourse one can see Deweyan transactionalism as described in *Knowing and the Known*. Transaction is "the right to see together, extensionally and durationally, much that is talked about conventionally as if it were composed of irreconcilable separates" (Dewey & Bentley 1989: 67). Where self-action and interaction look at a whole as the sum of its parts, transaction sees the parts as determined by the whole (Ryan 2011: 35).
5. This is an aspect deeply connected to Pareyson's transcendental ontology (Finamore 1999: 82; Tomatis 2003: 51-2).
6. Dowling (2010) and Irvin (2008) propose to pay attention to the little things and behaviours of the ordinary that give us aesthetic pleasure, such as drinking a cup of coffee.
7. This also might happen when we experience a piece of art, for example looking at a Hopper painting at an exhibition, listening to a Haydn string quartet in a concert hall, or watching a movie at the cinema. This kind of aesthetic experience may be in strong contrast with ordinary existence, especially for people who have little direct experience of great artworks, so rendering everyday life more boring and dull. Thomas Leddy offers an interesting contribution to solving the dilemma of the opposition ordinary-extraordinary through a reference to Dewey's anti-dualistic stance (Leddy 2021).

ABSTRACTS

Even though the American thinker John Dewey and the Italian Luigi Pareyson belong to two different philosophical traditions, on the aesthetic ground they show many resonances and similarities. Using Pareyson's words, "just as it happens between people, who in particularly

happy encounters [...] reveal themselves to each other,” it is therefore possible to have Dewey’s aesthetics and Pareyson’s dialogue with each other, highlighting their affinities. This operation can strengthen the idea that the aesthetic experience is a way to fulfil human existence. Thus, the hermeneutic character of Pareyson’s aesthetics in combination with Deweyan pragmatist aesthetic theory not only have great importance for the artistic experience, but also considerable value for human beings’ everyday lives.

Starting from some Deweyan resonances in Pareyson’s aesthetics, the discourse focuses on his aesthetics in its educational and hermeneutic significance within the dialogue between the two philosophers, coming, finally, to Dewey’s and Pareyson’s aesthetics in connection with so-called “everyday aesthetics.” Although a Deweyan influence on Pareyson is ascertained, and the similarities between them are not superficial at all, it is worth bearing in mind the different backgrounds of the two philosophers in order to accurately situate their reflections.

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Dewey's Denotative Method

A Critical Approach

Andrii Leonov

1. Introduction

“These remarks are preparatory to presenting a
conception of philosophy; namely, that
philosophy is inherently criticism, having its
distinct position among various modes of
criticism in its generality; a criticism of criticism,
as it were.”
(LW.1: 298)

- 1 When studying Dewey's work, I caught myself thinking that Dewey's method and metaphysics are essentially interdependent: that if one aims to clarify his naturalistic method, this automatically leads to clarification of his naturalistic metaphysics, and if one attempts to clarify Dewey's metaphysics, this sheds some light on his methodology.
- 2 In this paper, my goal is to clarify Dewey's naturalistic *method*, and if I am right, this should help us see his metaphysics better. Here, my approach is critical: I am aiming not just to describe Dewey's method, but to specify the problems within it, and after doing that, to fix them.
- 3 Since Dewey's *Experience and Nature* is considered to be his *magnum opus* where his naturalistic method (that he termed as “denotative method”) as well as his naturalistic metaphysics are explicitly stated, this work is my main guide. I also attempt to show that Dewey's metaphysics as well as his methodology are not as explicitly and clearly formulated as it can seem *prima facie*.
- 4 The main method that I employ in this paper is that of genealogical “deconstruction”¹ followed by pragmatic “reconstruction.”² This method was employed in *Experience and Nature* by Dewey himself. For example, when talking about the mind-body problem, Dewey suggests that its “solution” [...] “is to be found in a revision of the preliminary assumptions about existence which generate the problem” (LW.1: 202). Therefore,

Dewey's meta-approach can be summarized by the following maxim: *Not to start with conclusions/solutions, and thus, not to take them for granted, but to start with the revision of the premises/assumptions on which the very problem is based.* In his *Experience and Nature*, Dewey applies this approach not only to the mind-body problem but to the whole history of philosophy: first he genealogically “deconstructs” the premises on which the problem is based, and then he pragmatically “reconstructs” the matter (usually via dissolving the original problem). Thus, I will apply the same meta-approach to Dewey's own naturalistic methodology (his denotative method) which will also have some consequences as regards his metaphysics.

5 The structure of the paper consists of two parts, thus reflecting the meta-approach applied in it. In Part 1, I genealogically “deconstruct” Dewey's denotative method, while in Part 2, I pragmatically “reconstruct” it. What I am going to do in this paper is the following:

(1) I claim that Dewey's “immediate empiricism” (that is the philosophical ground of Dewey's naturalistic method) and his pragmatism (instrumentalism) are essentially incompatible. Dewey's denotative method is not only strictly metaphysically laden but is heavily socially/politically laden as well. By the latter, I mean Dewey's main hidden assumption of the “common man” that grounds “common sense” as its main bearer. I argue that the latter prevents Dewey's method to be genuinely scientifically and instrumentally applicable. From this, it follows that one has to modify Dewey's naturalistic method in the first place.

(2) Dewey's “primary experience” must not be identified with the “non-cognitive.” I claim that such identification leads to contradictions like “non-cognitive cognitive”/“immediate mediacy”/“immediate meaning.” In order to avoid these contradictions, one has to acknowledge that all of our qualitative experience is *cognitive* (but not to be reduced to “intellectual”) in the sense that we always start with *interpretations*. Therefore, our primary experience is always mediated with *interpretive meaning*. Immediate empiricism in its original postulation is false: qualities are indeed objective (as emergent properties of objective situations) but are always mediated through *interpretive effort* that is grounded in the organism's *sensorimotor coordination*. This leads to the reconstruction of Dewey's “immediate empiricism” into the “hermeneutic empiricism.”

(3) I claim that Dewey's identification of primary experience with “common sense” leads to the interpretation of immediate empiricism's postulate as some kind of “intuitionism” (as based on the “common sense intuition”) which is at odds with Dewey's pragmatism (instrumentalism) and pragmatism overall. Thus, instead of identification of primary experience with common sense, I claim that it would be better to identify it purely with the *problematic situation*.

(4) One of the ways to modify Dewey's method further would be through the substitution of his notion of “common sense” with what I would call “sound reason.” The latter I see as more pragmatically and scientifically oriented than common sense, and if to bracket Dewey's main hidden political assumption of the “common man” that grounds “common sense,” *sound reason* is something that Dewey should actually have appealed to instead.

Part 1. Genealogical Deconstruction

2. Dewey's Denotative Method. A Thread Through Labyrinth?

- 6 What are the origins of method/metaphysics “interdependence” that I was mentioning in the Introduction? To find this out, I invite the reader to look at the *origins* of Dewey's denotative method itself. One of the major Dewey scholars, Thomas Alexander (2004) associates Dewey's denotative-empirical method with the “thread through labyrinth.” Dewey himself viewed his denotative method/pattern of inquiry as a “unified method” with that of natural sciences. But if the method in itself is perceived as a “labyrinth,” how can it be *applied* successfully in both philosophy and especially in sciences in the first place?

2.1. A Case of Confusion

- 7 Alexander aims to distinguish between the “denotative method” (as genuinely *philosophic* method) and the “pattern of inquiry” (a label introduced by Dewey (1938) in his monumental *Logic: Theory of Inquiry*) that is the core of Dewey's “instrumentalism” or “theory of knowing.”
- 8 Thus, Alexander writes:
- Instrumentalism is Dewey's theory of inquiry, i.e., his theory of knowing. The “denotative method” on the other hand is *philosophical method*, i.e., a way of preventing philosophy from succumbing to “intellectualism”; it is a way of putting “knowing” in context and making “experience” serviceable for the real philosophical project: wisdom. (Alexander 2004: 248)
- 9 And as a way out, Alexander finds “aesthetics a particularly significant, though neglected, aspect of Deweyan philosophy” (*ibid.*) that leads him to “believe” that Dewey's *Art as Experience* is “more of a key in understanding Dewey's philosophy than has been generally recognized” (*ibid.*: 249).
- 10 So, according to Alexander, it is the instrumentalist method (or “pattern of inquiry”) that is purely scientific (as the “theory of knowing”), but the denotative method is more than that. As essentially “philosophic,” denotative procedure is the way not just to knowledge but to “wisdom.” I tend to disagree with such a bifurcation between Dewey's denotative method and his instrumentalism. To me, they appear as essentially the same methods but expressed in different words. Dewey viewed both of them as scientific not in terms of the subject-matter but *in kind*. First, let's look at how Dewey himself views the matter, and then we can speculate as to what could be the cause for Alexander to bifurcate Dewey's method into two.
- 11 Let's start with Dewey's 1938 version:
- The attainment of unified method means that the fundamental unity of the structure of inquiry in common sense and science be recognized, their difference being one in the *problems* with which they are directly concerned, *not* in their *respective logics*. It is not urged that attainment of a unified logic, a theory of inquiry, will resolve the split in our beliefs and procedures. But it is affirmed that it will not be resolved without it. (LW.12: 84; my emphasis)

- 12 Already in 1905, when talking about his “postulate of immediate empiricism,”³ Dewey expresses the same thought as he would express in his *Logic: Theory of Inquiry* (1938): “But the real significance of the principle is that of a *method of philosophical analysis* – a method *identical in kind* (but differing in *problem* and hence in operation) with that of a *scientist*.” (MW.3: 165; my emphasis).
- 13 Finally, already in the Preface to the second edition of his *Experience and Nature* (1929), Dewey writes the following:
- All art is instrumental* in its use of techniques and tools. It is shown that normal artistic experience involves bringing to a better balance than is found elsewhere in either nature or experience the consummatory and instrumental phases of events. Art thus represents the culminating event of nature as well as the climax of experience. In this connection the usual sharp separation made between art and science is criticized; it is argued that *science as method* is *more basic* than *science as subject-matter*, and that *scientific inquiry is an art*, at once instrumental in control and final as a pure enjoyment of mind. (LW1: 8-9; my emphasis)
- 14 Let’s unpack this quote. Dewey does not identify “instrumental” and “instrumentalism” with just “theory of knowing” and especially with “intellectualism.” Moreover, he states that “science as method” is “more basic” than “science as subject-matter.” And “scientific inquiry is an art.” But art in itself is “instrumental.” If we were to follow Alexander’s understanding of “instrumental” as just “theory of knowing,” then we would have to conclude that art is also a theory and practice of just “knowing” which is, of course, something that Alexander would avoid saying at any price.
- 15 But, Dewey’s notion of “instrumental” is not to be reduced to just “knowing.” Because if we do, we again would have to conclude that art (as instrumental) is purely “knowing” and as such, is an “intellectualist” enterprise. What is “intellectualism” then? According to Dewey, it is “the theory that all experiencing is a mode of knowing, and that all subject-matter, all nature, is, in principle, to be reduced and transformed till it is defined in terms identical with the characteristics presented by refined objects of science as such” (LW.1: 28). Thus, Dewey claims that “intellectualism” appears when we tend to reduce nature to the “refined objects” of “science as such.” Here, he says nothing about the scientific *method* of “science as such.” Because, as we saw earlier, the scientific *method* is “more basic than science as subject-matter.” Therefore, when Dewey refers to the “refined objects of science as such,” he seems to refer to the scientific “subject-matter” and *not* to the scientific method *per se*.
- 16 From this it follows that Alexander seems to make some kind of a category mistake. Since he basically identifies Dewey’s “instrumentalism” with Dewey’s theory of inquiry/knowing, this leads to the (mis-)identification of Dewey’s instrumentalism with “intellectualism,” and limits inquiry as such to the latter. And since Alexander wants to escape the identification of Dewey’s philosophy with instrumentalism-as-intellectualism, and, therefore, aims “to contextualize ‘instrumentalism’ within a broader and deeper philosophical methodology” (Alexander 2004: 248), he simply misses Dewey’s own point that “all art is instrumental” (but not as intellectualist). And since science-as-*method* is *art*, it is also *instrumental*. And in natural sciences it is science-as-method-as-instrumental that helps eliminate the gap between experience and nature, as “the only method”/“the only way” to be “intelligently used as a *means* of disclosing the realities of nature,” [my emphasis] and “penetrating its secrets” by getting directly at nature’s heart (LW.1: 4-5, 11).

- 17 According to Dewey, “the inquirer must use the *empirical method* if his findings are to be treated as scientific” (*ibid.*: 11; my emphasis). And later on, Dewey boldly claims: “This empirical method I shall call the *denotative method*.” (*Ibid.*: 16).⁴

2.2. Dewey’s Denotative Method. An Overview

- 18 Now let’s overview the very pattern of the denotative method itself. Dewey (following James) states that our experience is “double-barreled” (LW.1: 18). It is basically a cluster of two different but interconnected *functions*, the “primary experience” and the “secondary experience.” The first denotes our experience in its “unanalyzed totality,” a qualitatively “gross” experience, a “macroscopic” one (*ibid.*: 15, 18). S. Morris Eames identifies Dewey’s primary experience with Peirce’s “firstness” that he understands as a “sheer feeling” (Eames 2003: 34). Primary experience is *immediate*. The latter leads to an interpretation of it as *non-cognitive* (*ibid.*: 17; Alexander 2004: 251), which is backed up by Dewey himself: “It is literally impossible to exclude that context of non-cognitive but experienced subject-matter which gives what is *known* its import” (LW.1: 29); “cognitive experience must originate within that of a non-cognitive sort” (*ibid.*: 30).
- 19 Our “secondary experience,” on the other hand, refers to our *reflective* activity, to *meaning*. It is experience as reflectively “refined,” and meaningfully perceived. Therefore, this kind of experience is *mediate* and *cognitive*. Thus, the trick is (and this is precisely why the method is called “denotative”) that while we always start with denoting objects of primary experience, and then reach the objects of secondary experience (those of philosophy and science), we still have to “go back” to denote the objects of primary experience again in order to test our “intellectual” results achieved in the secondary one. Thus, Dewey thinks that it is exactly what natural sciences do but philosophy does not. And that is exactly what makes sciences successful and of primary importance, while philosophy is usually redundant and of secondary importance. This method is the essence of the natural-scientific approach as such, and if philosophy employs this method, it will become genuinely naturalistic and scientific.
- 20 Despite a seeming scientific-empirical origin of the denotative method, is there any *philosophical* origin of this method?

2.3. A Problem with Dewey’s Immediate Empiricism and the Notion of Primary Experience

- 21 There is no doubt that the first and foremost *philosophical* inspiration for Dewey’s method was William James’ *radical empiricism*.⁵ Based on that, Dewey developed his own famous position that he called “immediate empiricism” or, to be more precise, the “postulate of immediate empiricism” (MW.3: 158-67).
- 22 According to Dewey, “Immediate empiricism postulates that things – anything, everything, in the ordinary and non-technical use of the term ‘thing’ – are what they are experienced as” (*ibid.*: 158). What does it mean? The very postulation itself is already problematic because it leads to different interpretations that seem to be opposite to each other. How to interpret the “as” part correctly? On the one hand, “experienced as” can refer to *meaning*, as it is interpreted in the phenomenological tradition (consciousness is consciousness *of* something *as* something) (Crowell 2013: 65). On the other hand, the “experienced as” part is usually interpreted as the *non-cognitive*

realm of experience. Thus, we already are presented with a problem, “things” that are “experienced as” can both be understood as non-cognitive, and therefore, “immediate,” and cognitive, i.e., mediated through meaning.

- 23 Dewey himself seems to give us reasons to understand his postulate in these two contradictory ways. On the one hand, he calls his empiricism “immediate,” and so suggests that this is the right interpretation of what he actually means. Thus, it is not hard to see that when Dewey is talking about “primary experience”/“gross experience”/“things as *had*” in his *Experience and Nature*, he refers to nothing but “concrete qualitative thing or *that*” from his 1905 paper (MW.3: 163). This leaves us with the impression that our “primary experience” is primarily *non-cognitive* (because Dewey also refers to “that” as “earlier non-cognitionally experienced thing” (*ibid.*: 166)).
- 24 On the other hand, Dewey identifies his “primary experience” with “common sense” by which he means “our day-to-day experience.” But it will be hard to deny that our ordinary experience is mediated with meaning and as such, it is *not* immediate. Even when we look at some very basic stuff like water, commonsensically we *interpret* it as a “liquid we can drink, cook with, take shower with, etc.” The latter pertains again to *interpretive meaning* which leads to thinking that all of the commonly shared “sense” is nothing but such meanings. Therefore, our “common sense” is always mediated with an interpretive meaning, and hence, is not “immediate.” It requires *interpretation* to be done in the first place. Thus, one cannot hold two understandings of primary experience (i.e., immediate/non-cognitive and mediate/cognitive) at once because it leads to the problem of “immediate mediate”/“non-cognitive cognitive”/“immediate meaning” that appears as a contradiction.
- 25 Let’s try to look at the expression “experienced as” in another way. Since our experience, according to Dewey, is basically a cluster of “primary” and “secondary” experiences, “things experienced as” refer to two *functions* of experience as a whole: primary experience is non-cognitive (for now, let’s bracket the common sense dimension), secondary experience is cognitive (meaning), but since experience as such is one thing (i.e., it is not essentially consisting of two separate domains), as “double-barreled,” it leads to interpreting experience as a whole as “immediate mediate”/“non-cognitive cognitive”/“immediate meaning” as well. An expression which again appears as contradictory in itself.
- 26 One way to argue for the “immediate meaning” as true would be via claiming that meanings are essential constituents of reality, and therefore, some of them are “mediate” and some are “immediate.” This leads to the idea that some kind of “meaning idealism” is true. But Dewey is not easy with any kind of idealism. Thus, is there any way to avoid these striking contradictions and even the possibility of ending up with just another kind of idealism? Dewey himself was totally fine with such a combination. He did use the expression “immediate meaning” himself (e.g., LW.1: 198, 200). But why? What are the conditions of possibility for that? We have to dig into Dewey’s method deeper.

2.4. A Further Problem with Dewey’s Notion of Primary Experience

- 27 As mentioned, we need always to go back to the things that are *had*, and to avoid substitution of the latter with our philosophic and scientific “knowings.” But what

exactly does Dewey mean by “things as *had*?” Dewey’s “primary experience”/“things as *had*” refers to nothing but *qualities*. Thus, we should further clarify what Dewey means by the latter.

- 28 One can definitely say that for Dewey, qualities are not “qualia” in the analytic philosophy of mind sense. Deweyan qualities are essential constituents of a *situation* that an organism is in. Therefore, qualities are not purely subjective/phenomenal properties of an organism. Instead, they are objective immediate data *in* and *of* the specific situation. Since situations (as contextual wholes) are objective, qualities as their emergent properties are objective as well. Anyone who enters the contextual whole of a situation would be able to feel its specific, unique, and immediate qualities.
- 29 For example, when I and my dog hear a noise in the house at 2 AM in the morning, we both seem rapidly to interpret it as some “bad sign.” Therefore, this situation to both me and my dog appears as problematic, and even fearful because there’s a rapid assumption that there could be an intruder who wants to rob the house and so on. Therefore, the problematicity and the fearfulness of this situation are not anthropomorphic, and are indeed shareable even with non-human species.
- 30 When one feels anger, fear, or sadness, these emotions are not purely subjective states, they are direct givens of a specific situation one is in. It is not that the person is just angry, or fearful or sad, it is the person’s being in a specific situation(s) (that are “angry,” “fearful” or “sad”) that determine these qualities to be felt by that person. Situations themselves are not some static or fixed entities or states of affairs. They are products of interaction between an organism with its environment. (But in themselves, these “products” are not just “states,” but more like *processes*.) Therefore, the *activity* of the organism is an important element for the appearance of situations and their specific qualities. And this seems to cause a problem. If it is only situations that are fearful, sad, etc., and not purely subjective states of a person/organism, then how to explain an organism’s “phenomenal” states that are *not* intersubjectively shareable overall? Does Dewey mean that it is to be a *norm* that it is due to our being in specific situations that we feel certain emotions, and when someone appeals to purely subjective states (i.e., not intersubjectively shareable), then it is to be *abnormal*? But practically speaking, many people either misunderstand the situations they are in or “impose” their own feelings and emotions onto seemingly objective situations. But if qualities are “immediate” then how is it possible to misperceive them in the first place? This leads to the hypothesis that qualities are actually *not* immediate and are heavily dependent on organisms’ *interpretations* of the specific qualitative event(s).
- 31 For example, when a student enters a party, she sees people laughing. The immediate quality is that of the cheerfulness of a situation. A bit later she discovers that the common laugh is caused by a senior publicly embarrassing a freshman. Now the same “cheerfulness” of a situation has changed into the feeling of sadness. But she is the only one in the group who feels sad because others are perceiving the quality of cheerfulness and not sadness.
- 32 How to explain this example? There is no doubt that the case is not just conceivable but empirical. It is usually well-portrayed in the movies and can be experienced potentially by anyone. But if we accept Dewey’s view that the qualities of situations are immediate, then the situation described above simply would not make sense. If qualities are immediate, the majority of that group should have felt the same sadness as she felt. But they did not. Or, she must have felt the same cheerfulness that that group had felt. But

she did not. This seems to imply that qualities are not immediate but are always mediated via our *interpretations*.

- 33 It is interesting that Dewey himself suggests that our perceptions of qualities are *not* immediate but are rather interpreted on the basis of various cultural/social/political factors:

Only analysis shows that the ways in which we believe and expect have a tremendous effect upon *what* we believe and expect. We have discovered at last that these ways are set, almost abjectly so, by social factors, by tradition and the influence of education. Thus we discover that we believe many things not because the things are so, but because we have become habituated through the weight of authority, by imitation, prestige, instruction, the unconscious effect of language, etc. We learn, in short, that qualities which we attribute to objects ought to be imputed to our own ways of experiencing them, and that these in turn are due to the force of intercourse and custom. [...] The power of custom and tradition in scientific as well as in moral beliefs never suffered a serious check until analysis revealed the effect of personal ways of believing upon things believed, and the extent to which these ways are unwittingly fixed by social custom and tradition. (LW.1: 23)

- 34 Can it be the case that Dewey's own views were "unwittingly fixed by social custom and tradition" as well?

3. Dewey's "Common Man"

- 35 Besides the assumption that situations and their qualities are immediate and objective, is there any other assumption that grounds Dewey's intention to identify primary experience with common sense? It seems that the assumption in question that Dewey "unwittingly fixes" is that of the "common man." Indeed, how can "common sense" be a widespread phenomenon if there were no further assumptions about its bearer, i.e., the "common man?" *Who* and *what* is that? One can deduce that the latter is a "practical man," an "artisan," to whom Dewey refers in many of his works, including *Experience and Nature*. Since common sense is a "day-to-day experience" then a common man is a person who lives his/her day-to-day ordinary life. A common man is a practical person that mainly solves practical problems. It is the notion of common man that seems to be both Dewey's starting point and the end point of his denotative method. It appears that Dewey's main assumption is that common men share common problems and offer common solutions.
- 36 Dewey's common man is a highly intelligent person that successfully deals with his environment without an appeal to the sophisticated "refined" philosophy or science. It is the common man that should be an exemplar for philosophy and not vice versa. Since Dewey is mostly against the division between theory and practice, he is also against the division of people into the "leisure class" and practical people. He often repeats that philosophers are still a "leisure class" by historical inertia. When common people were people of arts and other practical activities, philosophers needed leisure to comprehend "essences" as something static and fixed. Philosophers as well as priests were in a "quest for certainty" (to use Dewey's later expression). It is only practical people who really recognized our existence as "precarious and stable" and were able to use arts instrumentally to stabilize our always precarious and unstable world. Therefore, Dewey's famous "reconstruction in philosophy" is not only an attempt to

employ the empirically-scientific method, but also an attempt to reconstruct the very status of philosophers and philosophy as such. Instead of being somewhere in the sky, it needs to become more grounded and deal with earthly and “practical” problems.

- 37 From this, it follows that for Dewey the meaning of “practical”/“instrumental” is also politically laden. Simply because scientists deal with many problems within their respective spheres but it will be very much naïve to identify them with just the problems of the “common man.” One can be still a “practical” person without being a “commonsense” person overall.

3.1. Is There any “Common Man?”

- 38 Where could Dewey’s assumption of a “common man” come from? Looking at the origins of Dewey’s idea of democracy can help clarify the matter. Michael J. Rockler (1997) while quoting from Gutek (1991) suggests that Dewey’s view of democracy is coming from his childhood upbringing:

The Deweys were members of the Congregational church. Life in small-town Vermont had an important impact on Dewey who, throughout his life, cherished a vision of the face to face, town meeting type of community that existed in New England. This vision of the small-town community may have influenced his emphasis on the role of the community in shaping social intelligence and participation. (Rockler 1997: 5; Gutek: 1991: 333)

- 39 Thus, it seems that it was Dewey’s “small-town community” that also shaped his view about “common sense” and “common man.” And indeed, Dewey’s view on democracy is inherently connected to the idea of “Common Man”:

Democracy is a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature. Belief in the Common Man is a familiar article in the democratic creed. (LW.14: 226)

- 40 How does Dewey define “common man” overall? In his “Beliefs and Existences” (MW.3: 83-101) Dewey says the following: “the world of the common man, – that is, of man as an individual and not as a professional being or class specimen.” (*Ibid.*: 83). Thus, there is not only a genuine gap between a philosopher and a common man but “the professional man, the philosopher, has been largely occupied in a systematic effort to discredit the standpoint of the common man, that is, to disable belief as an ultimately valid principle.” For Dewey, “modern philosophy,” after it “absorbed the Stoic dogma,” became nothing but “epistemology.” The latter is just about “[p]assionless imperturbability, absolute detachment, complete subjection to a ready-made and finished reality – physical it may be, mental it may be, logical it may be – is its professed ideal” (*ibid.*: 84-5). Nevertheless, even though philosophers alienated themselves and became a different “leisure” class, still there is “the possibility of a common understanding, in thought, in language, in outlook, of the philosopher and the common man” (*ibid.*: 99).

- 41 However, one might wonder: “Is there any such thing as a ‘common man’ in the first place?” “Isn’t it just another kind of ‘realism’ in the classical sense?” In the Medieval Ages, philosophers used to debate about the existence of “universals.” Roughly, the question was: “Is a ‘horse’ just an abstraction or does it *really* exist?” Nominalists held that there is no such thing as a “common horse,” it is just a name for individual animals that have some differences. The “commonness” in question is just an abstraction.

Realists, on the other hand, stated that a universal “horse” does exist, and there is indeed a real object, a real “common horse,” to which it corresponds.

- 42 By analogy, Dewey’s view of “common sense” and of “common man” as its bearer appears to me a kind of (common sense) *realism*. Dewey does not hold that “common man” is just a useful (“instrumental”) abstraction. Rather, he generally thinks that “common man” is objectively real and now it is the main goal of philosophy to descend from heaven to earth, and thus, to “go back” to the reality of common man (common sense), which means that of “primary experience.”⁶
- 43 Therefore, besides the strictly metaphysical assumptions (like the existence of objective immediate qualities), there is also a strong social/political assumption on which Dewey’s method rests and on which it seems to be “unwittingly fixed.” And it is that of “common sense realism.”⁷

3.2. Pragmatic Approach to Dewey’s Immediate Empiricism and Primary Experience

- 44 Is Dewey’s immediate empiricism (as “concrete qualitative thing or *that*”) compatible with his pragmatism and with pragmatism overall? Dewey’s description of “primary experience” is ambiguous. On the one hand, he identifies it with the “unanalyzed totality” (non-cognitive) while on the other hand, he identifies it strictly with “common sense” (cognitive). In his “Re-Introduction” to *Experience and Nature* (LW.1: 331-61), Dewey is even talking about “common sense knowing,” which only reinforces my previous assumption that common sense is indeed cognitive. Thus, we have two ways to interpret “primary experience.” On the one hand, it is “immediate”; on the other hand, it is also a form of “knowing” and therefore always mediated with meaning. These two strains of interpretation can lead into one “immediate knowledge/meaning.” What is this “immediate knowledge” then? It seems that it is nothing but what is known in the modern philosophy as “intuition.” But how is this compatible with pragmatism?
- 45 The fact is that pragmatism is essentially against *any* kind of intuition. Pragmatism as a philosophical tradition started with the criticism of Descartes and precisely of his *intuitive method*. Charles Peirce, in his “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities” (Peirce 1955 [1868]: 228-50) famously undermined the Cartesian method while stating that “We have no power of Intuition, but every cognition is determined logically by previous cognitions” (*ibid.*: 230). Therefore, every cognition is always mediated by another cognition. There is no such thing as “immediate knowledge/cognition.” Thus, the pragmatic method (as exemplified through the “pragmatic maxim”) is about testing every meaning in its practical consequences.
- Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object. (Peirce 1955 [1878]: 31)
- 46 The procedure starts with meaning (let’s call it *initial* meaning) and after looking at facts or via making experiments ends with the *outcome* meaning (as the *consequences* of the inquiry or experiment). The latter becomes the “real” meaning of the theory or hypothesis that was tested. Thus, in the pragmatic attitude, we start with meaning (cognition) and we end with meaning (cognition) as well. In immediate empiricism, on the other hand, we start with the “common sense” or “common sense knowing” that is

“immediate.” That seems to contradict what Peirce was trying to say, i.e., there is no immediate knowledge as such. It also contradicts Dewey’s ubiquitous denial of any kind of intuition respectively. It seems then, that Dewey’s “immediate empiricism” fails his own and the overall pragmatic test as just another kind of intuitionism.

- 47 There’s another problem with Dewey’s denotative procedure. After our being in the reflective mode (“secondary experience”), we are supposed somehow to “go back” in order to “denote” that “unanalyzed totality” of “common sense” that is immediate, and from which we initially started. But how? As we saw earlier, Dewey has admitted that the way we perceive objects’ qualities can be heavily socially/politically/culturally influenced. So then how is it actually possible to “go back” without practicing what in Husserlian phenomenology is called “epoché” or “bracketing?” For (the later) Husserl it is only via the phenomenological *epoché* that it is possible to “go back” to the “life-world” (*Lebenswelt*) (i.e., our prescientific and ordinary way of perceiving the surrounding world (*Umwelt*)) (Husserl 1970).⁸ But Dewey has no bracketing technique whatsoever. Even more, Dewey is very much skeptical of the whole phenomenological tradition as still “Cartesian” (Dewey 2013: 90). His naturalism does not allow him to appeal to the phenomenologically “given” or to “intuition.”⁹ For Dewey, these things are simply “super-natural” and Cartesian. But as the “immediate empiricist,” Dewey seems to do what officially he is opposed to, because, as based on my analysis above, immediate empiricism appears as just another kind of intuition (let’s call it “commonsensical intuition”) that is directly at odds with the pragmatic method overall. It seems there is another methodological inconsistency in Dewey’s method.
- 48 Husserl assumed the existence of the “transcendental ego” that “holds sway” of our lived-body and that is the essential ground for our genuine (transcendental) rationality, but which is hidden behind the veil of the “natural attitude” (basically “common sense”), as well as the “naturalistic attitude” (basically, physicalism); it is only via the phenomenological epoché and reductions that it is possible to recover that transcendental realm of our existence. Dewey, on the other hand, just assumed the existence of the “common man” that holds sway in every one of us. And it is only such a “common man realism” that seems to be the real condition of the possibility for our “going back” to the “unanalyzed totality” of the primary experience with common sense as its essential ground, and of Dewey’s immediate empiricism as true overall.
- 49 Therefore, if one repudiates the idea of “common man,” one has to repudiate the idea of “common sense” (the way Dewey put it) as well. Which also leads to the repudiation of the notion of the “primary experience” in the *original* sense, and of the doctrine of immediate empiricism as well. Does this lead to the destruction of the denotative method as a whole?

Part 2. Pragmatic Reconstruction

4. Dewey’s Denotative Method 2.0. Towards Hermeneutic Empiricism

- 50 After the genealogical “deconstruction”/“analytic dismemberment” of Dewey’s denotative method, one can wonder what is left and whether it is possible

pragmatically to “reconstruct” it overall. I think it is possible. One should undertake the following steps:

1. To get rid of the identification of primary experience with the non-cognitive, and to recognize that our “primary” experience is always an *interpretation* and as such it is always mediated with interpretive meaning, and therefore, it is *cognitive*. Qualities are indeed objective (as emergent properties of objective situations) but are always mediated with an interpretive meaning. This leads to the reconstruction of Dewey’s “immediate empiricism” into the “hermeneutic empiricism” instead.
2. To repudiate Dewey’s identification of primary experience with “common sense,” and to identify it with just *problematic situation* which is not necessarily commonsensical.
3. To substitute “common sense” with “sound reason.”

4.1. Things Are What They Are Interpreted As

51 Let’s start with (1). According to Dewey, our experience is essentially *problematic*. An organism would simply die if nothing were going on. An organism always needs some problems in order to survive. A problem starts when “*something happens*” (LW.1: 13). But how is it “immediate” if to recognize this “something,” an organism should *interpret* the event as something problematic? An individuation of this something-as-happening from the contextual whole of the situation needs an *interpretive effort* of the organism in the first place. Without such an effort, this “something” will not even be noticed as “something” to pay attention to. An organism *interprets* events as troublesome, pleasant, sad, scary, etc. Therefore, “something happens” is always mediated through interpretive meaning. It is always *cognitive*. Although it does not entail the latter’s being necessarily “intellectual.” Thus, we can distinguish between two senses of “cognitive”: *weak* and *strong*. By the “weak” sense of the cognitive I mean an *interpretive effort* of the organism as described above, whereas the “strong” sense of the cognitive refers to our *intellectual* activity. Dewey seems strictly to identify “cognitive” with “intellectual.” Thus, he writes: “[...] the only way to maintain the doctrine of natural continuity is to recognize the secondary and derived character of aspects of experience of the intellectual or cognitive.” (LW.1: 30). From this, it follows that, since Dewey wants to avoid “intellectualism,” he tends to reduce the “cognitive” only to its “strong” sense while leaving the “weak” sense of it out of the picture. Such reduction leads to the identification of objective qualities and the meaning of primary experience as “immediate.” Since I introduce the “weak” sense of the cognitive as the *interpretive effort*, I must clarify the origins of the latter.

52 By “interpretive effort” I mean essentially an *act* that is grounded in what Dewey in his 1896 seminal article “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology” (EW.5: 96-109) referred to as the “sensorimotor coordination.” The latter is in itself also an *act* that consists of two interdependent *functions* “stimulus” (sensation) and “response” (movement/motion). As opposed to the classical tradition of looking at stimulus and response as separate “existences” that constitute the “reflex arc,” Dewey proposes to look at them “teleologically.” They are functional parts of the same functional whole. This whole presents itself not as an arc, but as a *circuit*. The way Dewey describes this process suggests that his 1896 paper is not only the document of his functional psychology but also one of the earliest statements of his *instrumentalism*:

The stimulus is that phase of the forming co-ordination which represents the *conditions* which have to be met in bringing it to a *successful* issue; the response is

that phase of one and the same forming co-ordination which gives the key to meeting these conditions, which serves as *instrument* in effecting the successful co-ordination. They are therefore strictly correlative and contemporaneous. (*Ibid.*: 109; my emphasis)

- 53 Dewey emphasizes the point that both “stimulus” and “response” are to be “discovered” or to be “made out” (*ibid.*: 106, 109). But *how* are they “discovered?” Dewey makes it clear that stimulus and response are not existences, but *interpretations* of the functional kind. What makes them functional is that they do not come out of the blue but are means to some end. What makes them interpretations is that to see the sensory stimulus *as* stimulus, and a response *as* response is to *interpret* them as such from the whole of the sensorimotor circuit/act:

[...] it is only the assumed common reference to an inclusive end which marks each member off as stimulus and response, that apart from such reference we have only antecedent and consequent; in other words, the distinction is one of interpretation. (*Ibid.*: 105)

- 54 Even before the “stimulus” and “response” are recognized, the sensorimotor act comes first:

In any case, what precedes the “stimulus” is a whole act, a sensori-motor co-ordination. What is more to the point, the “stimulus” emerges out of this co-ordination; it is born from it as its matrix. It represents as it were an escape from it. (*Ibid.*: 100)

- 55 After the stimulus was interpreted by an organism *as* stimulus, the response (or movement/motion) “is only for the sake of determining the stimulus, of fixing what kind of a stimulus it is, of interpreting it” (*ibid.*: 102). Because, “the motion is not a certain kind of existence; it is a sort of sensory experience interpreted, just as a candle flame, or burn from candle flame. All are on a par” (*ibid.*: 103). On and on, Dewey is emphasizing that both stimulus and response are the functional “terms of interpretation”:

[...] it is impossible to apply the phrase “sensori-motor” to the occurrence of as a simple phrase of description; it has validity only as a term of interpretation, only, that is, as defining various functions exercised. (*Ibid.*)

- 56 In a very instrumentalist fashion, Dewey states: “Just as the discovery of the sensation marks the establishing of the problem, so the constitution of the response marks the solution of this problem.” (*Ibid.*: 105-6). Based on that, we can deduce that what Dewey called “stimulus”/“sensation”/“problem,” and “response”/“movement”/“motion”/“instrument” in the “Reflex Arc” article, signifies what he termed as “primary experience” and “secondary experience” later in *Experience and Nature*. Both stimulus/primary experience and response/secondary experience are *functional interpretations* of the situation that an organism is in. Both are grounded in and distinguished from the sensorimotor circuit/coordination as its functional phases. Therefore, both clusters are always mediated through *interpretive meaning* that is never “immediate.” This also shows that Dewey’s “immediate empiricism” of 1905 and as applied in 1925/1929, is at serious odds with his functional psychology and instrumentalism as presented in 1896.

- 57 The evidence presented in Dewey’s “Reflex Arc” article suggests to reconstruct the “immediate” part of his “immediate empiricism” into the “hermeneutic” one instead. The outcome is “hermeneutic empiricism.” Dewey’s immediate empiricism’s *motto* is “things are what they are experienced as.” While the hermeneutic empiricist’s *motto*

would be “things are what they are interpreted as.” Or, “things are experienced what they are interpreted as.”

4.2. Primary Experience as the Problematic Situation

58 (2). Dewey’s preoccupation with an understanding of primary experience as “common sense” leads him to thinking that genuine science is essentially commonsensical¹⁰ and always goes back to common sense to “verify” and “check” with its statements. Again, this assumption seems to be based on his implicit idea that there is such a creature as a “common man” in all of us (compare to Husserl’s assumption about the “transcendental ego”). So in order to check our philosophical and scientific assumptions with the “common man,” philosophers should descend from their philosophical heaven. But as showed earlier, this assumption leads to some kind of (Medieval) realism with which Dewey’s instrumentalism should be at odds. If we bracket the “common man” idea, then it would seem that one’s “common sense” depends on a person’s *practical identity*. It is hard to believe that quantum physicists’ “common sense” (as *intersubjectively shared meanings*) would correspond to the “common sense” of some religious sect, or to that of peasants/farmers. Thus, to avoid confusion, primary experience should rather be identified with the *problematic situation* as such. And the latter’s complexity would be different depending on people’s different practical identities. What remains is the *situation-as-problematic*.

59 Therefore, the “reconstructed” version of the denotative method would be the following. We start with the *situation-as-problematic*. In order to distinguish that specific situation as problematic, one has to make some *interpretive effort*. The latter can be already seen as an initial hypothesis/interpretation of the event. Then we start making further hypothesis(es)/interpretation(s) in order to stabilize our “precarious” situation into a more stable one. That is where our fully-fledged “secondary experience” comes in. And then we go back to our problem in order to solve it. If we are successful, our situation has been stabilized and the worry has gone; if not, then we need to look for other hypotheses/interpretations (“secondary experience(s)”) in order to stabilize it. In a sense, “secondary experience” (as our interpretive effort) goes hand-in-hand with our “primary experience” (our problematic situation).¹¹ But again, and to remind the reader, that when it comes to the latter, we got rid of the purely non-cognitive level in it (because it is always mediated via interpretive meaning, and therefore is “weakly cognitive”), and we also eliminated its universal identification with common sense.

4.3. Reconstruction of the “Common Sense” Into “Sound Reason”

60 (3). After we genealogically “deconstructed” Dewey’s notion of “common sense,” is there any way pragmatically to reconstruct it? I think there is, and here is my proposal. Instead of the concept of “common sense,” I am offering the notion of *sound reason*. I want to show that this concept is compatible with both Dewey’s pragmatism and his overall natural-scientific orientation.

61 Let’s start with the semantics. What makes it a “reason” and what makes it “sound?” Dewey’s philosophy is not against rationality as such but is rather at odds with the classical *rationalism* like that of Descartes and Spinoza because it is presupposing the “antecedent reality” as “fixed” before the inquiry even starts. In fact, he pragmatically

reconstructs the notion of rationality, and offers what I elsewhere called an “instrumentalist rationality.”¹² It is essentially the means-consequences relation with the core idea that an organism uses ideas as “instruments” (“means”) in order to resolve the problematic situation (“end”) it is in. Ideas are not “real” in this sense. They are *instrumental*, and are to be controlled by facts (and not vice versa). What is genuinely real is the situation which is problematic. That is my justification of the “reason” part.

- 62 What makes the reason “sound?” When an organism successfully applies ideas that it uses as “tools” to the problematic situation, and when the latter is resolved that makes those ideas “sound.” They “make sense” not because they are inherently “beautiful” in themselves, but because they “work.” They transform a previously precarious situation into a more stable one. How is the “sound reason” different from “common sense?” The above-mentioned explanation should have provided the evidence that the sound reason is essentially *pragmatic*. It starts with the *consequences* and treats ideas as *hypotheses*, and not as “fixed” and infallible data. Therefore, sound reason is fundamentally *critical*.
- 63 Common sense instead is mostly *uncritical*. What makes it uncritical? Well, it takes many things for granted. For example, let’s look at the commonsensical belief in the mind-body relation. Andrew S. Gordon and Jerry R. Hobbs (2011) focused on “commonsense (naive) psychology” with its emphasis on “the commonsense theory that non-scientists use to make everyday inferences, particularly with respect to the interpretation of natural language about the mind and the body.” In the end, the result they got was a theory that most resembled Descartes’ mind-body dualism as presented in his *Meditations* (Gordon & Hobbs 2011: 1-2, 6). This implies that common sense is still Cartesian. The latter methodology as well as metaphysics is Dewey’s arch enemy.¹³ Another example comes from Dewey’s 1896 “Reflex Arc” article discussed above. Dewey claims that the “older dualism of body and soul finds a distinct echo in the current dualism of stimulus and response” (EW.5: 96). Such a dualism is totally *commonsensical*: “The ordinary interpretation would say that the sensation of light is a stimulus to the grasping as a response, the burn resulting is a stimulus to withdrawing the hand as response and so on,” and though it is the “rough practical way” to see things, “when we ask for the psychological adequacy the case is quite different” (*ibid.*: 97). Overall, such an “ordinary conception of the reflex arc theory, instead of being a case of plain science, is a survival of the metaphysical dualism, first formulated by Plato,” and as such, is “a mixed materialistic-spiritualistic assumption” (*ibid.*: 104).
- 64 On the other hand, since sound reason is more scientifically inclined, it thinks that Darwinian evolution is true because it is based on scientific evidence. Since Dewey’s own “emergent’ theory of mind” is Darwin inspired, sound reason would be more eager to accept Dewey’s own emergentist perspective on the mind-body relation, than the commonsensical religiously inspired Cartesian one. The same applies to the “reflex arc” discussion.
- 65 Finally, one could ask: “Who is the bearer of the ‘sound reason?’” Answer: the bearer of the sound reason can be anyone. Sound reasoner is not a mythical “common man.” It does not depend on the practical identity either. Sound reason is a *function* and the *method of intelligence*. Anyone who can think critically, who cherishes evidence, who is able to see a problematic situation as problematic, and starts to undertake actions in order to stabilize it, can be called a “sound reasoner.”

- 66 With such a modification, I think, this pragmatically reconstructed denotative method can be considered a good candidate for being genuinely empirical and scientific.

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NOTES

1. Here, I use the word "deconstruction" in the wide sense as "the analytic examination of something (such as a theory) often in order to reveal its inadequacy" (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deconstruction). Thus, when I say "deconstruct," I mean it in a more general way like "to subject to rigorous analysis, as to reveal weakness or error" (www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/deconstruct). Therefore, I am using it more as antonym and antecedent to pragmatic "reconstruction." Once the problem (theoretical "construction") is identified, we seek to find its *origins*, i.e., what makes it as a problem. After doing that, we pragmatically "reconstruct" the issue, in order to fix the problem itself.

2. Such a view of the philosophical methodology can be found in Dewey himself. Thus, in chapter 2 of *Experience and Nature*, Dewey is talking about the "analytic dismemberment and synthetic reconstruction of experience" as the task of philosophy that he borrows from anthropology (LW. 1: 42).

3. To be discussed in section 2.3.

4. Paradoxically, the reason for Alexander's bifurcation of Dewey's method can be found in Dewey himself. Thus, Alexander cites Dewey's letter dating back to 1940: "I have come to think of my own position as cultural or humanistic Naturalism. Naturalism, properly interpreted, seems

to me a more adequate term than Humanism. Of course I have always limited my use of 'instrumentalism' to my theory of thinking and knowledge; the word 'pragmatism' I have used very little, and then with reserves." (Alexander 2014: 69).

So how to interpret this letter? Here, Dewey openly contradicts what he was saying in his *Experience and Nature*. My take on it is the following. (1). Since, *Experience and Nature* is a published work, and thus, was intended to be read by anyone, I take the view expressed there as having more authority than his private correspondence.

(2). Since Dewey's statement there is semi-biographical, I wouldn't treat his claim "I have always limited my use of 'instrumentalism' to my theory of thinking and knowledge" to be too seriously a reliable source as opposed to his officially published work because given the immense work he produced throughout his life, and given his own testimony that he is not very good with the description of his own philosophical development (See "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" [LW.5]), I still prefer to stay with my above-mentioned interpretation of Dewey's method as the "unified" one, and therefore, not to reduce Dewey's instrumentalism to just his "theory of knowing."

5. Although Dewey viewed his "immediate empiricism" as just another name for the pragmatism, and the scientific method, James, on the other hand, saw his "radical empiricism" as neither a scientific enterprise, nor his pragmatism, but rather as his *worldview*: "I give the name of 'radical empiricism' to my *Weltanschauung*." (James 1977 [1904]: 195).

6. One can also specify the *philosophical* origins of the "common man" idea in Dewey that is coming from his interpretation of Emerson. In his "Emerson - The Philosopher of Democracy" (MW.3: 185-92) Dewey is praising Emerson for his attempt to return philosophy to the "common experience of the everyday man" and it is by the "immediate life" of the latter that Emerson "tries every philosopher [...] even prophets like Plato and Proclus whom Emerson holds most dear, to the test of trial by service rendered the present and immediate experience" (*ibid.*: 188-9). That all of Emersonian "symbols of various uses" are "administered to the common soul" (*ibid.*: 189).

And again, Dewey sees Emerson as a philosopher of the *common man*: "Against creed and system, convention and institution, Emerson stands for restoring to the common man which in the name of religion, of philosophy, of art and of morality, has been embezzled from the common store and appropriated to sectarian and class use." (*ibid.*: 190). From this it follows that, "Emerson is not only a philosopher, but that he is the Philosopher of Democracy" (*ibid.*).

7. I tend to agree with Peter Godfrey-Smith (2002) that Dewey's "common sense realism" should not be articulated via the "mind-independence" thesis because it undermines Dewey's view on mind as a *social* function (although Godfrey-Smith thinks that Dewey is not a common sense realist overall). And I think that this only supports my idea that Dewey's "common sense realism" has a firmer foundation in Dewey's social/political commitment (i.e., that of "common man") than in just a strictly metaphysical one (like that of a "mind-independent reality").

8. In Leonov 2020, I am suggesting that what Dewey called "common sense" in his *Logic*, Husserl referred to as the "life-world" in his *Crisis*.

9. "Non-empirical method starts with a reflective product as if it were primary, as if it were originally 'given'." (LW.1: 19).

10. In fact, Dewey thinks that the tendency of the modern sciences to substitute "qualitative events" for the "older notion of fixed substances" is in agreement with the "attitude of naïve experience" (LW.1: 5).

11. Dewey himself viewed primary experience as a problematic situation: "A philosophy which accepts the denotative or empirical method accepts at full value the fact that reflective thinking transforms confusion, ambiguity and discrepancy into illumination, definiteness and consistency. But it also points to the contextual situation in which thinking occurs. It notes that the starting

point is the actually *problematic*, and that the problematic phase resides in some actual and specifiable situation.” (LW.1: 61).

12. See Leonov 2020.

13. Thus, Dewey is wrong when he claims that common sense/“naïve experience” sees mind and matter as “significant characters of events, presented in different contexts, rather than underlying and ultimate substances” (LW.1: 5). It seems to be rather exactly the opposite.

ABSTRACTS

In this paper, I critically approach the essence of Dewey’s philosophy: his *method*. In particular, it is what Dewey termed as *denotative method* is at the center of my attention. I approach Dewey’s denotative method via what I call the “genealogical deconstruction” that is followed by the “pragmatic reconstruction.” This meta-approach is not alien to Dewey’s philosophy, and in fact was employed by Dewey himself in *Experience and Nature*. The paper consists of two parts. In Part 1, I genealogically deconstruct the philosophical foundation of the denotative method: the doctrine of *immediate empiricism*. The latter was originally stated in Dewey’s 1905 seminal “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism” article, and fully developed twenty years later in his *Experience and Nature*. I claim that Dewey’s immediate empiricism is essentially incompatible with his pragmatism (instrumentalism) and with pragmatism overall. In Part 2, I pragmatically reconstruct Dewey’s denotative method from the perspective of what I term as the “hermeneutic empiricism” which is grounded in Dewey’s 1896 “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology” article. As opposed to the immediate empiricism’s main thesis “things are what they are experienced as,” the motto of the *hermeneutic empiricism* would be “things are what they are interpreted as”/“things are experienced what they are interpreted as.” The above-mentioned pragmatic reconstruction also leads to the transformation of the notion of “common sense” which is vital to Dewey’s method, into the notion of *sound reason*.

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Meaning and Experience

For a Pragmatic Hermeneutics

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- 1 It could be said, as an initial approximation, that the focus on experience is to pragmatism what the focus on meaning is to hermeneutics. Whether the role of induction and abduction in the logic of signs (Peirce), the role of experimental inquiry in scientific research (James) or that of “art as experience” (Dewey), or indeed the function of immediate experience in ordinary knowledge (Mead), experience, in all its dimensions, clearly bears the signature of pragmatism. And be it in the attention paid to interpreting the signs of the living world among the Ancients (Hippocrates, Galen), or in the focus on understanding discourse among the Moderns (Aristotle, Meier, Schleiermacher), or again among the Contemporaries (Heidegger, Gadamer) in the centrality of language to any understanding of the world or of being, the question of meaning is clearly a hallmark of hermeneutics, across its many variants.
- 2 Should we infer, then, that pragmatism is deaf to the question of meaning? By no means; our initial approximation is no more than an approximation, after all. That would be to overlook the semiotics of Peirce, the centrality of symbolism in Mead, the theory of interpretation in Royce, to say nothing of the cardinal function of language in the neo-pragmatism of Rorty, admittedly characterized by the singular way in which he draws on hermeneutics (particularly Gadamer).
- 3 So are we, conversely, to deduce from this initial approximation that hermeneutics knows nothing of experience? That is not the case either. That would be to ignore the richness of experience in Dilthey’s concept of life, and even more so among his heirs, contemporaries and disciples such as Lipps, König, and especially Misch. But, among the contemporaries, it is really in Gadamer that experience performs the most salient function.
- 4 The opposition between meaning and experience is therefore not a satisfactory entry point for a comparison between hermeneutics and pragmatism. The most we can say, with any confidence, is that one is more prominent than the other in this or that tradition, especially in certain authors from each philosophical current. The real

problem lies instead in the question of whether all experience is by nature linguistically mediated and discursive: is the meaning of experience grounded in language, as Gadamer claims? It has to be said that the different answers elicited by this problem transcend the schism – if that is what it is – between hermeneutics and pragmatism, affecting both of the philosophical traditions. On the one hand, hermeneutists like Misch and pragmatists like James, Dewey or Shusterman have no hesitation in recognizing the value of non-verbal or pre-linguistic experience in ordinary understanding, in practical life, or indeed in the field of esthetics, rejecting Schleiermacher's precept that "language is the only presupposition in hermeneutics." On the other hand, hermeneutists like Gadamer and even, up to a point, Ricœur, as well as pragmatists like Rorty, have tended to reduce all experience to linguistically mediated experience.

- 5 Without denying the centrality of language and discourse in experience, this paper takes a clear position in favor of recognizing the value of pre-linguistic – and especially bodily – experience, without treating it as the sacred domain of the ineffable. Recognizing experience as pre-verbal or non-verbal does not signify that it is necessarily devoid of meaning and irreducible to any form of understanding. There can be meaning in experience without it being expressed in discursive form. This is precisely why a pragmatic hermeneutics of non-verbal experience is possible, and even necessary. The question of meaning and understanding is framed differently depending on whether one is looking at experience simply as the interaction of an organism with its environment (immediate experience), or as something that is acquired over time ("having experience"), or again as something that happens to, or is sought out by, the subject ("having AN experience" or "living an experience").¹

1. Immediate Experience and Spontaneous Understanding

- 6 There clearly is such a thing as non-linguistically mediated experience. It is inherent to the very functioning of a living being in as far as it interacts with a given environment. This is one of the lessons we take from the pragmatism of Dewey and Mead, revealing the primordial layer of experience embedded at the core of the living entity, in which humans are not a special case: "Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living." (Dewey 1980: 35). Whenever a living organism responds to the stimuli in its environment, perceives its surroundings, explores them and seeks to modify them in order to satisfy its own needs and primordial impulses, there is experience. The living being's experience is articulated between two distinct poles: that of receptivity – which is not necessarily the same thing as passivity, when it is affected by stimuli from the outside world (or indeed from the "inner" world in the case of self-affection) – and that of activity, when it can act upon and modify its *Umwelt*.
- 7 If experience is a near-permanent necessity for living things, i.e., their way of being in the world, it is because they are regularly subject to incidents, imbalances, disruptions and disorders that demand appropriate responses in order, time after time, to recover equilibrium and harmony with themselves and their environment. The harmony between an organism and its environment is never more than temporary:

Contrast of lack and fullness, of struggle and achievement, of adjustment after consummated irregularity, form the drama in which action, feeling, and meaning are one. The outcome is balance and counterbalance. These are not static nor mechanical. They express power that is intense because measured through overcoming resistance. Environing objects avail and countervail. (*Ibid.*: 16)

- 8 This is a long way from the hermeneutic experience (so dear to Gadamer) characterized by its openness to oral – and above all written – tradition, but there is no good reason to neglect a mode of experience that takes place at the scale of life itself. And does it really lie outside any hermeneutic perspective? Far from it, if we only extend our focus beyond the discursive, the linguistic (and *a fortiori* the textual) and return to the source of the hermeneutics of nature and the living world, that of the Ancients, albeit revisited by the Contemporaries: Dilthey, Misch or Gens. This hermeneutics of nature resonates strongly with the pragmatism of vital experience in James, Dewey or Mead. In the above quotation, Dewey speaks explicitly of “meaning” (which merges with action and feeling) in describing this mode of experience. Dewey’s terminology, like Mead’s, reflects the dual heritage of Darwinism and behaviorism in the way it characterizes the experience of the living world, including humans as living beings (Mead’s “biological individuals”), but it is not difficult to see in it a more semiotic perspective, this time coming from Peirce: stimuli are *signs*. In other words, the living being’s experience, as a continuous interaction with its environment, can be thought of as a *semiosis*, i.e. as a process of exchanging signs, the production and reception of signs between an organism and an environment which is, as von Uexküll has shown, a “bearer of meaning.” Whatever signs there may be in this case, they are not linguistic signs. And yet the living being can experience them. More precisely, the signs or “manifestations” of life (*Lebensäußerungen*),² to borrow a term from Dilthey, constitute the core of a mode of experience: and there is no good reason for hermeneutics to ignore them simply because they are not mediated by language and discourse.
- 9 If signs are exchanged in vital experience, what mode of understanding might be the right medium for grasping their meaning? In as far as this is a form of “immediate experience,” to borrow a term found in James, as well as in Mead and Dewey, there is no reflection involved in this mode of understanding. And so it would be an exaggeration to speak of “interpretation” if we define that as being a mediated, suspensive and reflective form of understanding (Michel 2019). In other words, vital experience, immediate though it is, elicits only spontaneous – and, strictly speaking, non-reflective – understanding. It is in this sense that James speaks of “pure experience” as the “immediate flow of life” (James 1912: 77).
- 10 Among the contemporary hermeneutists, it is no doubt Georg Misch (Misch 1994) who went furthest in probing the mode of understanding at work in immediate experience, using an initial framework that owes much to the life philosophy of Dilthey. Misch starts out from Dilthey’s distinction between “elementary understanding” and “higher understanding” (Dilthey 2002), but he does so in order to give a different significance to the former. In Dilthey, elementary understanding refers to an understanding of the “outer manifestations of life” that emerge from practical existence. This mode of understanding operates through an analogical type of reasoning (comparing one’s own life-expressions with those of others). Dilthey offers some examples to illustrate elementary understanding: a series of letters combined into words which form a sentence, the elementary acts of which continuous activities are composed (lifting an object, dropping a hammer, sawing wood, etc.). Elementary understanding is a lower

form of understanding, even if it serves as a basis for higher understanding; it is inferior because it apprehends manifestations of life in piecemeal fashion: “In this elementary understanding we do not go back to the whole context of life which forms the permanent subject of life-expressions.” (*Ibid.*: 226). Only higher understanding – which for Dilthey, of course, must serve as a foundation for the human sciences – can apprehend the manifestations of life in all their unity and permanence by establishing regularities (through causal reasoning) and all kinds of inferences (for example inferring which class or historical era someone belongs to from their clothing).

- 11 With Misch, elementary understanding is placed in a conceptual framework that is more phenomenological (perhaps even ethological) than epistemological. This framework seems more in phase with the pragmatism of Dewey, Mead and James insofar as it takes seriously a mode of understanding that is not only pre-verbal (i.e. at a stage prior to linguistic expression) but non-verbal (irreducible to any form of linguistic expression): “Everywhere here there is an understanding – an understanding of an elementary kind; it occurs as a matter of course when faced with certain human or animal manifestations of life (more precisely, organic bodily movements) that fall within the domain of sensory perception.” (Misch 1994: 144).³ With Misch, elementary understanding is basically an understanding of bodily attitudes (gestures, intonations, mimicry, moods...) that do not involve any form of reasoning (even by analogy): it is immediate, non-reflective and non-discursive. Just as meaning and feeling are one (Dewey), so the expression of a bodily attitude is at one with its meaning. It is neither by inference nor by analogy (with what I myself might feel) that I read the tears on the face of the other as an expression of sadness. My understanding of the meaning of this expression of sadness is captured spontaneously, with no roundabout reflection, no interpretive process of decryption, and no verbalization.
- 12 The immediate character of lived experience in bodily understanding is concomitant with a temporality that takes the form of a continuous flow of undifferentiated present. There is a striking similarity between the way Misch thematizes immediate experience as a kind of headlong rush from sign to sign, without restraint, without repose, without objectification,⁴ and the way Mead analyzes the immediate response of the biological individual to the perceived world, when unimpeded and uninterrupted:
- The flow of experience is not differentiated into a past and future over against an immediate now until reflection affects certain parts of the experience with these characters, with the perfection of adjustment on the one hand, and with the shifting control on the other. The biologic individual lives in an undifferentiated now. (Mead 1972: 351)
- 13 The semiosis at work in the spontaneous understanding of immediate experience is entirely wrapped up in the logic of the senses. The spontaneous experience of bodily understanding is marked by a homology between the logic of sensation and the logic of meaning. Bodily expressions are understood spontaneously only through the mediation of the sensory, affective and emotional system. If the senses are inhibited, or if one of them is lost, the intensity of immediate experience is diminished, and with it the possibility of a spontaneous understanding of life-expressions. This is true of bodily attitudes and also of linguistic expressions, whether spoken or written (and perceived through the visual, auditory, tactile etc. apparatus). There is no immediate experience without sensory and affective mediation. Nobody put it better than James when he insisted, in his *Principles of Psychology* (James 1983: 287), on the importance of the function of the sensory organs not only for the immediate bodily apprehension of the

world, but also for our modes of thought and perception, to the extent that the mental is literally embodied in the physical. The same is true of attention: focusing one's attention on something is part of a bodily disposition (contraction of the muscles in the jaw, chest, back, etc.).

- 14 The hermeneutics of Misch and the pragmatism of James and Dewey share a common presupposition in that they ground the meaning of the signs of immediate experience on the substrate of the senses, which includes a whole palette of expressions:

“Sense” covers a wide range of contents: the sensory, the sensational, the sensitive, the sensible, and the sentimental, along with the sensuous. It includes almost everything from bare physical and emotional shock to sense itself – that is, the meaning of things present in immediate experience. Each term refers to some real phase and aspect of the life of an organic creature as life occurs through sense organs. But sense, as meaning so directly embodied in experience as to be its own illuminated meaning, is the only signification that expresses the function of sense organs when they are carried to full realization. (Dewey 1980: 22)

- 15 There is of course a paradox, perhaps even a contradiction, in the way of describing immediate experience as Misch and Dewey do; something that a hermeneut like Gadamer or a neo-pragmatist like Rorty would be sure to pick up on, in order to challenge its validity. The paradox is that they *speak* about it: they represent it in the form of discourse – and reflective discourse at that – although immediate experience is supposed to belong to the realm of non-discursive and non-reflective understanding. The paradox must be acknowledged, but without sliding into contradiction, to the extent that immediate sensory experience can only be understood in so far as it is *lived* in the situation. “Discourse” about experience can only ever be secondary, even if it presupposes that “embodied meaning” can be translated, however partially and imperfectly, into discursive meaning. Witness the difficulty we sometimes experience in putting affective or emotional states into words, to say nothing of all the infra-signs (such as aromas) that affect our senses and modify our moods without ever impinging on our attentive consciousness.
- 16 Immediate experience not only has value for itself, it provides a grounding for all other forms of experience. But not to the extent of making it – as the empiricist philosophers, seeking to construct an epistemology, would like – the cornerstone of all our knowledge. Rather, immediate experience, in the sense of a meaningful embodied interaction between an organism and an environment, is the substrate without which no other experience could occur. Which presupposes, conversely, that immediate experience cannot account for the full range of experience, except for certain categories of being that live only in the immediacy of their relationship to the environment.

2. Acquired Experience and the Preunderstanding of Meaning

- 17 A lasting form of experience, an acquired experience, can happen only if there is a break in the ceaseless flow of the undifferentiated now, the headlong rush from sign to sign. Such interruptions in experience occur when an organism's responses are no longer adapted to their environment, when there is a certain “inhibition of action” (Mead) or of the impulses, when organisms are faced with obstacles, barriers and

disruptions, and are forced to adjust their behavior (Dewey). Mead uses an illustration taken from animal life: that of a dog that approaches a stranger offering meat (primary impulse) only to dart away again (secondary and opposing impulse) on sensing danger. While there may be an instinctive element in this behavior (Mead refuses to ascribe a capacity for reflection to the animal condition, reserving it for human social individuals), there is no reason to doubt its experiential dimension, at least for mammals. Where does the difference lie between a young puppy and a dog of a certain age faced with the same situation? Without having first perceived *something* that might be seen as a kind of threat, the puppy will obey its primary impulse alone (coming forward to take the food). The older dog, by contrast, even if it may still continue to move towards the food, will have a moment of hesitation, of restraint, even of drawing back, in as far as the *something* it perceives reminds it of a potential (or perhaps very real) danger. What is the cause of this opposing impulse (hesitation, drawing back, etc.)? Experience; no more, no less. But no longer in the sense of immediate experience. This is acquired experience, albeit acquired through conditioning. In other words, acquired experience takes over from immediate experience when the latter is obstructed, disrupted, or interrupted. Acquired experience consequently presupposes a different relationship to temporality. Instead of the ceaseless flow, the undifferentiated now that characterizes immediate experience, it is a present enriched with a past, and perhaps even, through anticipation, with a future. Correlatively, it presupposes a capacity for discernment, for memory – implicit (procedural) or explicit (remembering) – and even (in the case of anticipation) for imagination. Acquired experience takes the form not only of remembrances (conscious representations of past events or situations), but also of acquired dispositions (*habitus*).

- 18 Acquired experience typically corresponds to the usual meaning of “having experience,” as an accumulation, a sedimentation of knowledge, understanding, observation and know-how constituting a stable fund that can be drawn upon in order to perceive, act and move more effectively in present situations. Acquired experience is the past teaching and shedding light on the present.⁵ It always assumes, in one way or another, that similar situations are reproducible, and that they can be compared, implicitly or explicitly, in order to avoid repeating past mistakes. There is no acquired experience without first having lived through some form of negativity. Gadamer joins Mead and Dewey on this point: “experience in this sense inevitably involves many disappointments of one’s expectations and only thus is experience acquired.” (Gadamer 2004: 350). It is in this sense that we speak of someone as being experienced: because they have confronted difficult situations and suffered disappointments many times, in similar (not necessarily identical) circumstances, and because they have come up with appropriate responses, they have built up a lasting resource that enables them to relate to their environment more harmoniously (as Dewey might have put it). Claude Romano makes the same point in a slightly different way: “Experience is first of all knowledge, which grows over time; one who ‘has’ experience is one who understands such and such a situation. One who is experienced is one who *has lived*.” (Romano 2009: 144).
- 19 To which mode of understanding does acquired experience typically correspond? To the preunderstanding of meaning. Acquired experience is, literally, that which has already been understood and is likely to be re-understood in similar situations. Acquired experience is a reservoir of meaning, available in the form of

preunderstandings. Having a reservoir of available meaning is not the same thing as being fully in control, or even conscious, of it. Acquired experience oscillates between the twin poles of passivity (when preunderstanding guides us without our knowing) and activity (when preunderstanding is reflective and conscious). It would be a mistake to think that all preunderstanding stems from an experience that involves reflection. The experienced driver is not only one who is able to recall past situations consciously and reflectively in order to deal with similar situations on the road. Her acquired experience acts within her largely without her realizing, for a whole series of sequential actions that are *de facto* embodied, and which easily distinguish her from a “young driver.”

- 20 Prejudices, in Gadamer’s sense of the word, are undeniably part (but only one part) of acquired preunderstanding, if we leave aside for a moment his theory of knowledge (prejudices as conditions of possibility of historical science). Humans may have no monopoly on immediate experience, nor even on acquired experience (which is found among the higher animals), but they do have a monopoly on acquired experience in the form of historical experience. And it is historical experience that is Gadamer’s chosen channel for exploring the hermeneutic experience, which is expressed through language: “[...] language is at the same time a positive condition of, and guide [*Leitung*] to, experience itself.” (Gadamer 2004: 344). We might rephrase that to say that language is the condition for a particular category of acquired experience, not for all experience. Which experience, then? The advantage of Gadamer’s concept of experience is the way he situates it beyond the sphere of the personal, so as to embed it in its historical and cultural dimension. The reservoir of meaning on which acquired experience reposes benefits from a legacy of preunderstandings that have sedimented down in the form of traditions. Contained in what we understand today is everything that our predecessors understood before us and passed on to us, sometimes as prejudices in the negative sense (as errors of judgment), sometimes in the positive sense (as conditions of current understanding). Like all acquired experience, this common historical fund of preunderstanding gravitates between the twin poles of passivity (that which we inherit by chance, starting with a language) and activity (that which we can reflect upon and consciously make our own). The pole of activity is, for Gadamer, the “highest type of hermeneutical experience: the openness to tradition characteristic of *historically effected consciousness*” (*ibid.*: 355). This openness is manifested not in the simple acknowledgement of the otherness of the past (acknowledging that others, before us, also understood things), but in the acknowledgement, and awareness, that our predecessors still have something to say to us, that what has been pre-understood can be understood again, including in *new and different* ways. When this condition is met, tradition becomes “open experience.”
- 21 Why is language accorded this primacy in the mediation of experience? Because for Gadamer the model of openness to tradition is the dialogical relationship (“it expresses itself like a Thou”), and because he prioritizes discursive forms of experience: “What has come down to us by way of verbal tradition is not left over but given to us, told us – whether through direct retelling, in which myth, legend, and custom have their life, or through written tradition, whose signs are, as it were, immediately clear to every reader who can read them.” (*ibid.*: 391). Gadamer is careful to distinguish between verbal transmission and written transmission, but it is clearly the latter that takes precedence in his account of hermeneutic experience. In other words, tradition achieves its full hermeneutic potential when it is expressed in writing, as a written

work. The reason being that the interpretation of the written word is detached from its initial conditions of production, and so can take on a life of its own for future generations of interpreters.

- 22 The importance of the discursive forms of acquired experience is incontestable, and makes the mode of transmission of human experience quite singular. Gadamer's analyses are valuable here, if we overlook his epistemological ambition (basing historical science on the consciousness of the effects of history). The real question, however, is whether all acquired experience can only be expressed, and can only become meaningful, in a linguistic, verbal or discursive form. The answer, my answer, is negative; and this is clearly where I would put limits on the hermeneutics of Gadamer or the neo-pragmatism of Rorty. Tradition, as envisaged by Gadamer, is only one mode of experience and cannot constitute all of its components.
- 23 It is to the credit of the founding pragmatists, James and Dewey in particular, that they took seriously another mode of acquired experience that is housed directly in the body. We have already noted the importance of the body in immediate experience, but the experience that comes through the mediation of the body cannot be reduced to the instantaneous information received by our sensory organs. The body is also the seat of acquired experiences, which are in turn liable to modify immediate experience. It is undoubtedly William James, a physiologist by training, who went furthest (sometimes too far) in recognizing bodily experience as a set of acquired and lasting dispositions.
- 24 What is the body in terms of acquired experience? A conjunction, a sedimentation, an articulation of habits. James, influenced by the work of Ravaisson, accords a central place to bodily habits in his *Principles of Psychology*. Some habits are purely individual, enabling us to recognize a person by their way of walking, their gait, their gestures, intonations and postures which set them apart from everyone else, but what makes James' psychology of habits interesting is that he at the same time embeds them in a historical, social and cultural framework. The lesson was not lost on Bourdieu when he focused his concept of *habitus* specifically on acquired socio-bodily dispositions. Bodily habits (including the bad ones) develop in different ways, depending on our social experiences of life, our exposure to hard physical labor, or the illnesses we have endured. A *social body* is not only a metaphor, it is also a physical body molded and mediated by social structures of incorporation, and not only in the disciplinary sense made familiar by Foucault. More broadly still, bodily habits are shaped by a whole historical and cultural heritage. Remember the "techniques of the body" theorized by Marcel Mauss: greeting, swimming, walking, sleeping, giving birth... far from being "natural," they vary profoundly from one society to another (the Masai, he notes, can sleep on their feet). These are all traditions, but in a very wide sense that goes beyond discursive transmission, that of a collective acquired experience of bodily dispositions that is passed on from generation to generation.
- 25 Most of the time, bodily habits act on the subject without being noticed: unconsciously, unreflectively, without coming to their attention. To this extent, they are a form of preunderstanding. Perhaps, when they were originally contracted, they required some degree of conscious effort, reflection or attention from the subject (think of a toddler's first steps, or of learning a new sport). But, at that stage of learning, they were not yet habits, but proto-habits, habits in the process of acquisition. A bodily attitude becomes a habit only when it is no longer thought of as such at the moment it takes place. Somatic habits are to acquired bodily experience what prejudices (in Gadamer's sense)

are to acquired discursive experience. The latter is a linguistically-mediated preunderstanding, the former a bodily-mediated preunderstanding.

- 26 There is not necessarily anything harmful about the fact that our bodily habits operate non-reflectively. Quite the contrary. Just imagine if, whenever we needed to act, we had to think about our posture, or the position of our hands and feet. Action would forever be inhibited, delayed, frustrated. That is why James advocates that we should abandon ourselves as far as possible to our bodily automatisms. The absence of somatic reflection frees up energy and mindspace for actions that require greater effort and intelligence, allowing us to focus on the “end” of the action to be accomplished, without having to incessantly ponder the bodily “means” for getting there. James gives a number of illustrations: “We walk a beam the better the less we think of the position of our feet upon it. We pitch or catch, we shoot or chop the better the less tactile and muscular (the less resident), and the more exclusively optical (the more remote), our consciousness is.” (James 1983 : 1128).
- 27 Some bodily habits, however, are indeed harmful, and end up causing suffering to the subject or disrupting the “motor pattern” or flow of action. Either because certain habits (such as crossing one’s legs, or shrugging one’s shoulders, which restricts the chest cage), though acquired long ago, have always been harmful but continue to be ingrained, or because certain habits that were once efficient have become deficient following a general change in the body or the environment. Not all acquired bodily experience is necessarily “good” (not in and of itself, but in terms of people, situations and contexts, i.e. pragmatically, with regard to its *effects* on action), just as not all acquired discursive experience (such as unfounded prejudices) is necessarily justified. The beneficial effect of the lack of reflection in bodily habits, when they are efficient, is reversed for deficient habits: changing “bad” habits is made that much more difficult by the very fact that they are, most of the time, exercised without reflection, especially if they were contracted many years earlier.
- 28 We can thank Dewey, more than James, for raising the question of the consciousness of bodily experience with a view to its transformation and improvement. It is partly under the influence of Alexander⁶ that Dewey sought to rethink the bodily conditions of voluntary action, that which impedes it, as well as that which could facilitate it. Unlike James, Dewey did not believe in a free will for which the body is merely a servile instrument. The stubborn body refuses to submit to the will. Purely “mental” willpower is insufficient to take action towards a given aim. Deficient bodily habits can get in the way. Alexander, for example, though not lacking in willpower, kept losing his voice when he was on stage, until he realized that the problem stemmed from his habit of adopting a declamatory stance, which was impeding his breathing. On a more fundamental level, Alexander discovered what was to become the core of the “Alexander technique”: the existence of a certain unity between the head, neck and back that allows for better coordination of the human body, seen as a single physical and psychic entity.
- 29 Alexander’s research and practice exercised a twofold influence on Dewey, both correlative and decisive. On the one hand, they comforted him in his goal of breaking away from the disastrous dualism of mind vs. body, supplying experimental evidence to support his position. On the other, they enabled him to develop a philosophy of bodily experience aimed at perfecting its harmony, or in other words, at replacing bad bodily habits with better ones. The associated method centers on attention and somatic

control: “consciousness of one’s own body,” or what Richard Shusterman, whose neo-pragmatism springs directly from Dewey, calls “somaesthetics,” and describes as “a method to discern, localize, and inhibit the unwanted habits, to discover the requisite bodily postures or movements (the indispensable ‘means whereby’ for best producing the desired action or attitude), and finally to monitor and master their performance through ‘conscious control’ until ultimately a better (i.e., more effective and controllable) habit could be established to achieve the willed end of action” (Shusterman 2008: 192).

- 30 Shusterman it was who sought to rehabilitate the concept of bodily experience, building on the legacy of Dewey and of Alexander, in opposition to the hermeneutic neo-pragmatism of Rorty and, more generally, to a certain tendency in contemporary hermeneutics, coming from Gadamer, to turn every experience into a discursive, linguistically-mediated experience. He nonetheless shares with Rorty (the master who first initiated him into pragmatism), and in opposition to Dewey, a suspicion of any radical pre-linguistic empiricism that might serve as an epistemological basis for a theory of knowledge. But Shusterman invokes Dewey to argue against Rorty when it comes to directing bodily experience towards practical and esthetic life:

Wanting to celebrate the importance of this nondiscursive experience, Dewey did so in the way philosophers have habitually emphasized factors they thought primary and essential – by erecting it as a theoretical foundation. This was a bad confusion of what was (or should have been) his true aim – to establish and improve the quality of immediate experience as a practical end and useful tool. Dewey wanted philosophers to see that nondiscursive experience could be used to improve knowledge as well as the felt quality of living. (Shusterman 1994: 136)

- 31 It is this last possibility in particular that Shusterman himself seeks to explore, both in the field of practical daily life and in the field of art, and he does so both as a theoretician (of somaesthetics) and at the same time as a practitioner, in the tradition of Alexander, and also experimenting with the Feldenkrais method, Zen, meditation and relaxation, with the aim of making embodied experience more balanced. This project is not about “bringing into consciousness” all of our bodily habits, an exercise as pointless as it would be pernicious, and liable, as James showed, to inhibit the flow of action. Non-reflective somatic habits, when they are efficient, do not need to be brought into consciousness, let alone transformed. It is when our bodily dispositions prove deficient that somatic-reflective practice becomes necessary, in order to transform them by enhancing our somatic consciousness.
- 32 I said earlier that unreflective bodily habits are to acquired bodily experience what prejudices are to acquired discursive experience. It might now be said that reflective bodily habits, brought into consciousness, are to acquired bodily experience what reflective openness to tradition is to acquired discursive experience. Openness to tradition, as Gadamer reminds us, is the consciousness of the action or effect of history in as far as it is still able to speak to us. For Gadamer this is, as we saw, the highest mode of hermeneutic experience.
- 33 But why should it be the highest mode? For this, we need to return to the schematic opposition between pragmatism – attentive to bodily experience – and hermeneutics, totally focused, by contrast, on discursive experience. Even Richard Shusterman does not entirely escape this schematic opposition: his pragmatist defense of somaesthetics is at the same time leveled at the discursive hypertrophy of hermeneutics (and more generally at the linguistic turn in contemporary philosophy), going so far as to include

the neo-pragmatism of Rorty, which is shot through with Gadamer's hermeneutics. It is undeniable that modern hermeneutics, since Schleiermacher, has been largely dominated by the primacy of discourse, and that contemporary hermeneutics from Gadamer to Ricœur privileges textual and linguistically-mediated experience (even to the point of encompassing the whole of hermeneutic experience), but it is not the case, however, that this presupposition is shared by *all* hermeneutic traditions. As indeed we saw with Misch, and his re-reading of Dilthey. A still more recent example can be found in the work of Jean-Claude Gens (2008), seeking to revisit the hermeneutics of the Ancients, who were more attentive to the signs of the body, including its long-term dispositions, than the Moderns. Dewey and Shusterman's advocacy for "body consciousness" is not so far removed from certain medical and therapeutic practices of Hippocrates or Galen: the patient diagnosis (and prognosis) must take into account not only the patient's current and temporary signs (the symptoms) but also his antecedents, his embodied history, ultimately, in other words, his acquired bodily experience.

- 34 What point am I trying to make here? Not only that the opposition between pragmatism and hermeneutics is not as schematic as one might think, if one takes the trouble to recognize the plurality of their respective traditions, but also, more fundamentally, that there is – whatever Gadamer might say – a somatic, bodily, *non-discursive hermeneutic experience* which is every bit as valid as the discursive and linguistically-mediated kind. In other words, pragmatism does not have a monopoly on somatic experience, any more than hermeneutics has a monopoly on discursive experience. Why might somatic experience be a legitimate focus for hermeneutics? Because the body reveals itself in signs (which are not only symptoms). Poor bodily habits that induce deficiencies are signs, signs that are usually pre-understood and pre-reflective. Somaesthetics is also a form of somasemiotics. When these bodily signs are brought to consciousness, preunderstanding yields to reflective, albeit discursive, understanding. Somaesthetics calls for a somahermeneutics.
- 35 We can be still more ambitious in breaking down the opposition between pragmatism and hermeneutics. There is a meaningful opposition between the somatic and the discursive, even if the former can, at least partially, be translated into the latter (as when we seek to express bodily signs in words),⁷ but the same cannot be said of the opposition between the somatic and the linguistic (in the general sense of the term). Bodily expressions are manifested as signs that can resemble a form of (non-discursive) language with an internal consistency in which the signs are correlated to each other. Take the example of the signs and symptoms of an illness, which are expressed in a correlated fashion and are analyzed by a medical semiotics or hermeneutics. One could say there is a "body-language" of flu, its correlated signs being fever, a cough, aches and pains, and so on. Much the same can be said of the "body arts," as well as sports activities, choreography, martial arts, and therapeutic arts (yoga, Zen, etc.) each of which has its own particular language, linguistic or otherwise, a language that presupposes learning, practice, and understanding. Learning a body art means acquiring the ability to master its language (gestures, postures, movement sequences, etc.) at all times. Think of the body "grammar" of Tai Chi, with its specific postural expressions (knees bent, shoulders down, back straight, hips loose, head slightly drawn up towards the sky, feet rooted on the ground...) each of which is one part of an overall code, whose movement sequences are ascribed meanings, associated with animals (the snake, the bird), plants (the tree), or energies (the yin and the yang). The gradual

mastery of this language by the practitioner is a bodily experience that is acquired, embodied, and at the same time pre-understood. It is a type of experience that can be described as hermeneutic, as well as somatic, despite being mediated through language, and which goes well beyond the purely discursive sphere. The term “somahermeneutic experience” is all the more apt in that Tai Chi, like other body arts, is the product of a long tradition founded centuries ago by Chinese masters. Acquired somatic experience is therefore not only embodied in the individual; if it is, consequently, a tradition, that is because it is a historically and culturally grounded somahermeneutic experience that is transmitted, reappropriated and transformed from one generation to the next. The “permanently fixed expressions” that provide the grounding for hermeneutic experience are also manifest in corporeal expressions, when the texture of the body becomes tradition.

3. Creative Experience and Interpretation

- 36 A third mode of experience remains to be explored. It differs from immediate experience (when we interact continuously with an environment) in that it presupposes a break in intelligibility, a disruption in understanding, a gap in the undifferentiated now. It also differs from acquired experience in that it is not reproducible, repeatable, or cumulative. It is thought of not in terms of experiencing things, nor of having experience, but of “having an experience” or *living*, or *undergoing* (in a transformative sense) an experience. It might be called creative experience. In many ways, new, creative experience involves a questioning, a challenging, a suspension of acquired experience. A subject that lived only through and for experience already accumulated could never strictly *live an experience*.
- 37 Fortuitously but not accidentally, the French equivalent, “*faire une expérience*” also has the meaning “to do an experiment.” Scientific experimentation relies both on acquired experience (repeatable and reproducible) and on creative experience (singular and unique). The latter intervenes when the scientist is confronted with a strange, unknown, unpredictable phenomenon, posits hypotheses to account for it, and seeks to test them by experimental means. Abduction, theorized by Peirce, typifies a creative type of experiential reasoning in as far as, when faced with a phenomenon that defies standard explanations (the emergence of a new phenomenon, or an unexpected observation of an otherwise known phenomenon) one can only establish probable causes. There is therefore an element of riskiness, in the Popperian sense, in the “testing” of hypotheses that are uncertain and open to falsification. However, scientific experimentation also draws on cumulative and repeatable experience when it comes to reproducing the same experimental protocol over a certain number of cases. The more a phenomenon can be reproduced under comparable conditions, the more certain our knowledge about it. But at the same time, confirming a phenomenon that is already known simply by reiterating it diminishes the element of creativity in scientific research.
- 38 Creative experience plays an important role in the scientific method, but its scope extends much further. The combined value of pragmatism and hermeneutics is that they broaden creative experience to other fields such as art, esthetics or daily life. Science has no monopoly on the experimental, let alone the experiential. Dewey, Heidegger, Gadamer and Romano, among others, have all sought, through this

broadening, to preserve a mode of experience that is unrepeatable, singular, unique, and irreducible to acquired and reproducible experience.

- 39 This newness and uniqueness of creative experience find an echo in what Dewey calls “having an experience,” which is clearly distinct from ordinary immediate experience. If experiences can be “had” in the sudden emergence of something that happens to us in the here and now, this is the very opposite of the continuous flow of the undifferentiated now of immediate experience. It is a now captured in the bursting-forth of an event that marks a discontinuity in lived experience, destined at the same time to become a lasting memory, “those things of which we say in recalling them, ‘that was an experience’” (Dewey 1980: 36).
- 40 For Dewey, the uniqueness of a creative experience, never previously encountered, goes hand in hand with its fulfillment. A memorable meal, that bears no comparison to any other, to pick up on one of his examples, can only become an authentic experience if it has been properly consummated. Dewey compares such experiences with a storyline or plot, each with its own beginning, development, events and end. This is why the unique, singular, creative experience calls for a narrative, especially when, before arriving at its dénouement, it has gone through trials and ordeals, encountering helpers and opponents along the way. From all that goes to make up “having an experience,” there is something that emerges, something like a particular tonality that gives it its unity (and ensures the unity of the plot): “An experience has a unity that gives it its name: *that* meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship. The existence of this unity is constituted by a single *quality* that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts.” (*Ibid.*: 37).
- 41 “Having an experience” does not imply that the subject living the experience necessarily has the ability to create or control it. This is true even for our French scientist about to *faire une expérience*: even if she controls certain elements of the protocol that she is implementing, the experiment can be creative only if something unusual, something surprising, has occurred to make her question her earlier certainties and paradigms of reasoning. This is a common trait that we find in every form of experience (immediate, acquired, or creative) in as much as it has a dimension, if not of passivity, at least of receptiveness. In creative experience, however, this is radicalized, as what ensues does not neatly link up with what went before.
- 42 There is no “having” or “living” an experience without a form of disruption that automatically mobilizes the entire affective and emotional sphere. To experience is, inevitably, to be affected. It is there in the etymology of the word, from the Latin “*experiri*,” to put to the test. Dewey accords a central function to this affective and emotional dimension: “There is [...] an element of undergoing, of suffering in its largest sense, in every experience.” (*Ibid.*: 41). Here, Dewey the pragmatist joins Heidegger the hermeneut:
- To undergo an experience [*eine Erfahrung machen*] with something – be it a thing, a person, or a god – means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us. When we talk of “undergoing” an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. (Heidegger 1982: 57)
- 43 Heidegger’s words, in the context of a lecture, on the particular experience of speech when it is addressed to us, may seem somewhat confusing in that they assume an intention, even a desire, to submit (*uns ihm fügen*) to that which “befalls us.” That is

undeniably a possibility when, for example, we are seeking to *provoke* an experience. But it is not the case when, conversely, we are seized or affected by something, without any prior wish: “it happened to us,” “it came out of the blue.” It is true of experiential emotional states such as disquiet, surprise, astonishment, stupefaction, shock, but also of marvel, amazement, rapture... There is therefore not necessarily anything negative about having an experience, even if Heidegger’s choice of experiential verbs like *erleiden* (endure, suffer) might lead one to think so. In this respect, I differ from Claude Romano, writing in the Heideggerian tradition, when he associates experience with risk, danger, undergoing an ordeal (Romano 2009: 145). The first taste of fatherhood, at least when it goes well, is a unique, singular experience, at the same time accompanied emotionally by intense joy, without a sense of endangerment. Dewey, in the illustrations he gives, makes a point of stressing authentic experiences from which we derive pleasure. The main difference, and it is a significant one, between the American pragmatist and the German hermeneut lies in the ontological and existential dimension that the latter gives to *having, living* or (in the Heideggerian literature) *undergoing an experience*. Heidegger, absorbed in the quest for the meaning of being, of finitude, of what lies behind language, or Romano, preoccupied with the unfathomable and inaugural event of our birth, would be unlikely to list Dewey’s “memorable meal” among their authentic experiences. More’s the pity. Existential hermeneutics cannot account for experiences that are less unique, singular, and creative than “anticipatory resoluteness.” A pragmatist hermeneutics of ordinary life, by contrast, can do them justice.

- 44 Claude Romano is right, however, to show that “undergoing an experience” is indissociable from self-transformation, “so that, having suffered and endured it, I will never again be the same” (*ibid.*: 149). Authentic experience is therefore an event in the strongest sense that Romano ascribes to it, marking a before and an after in lived history. There are, however, degrees in the way the experiential event transforms us, and it takes many different expressions. Romano’s eventual hermeneutics tends to present this in a radical form. The experience of bereavement or of incurable disease affects and transforms us at a depth that Dewey’s memorable meal cannot reach. But there is no reason to reject it: that meal we tasted, incomparable to any other, undoubtedly *transformed* us in the way we appreciate food, and the people we share it with, without affecting the deeper meaning of our existence as the experience of mourning or motherhood might do.
- 45 What mode of understanding, what relationship to meaning is implied by creative experience? Firstly, the ordeal of the non-comprehensible, the incomprehensible, the difficulty in comprehending the meaning of what happens, of what happens *to us*, measurable not only by the yardstick of the “nonground of birth [...] as a bottomless source of incomprehensibility” (*ibid.*: 155), which is an extreme but not necessarily foundational form (any more than is the prospect of the meaning of my own death). A pragmatist hermeneutics of the ordeals of non-understanding requires no assistance from an eventual hermeneutics that analyzes all forms of incomprehensibility back to some basic ontological unit (birth or death) from which, supposedly, they are all ultimately *derived*. It is hard to see, for example, why the difficulty we face in grasping the meaning of a text should invariably point us back towards the impenetrable mystery of our own birth, which may well be a “bottomless source” of incomprehensibility, but is not necessarily the original fount of all incomprehension.

- 46 It is certain, however, that there is no having or living an experience without an ordeal of incomprehensibility: all unique, singular creative experience presupposes – precisely because it is comparable to no other – a breakdown of intelligibility in the pre-existing order of meaning. This is what distinguishes it from immediate experience, which calls only for spontaneous understanding in a world of meaning that is taken as self-evident. In the continuous flow of immediate experience, the understanding of meaning is not subject to problematicity. This is equally true of acquired experience, at least for the share of unreflective habits and routinization that it involves. The same cannot be said when we live an experience, faced as we are with the hardships of the problematicity of meaning (strangeness, confusion, obscurity, ambiguity, absurdity, etc.). In other words, there is no creative experience without a suspension of meaning and of our beliefs, which can be assimilated to a hermeneutic epoché. The ordeal – or at least challenge – of the non-comprehensible, which, let us remember, is not necessarily negative (the sense of marvel at an unusual performance assumes a suspension of meaning), may be left hanging, for lack of effort, willpower, or resources. But, under such conditions, the experience would remain abortive, unfinished, without being authentically creative of meaning.
- 47 What is missing? Interpretation, in the strong sense of the word. Unlike spontaneous understanding (the stuff of immediate experience), interpretation is a suspensive, mediated and reflective form of understanding. Interpretation is an *inquiry* into meaning, and requires work on the signification of something, an effort to better understand it. Where the suspension of meaning represents interpretation's pole of receptivity, the reconstruction of meaning is its pole of activity. Success in this endeavor is never guaranteed, the process can be interminable, but interpretation can be productive or creative only if it sets out on the quest for, and conquest of, meaning.
- 48 Interpretation can only be brought into play tangibly through a set of interpretive devices I call the *interpretatio* (Michel 2019): explicitation, contextualization, unveiling, translation, clarification, categorization, and other such techniques. Without the toolbox of creative experience that is the *interpretatio*, it is scarcely possible to overcome the challenges of problematicity and to begin the process of reconstructing meaning. It is thanks to the *interpretatio* that semantic innovation, the production of new meanings, is possible: experience can be characterized as unique, singular, and creative only once it has been *interpreted* as such, i.e. made explicit, unveiled, clarified.
- 49 It is incontestably the hermeneutic tradition that has done most to draw attention to the importance of the interpretive techniques. But its principal focus was, originally, on scholarly techniques of interpretation applied to the discursive field and to linguistically-mediated hermeneutic experience, such as Schleiermacher's grammatical and psychological interpretation of acts of speech. Heidegger's hermeneutic shift may have dragged hermeneutics away from the science of texts – even to the extent of making *explicitation* a way of being for the beings that we are (*Dasein*) – but at the price of creating a radical ontologization that makes it impossible to account for ordinary modes of interpretation (not reducible to the meaning of being) except by pigeonholing them as inauthentic. By contrast, the whole point of grafting pragmatism onto hermeneutics (in a very different sense from that demonstrated by Rorty) is to do justice to ordinary experiences of interpretation. Just such a project can be found in the work of the pragmatist philosopher who was second only to Peirce in the value he ascribed to the processes of interpretation, not only in scientific endeavor, but also in

day-to-day experience, namely Josiah Royce. So much so that he defined humankind – before Taylor made it the core of his hermeneutics – as “an animal that interprets” (Royce 1918: 172). Admittedly, Royce proposes a very (overly) broad conception of interpretation, encompassing all forms of understanding and all relationships to meaning, without distinguishing between immediate understanding and interpretive understanding. But the great contribution of his pragmatist theory of interpretation, apart from the fact it looks beyond scientific activity, and discourse-centered research in particular, holds in its intersubjective and social structure: somebody interprets somebody (or something) for somebody else, in what Royce calls a “community of interpretation.”

- 50 The third benefit that we can take from pragmatism (and particularly from Dewey and Shusterman) in order to transform hermeneutics for the better resides, as we saw, in the essential character of the somatic experience. Just as acquired experience has its embodied tradition, so creative experience demands a somahermeneutics. Living an experience can never be entirely reduced to discursive experience. Interpretation, as mediated and reflective understanding, intervenes when the spatiality of the body itself (*Leib*) ceases to be self-evident (due to physical disruption, illness or accident), when that spatiality is affected by a problematicity of meaning and requires significant motor reorganization, or when our bodily habits become dysfunctional. This is also true when we learn new sporting, therapeutic, erotic, or other body techniques, and our hesitant, tentative body movements and gestures call for an effort of reflection to recapture the meaning of the body. It is true, finally, when the bodily expressions of others appear strange, alien, confused or ambiguous to us. The bodily understanding of the other (which Misch, after Dilthey, calls elementary) loses its immediacy and calls for reflective feedback on our own bodily expressions. At that point, spontaneous understanding becomes bodily interpretation.

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NOTES

1. This distinction is reflected in different ways in other languages (for example in French – *avoir de l'expérience* and *faire une expérience* – or in German, in the contrast between *Erfahrung haben* and *Erfahrung machen*) and is addressed as a specific philosophical question in Gadamer: "Language shows this when we use the word 'experience' in two different senses: the experiences that conform to our expectation and confirm it and the new experiences that occur to us." (Gadamer 2004: 347). Claude Romano picks up on the same distinction in his chapter on experience (Romano 2009: 143).
2. Also translated widely as "life-expressions."
3. Here I follow closely the excellent commentary by Simon Calenge 2020.
4. In his commentary on Misch, Simon Calenge rightly compares this process, this chasing after signs, with the way one might read words in a dictionary that always point to other words, and so on, in a *semiosis* without end: "this race from sign to sign sees meaning reduced to the movement by which I am constantly redirected from one sign to another." (Calenge 2020: 145).
5. With a normative agenda, Gadamer situates this mode of experience within the wider context of wisdom, which he associates with the Ancients (especially Eschylus): true experience, from past trials, teaches us the limitations of humankind when faced with the temptation of hubris. All authentic experience serves to make Man conscious of his finitude.
6. Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869-1955): Australian actor, educator and therapist. After losing his voice on stage, Alexander invented the technique that now bears his name, teaching people to reappropriate their own body in order to make their gestures and postures more harmonious.
7. The principle of translation, though inevitably unfaithful, from one language to another also applies to understanding the encoding of one category of signs into another, as when we try to express physical pain in words. The distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive, or the somatic, does not therefore mean that it is impossible to cross boundaries of meaning.

ABSTRACTS

Rather than opposing hermeneutics and pragmatism, this contribution, without denying their differences, aims to lay the foundations of a pragmatist hermeneutics by taking the relationship between meaning and experience as a common thread. The challenge is to analyze this relationship from three distinct angles: immediate experience (and spontaneous understanding), acquired experience (and pre-understanding) and creative experience (and interpretation). From each of these perspectives, the aim is to grant a meaningful place to non-verbal – and specifically bodily – experience, which calls for a somahermeneutics.

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Heidegger and Dewey

Art and the Horizons of Meaning

Nicola Ramazzotto

1. Introduction

- 1 The goal of this paper is to investigate the possibility that for Heidegger and Dewey, a work of art can provide a horizon of meaning. A better understanding of this possibility will have a twofold value. On the one hand, it will allow for a better clarification of two key terms in Heidegger and Dewey's philosophy and aesthetics: "horizon" and "meaning." On the other hand, given the importance that these two terms have more generally for Hermeneutics and Pragmatism, this analysis could lay the foundation for a renewed and more vigorous dialogue between the two schools of thought.
- 2 However, this attempt is immediately faced with some difficulties which will be addressed and resolved in this introduction. As it has been noted, at first glance Hermeneutics and Pragmatism "will seem the oddest of pairings, about as different as two philosophical traditions can be" (Begby 2014: 612). Not only because of the different philosophical styles, but also the almost total absence of specific historical connections between Heidegger and Dewey. This imposes on this paper a way of proceeding which will be more theoretical than historical. We will certainly treasure the few relevant textual examples that testify to a mutual reading of Heidegger and Dewey, but an effort to translate the respective vocabularies will be necessary; an endeavor that is inevitable and preliminary to any attempt at dialogue. As in any translation something will inevitably be lost, and some specific details of meaning will be leveled out. The hope is that the theoretical gains resulting from this comparison will make up for it.¹
- 3 This paper has been structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the similarities between Dewey and Heidegger's critiques of the modern conception of aesthetic experience, comparing it, as both authors do, with the different approaches to art typical of the Greek world. It will be shown how, in the modern world, art has lost its capacity for making sense, i.e., of establishing a horizon of shared meanings and an *ethos* –

something that did happen, albeit in a non-repeatable and imperfect way, in the ancient world. The third section explores the possibility that art and aesthetic experience could perform this same function today. In order to do so, we will analyze how art is able to constitute these horizons of meaning and we will discuss their operational and historical significance. In conclusion, we will recap the results obtained during the course of the discussion and make an overall assessment of the possibility of creating a dialogue between Heidegger and Dewey.

2. A World Well Lost

- 4 If the aim of this article is to analyze the ability of the work of art to produce shared meanings, it seems natural to ask whether this potentiality is brought to fruition in the modern world. This means questioning the status of art today. Bringing Dewey and Heidegger into dialogue on this point seems particularly fruitful precisely because this *pars destruens* is perhaps where the proximity and similarities between the two authors are most evident.
- 5 For both Heidegger and Dewey, we witness in the modern world a process of progressive compartmentalization and musealization of the work of art. Artistic objects are placed in a spatial and institutional system, the museum, which is anything but neutral as it determines the frame and the horizon of their possible fruition. In this way, the aesthetic experience becomes the passive contemplation of a given object placed on a pedestal and abstracted from all its historical, social and cultic components. Heidegger uses two very effective terms to describe this process: “*Weltentzug*” and “*Weltzerfall*.”² The first can be translated as “world-deprivation,” the second as “world-breakdown.” The concept of world (*Welt*) will be further explored in the next chapter, but its meaning can be understood as the set of living relations that a work holds within its core. If this is true, the world-deprivation and the musealization of the work are the same thing. The work is deprived of its own world, that is, of the living relations that it weaved, and is “separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience [...], cut off from that association with the materials and aims of every other form of human effort, undergoing, and achievement” (LW.10: 9).³ The musealization of art is literally its confinement, the delimitation of the field of its influence to the very precise space of the museum. Art is thus isolated from the business of everyday life and its role is limited to that one of a “beauty parlor of civilization” (LW.10: 346).
- 6 The musealization of art, which is the standard condition of the work of art today, certainly does not seem to speak in favor of its ability to produce horizons of meaning. Given this condition, Heidegger and Dewey, each faithful to his own tradition and style of thought, investigate from different points of view the reasons that led to this progressive isolation and weakening of the role of art. What the two analyses have in common is a critique of the dualisms that permeate the entire history of thought – and in particular the modern world. Different, but not contradictory and perhaps even complementary, are the causes of the emergence of these dualisms. Heidegger traces them back to the onto-theological structure of metaphysics, brought to fulfillment in the modern philosophy of the subject, and with respect to which aesthetics is a simple consequence.⁴ Dewey believes that the cause is the hypostatizing tendency of classical philosophy, with its hierarchical and political co-implications in favor of the preservation of what must be immutable (MW.12: 92-4).

- 7 What has been said may suffice as a preliminary sketch to understand what art today is not: art is not a decisive force for human living and is not something capable of satisfying the thirst for meaning. Our relationship with great art is disengaged. Art is something to be enjoyed in our free time, like an innocent but useless play. Both Heidegger and Dewey, however, believe that this is not always the case. Indeed, the way of relating to the work of art that characterized the Greek world was quite different. Dewey states explicitly that for the Greeks, nature, since it was understood as a story, “demanded esthetic form” (LW.10: 153). According to Greeks art is far from being something accessory or decorative, as it was the fundamental medium that enabled them to think and represent what happened to them and their surroundings, i.e., nature and history. The great Greek art, Heidegger confirms, had therefore nothing to do with aesthetics, if by aesthetics we mean the modern way of relating to the work, subjective and disengaged. The great Greek art on the contrary could arise precisely because the operational power of art had not yet been obscured by that deficient and disempowering consideration.⁵ The corollary of all this is that art, for the Greeks, was more than aesthetic: art, Dewey suggests, was the set of “communal modes of activity [that] united the practical, the social, and the educative in an integrated whole having specific esthetic form” (LW.10: 330-1). Aesthetics was so central to the life of the Greek citizens that Heidegger finds the unifying center of these different activities in the very concept of *polis*, which he interprets literally as the “pole” around which the Greek world revolves and around which it gathers.⁶ The *polis*, therefore, becomes the ultimate work of art in Greek civilization. In turn, the entire life of the Greek people becomes a life conducted in an artistic way, a life in which art is not relegated to a museum but acts as the beating heart of civilization.
- 8 According to Heidegger and Dewey, the modern world and the Greek world are thus the two opposite sides of the potentialities of the work of art. On the one side, art is a central activity for life and for the search for meaning of a historical community, on the other side, art is mere subjective enjoyment removed from any link with the political and moral life of those who make use of it. The Greek world, according to Dewey and Heidegger, represents therefore an essential moment of theoretical confrontation. It is proof that the modern conception of art is not all; a proof of its non-ineluctability. Equally, however, this leads neither Dewey nor Heidegger towards a nostalgic return to classicism. On the contrary, for both authors the fall of the ancient world (the *Weltzerfall* mentioned above) is something irreversible.⁷ Indeed, the spirit of the modern world, with its specificities, requires a new configuration in our relation to works of art, analogous in power to that of the Greeks, but different in manner. In addressing this question, Dewey and Heidegger are both confronting the Hegelian thesis of the end of art. The secondary literature has indeed highlighted how profound the influence of Hegel is on both aesthetic theories.⁸ The similarities are obvious and cannot be accidental, given the importance that Hegel has had, albeit in different ways, for both authors. On the one hand, according to Hegel the ethical community of the Greek world is a community that knows itself through artistic production and that has, in art, the living link that constitutes its *ethos*. On the other hand, it is Hegel who has found an inescapable deficiency in the status of art in the contemporary world; a status for which it can no longer perform its essential task. Of course, a more correct and deeper interpretation of Hegel would show how questionable the interpretations of Dewey and Heidegger are. Such a task, however, is beyond the intent of this article. What is important to note here is the common origin of Heidegger and Dewey’s reading

of the phenomenon of art in the modern and ancient world; a common origin that further legitimizes the possibility of establishing a comparison. This comparison, however, must concern not only the diagnosis of the problem – almost identical in the two authors – but above all the solutions they propose. Given that art today, unlike in the Greek world, is no longer able to provide horizons of meaning, and given that a return to classicism is neither desirable nor possible, how can the dignity and strength of aesthetic experience be recovered?

3. The Horizons of Meaning

- 9 Heidegger and Dewey’s answer to the crisis of art in the contemporary world lies in the recovery of its possibility of establishing horizons of meaning. In order to understand how this is possible we need to clarify more precisely the expression “horizon of meaning,” an expression that has been used so far in a rather obscure way. The clarification of the expression will therefore be divided into its two components: “meaning” and “horizon.”

3.a. Meaning

- 10 Let us start then with the term “meaning” and show its importance for the two authors. In his earliest texts Dewey states that “meaning constitutes for us the whole value of experience” (EW.1: 179). This relevance of the concept of meaning does not concern only Dewey, but his theory of meaning, it has been noted, represents a privileged point of view from which to investigate the possibilities of a dialogue between the two sides of the Atlantic.⁹ This is because the entire human experience, for Heidegger and for Dewey, is never a disinterested search for a merely theoretical truth. It is first of all a quest for a *meaningful* truth. Meaning can be preliminarily defined as the conquest, by intelligence, of a portion of that environment and that situation in which the human being is embedded. In making a situation meaningful, that situation becomes intelligible and orderly for us – that is, it becomes a *world*. The term “situation,” used here, plays a crucial role. It is well known that Dewey, having read *Sein und Zeit*, stated that “it sounded like a description of ‘the situation’ in transcendental German.”¹⁰ This statement is not to be underestimated, especially if we consider that, as Dewey himself wrote, “situation is the key word” (Alexander 1987: 86) for his logical doctrine and, one might add, for much of his entire philosophy. “Situation” indicates that character of disposedness (*Befindlichkeit*) that binds the human being to his environment, his being-always-already-immersed in it.¹¹ Of course, it would not be correct to make Dewey’s concept of environment coincide totally with Heidegger’s concept of disposedness,¹² but what is important for the topic we are dealing with is not so much the differences in the description of the concept as the consequences it has for the question of meaning. Since the human being is always already in an environment, any construction of meaning, including art, cannot deny or suppress this characteristic, but rather has the task of bringing it to light. Art, therefore, must transform the situation into a meaningful unity, intelligently reappropriate it and illuminate it (LW.10: 51).
- 11 This dynamic between disposedness and the projectuality in art is for both something essentially polemical, that is, linked to a struggle and a resistance. Regarding the work

of art, Heidegger speaks of it as the result and the instigation of the dispute between two opposite “categories”, those of “Earth” and “World” (HGA.5: 35-6). If we look at the textual passages in which Heidegger tries to define these two terms and if we try to translate his obscure ontological language into a more prosaic one, it does not seem out of place to affirm that they represent a new attempt to think in an onto-historical and political-artistic way; what in *Sein und Zeit* was called “projection” (*Entwurf*) and “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*).¹³ The projection of meaning that takes place in the work of art is then for Heidegger the struggling exposition of a World starting from its contention with the Earth.¹⁴ In a similar way, as Alexander writes, Dewey affirms that “the work of art has its ultimate origin in the tensive drama of the lifeworld; it reflects its *rootedness* in the moment of *reconstruction* or *recovery*” and “harmony will be seen as the result of *struggle*” (Alexander 1987: 193). Even for Dewey, the work of art, unlike science (LW.10: 41) and crafts (*ibid.*: 257), must cultivate a resistance and a tension between its elements that cannot be overcome if the success of the aesthetic experience is to be preserved.

- 12 From what has been said, it is clear how meaning is the product of a work of conscious construction, a construction that being rooted and situational will in turn produce meanings that are never absolute but are equally situational. Indeed, the non-absoluteness of the produced meaning implies that rather than *a* meaning, we should speak of *a series* of transient meanings which together and in their unity form what can be called a world. The correlation between different meanings is, for both Heidegger and Dewey, a series of references, often tacit or not thematized, that unite and separate things and events, actions and passions in the life of the human being that determine his relationship with what surrounds him (Alexander 1987: 140). Since we live in a world of meanings, art has a double task: on the one hand it must establish this series of references, on the other hand it must highlight our belonging to the world and enhance our participation in this series of shared meanings. As Alexander once again summarizes well, “art and the aesthetic are therefore as ‘ontological’ for Dewey as for Heidegger, since they can disclose the meaning of our existence and of the world’s” (*ibid.*: 102).
- 13 In this way, a first answer to the question of the significance of meaning has been given. On the one hand, meanings are the references that constitute in their unity a shared world. On the other hand, they are conscious constructions that are based on the situation and thematize it. The question must now be asked however: how do humans interact with this series of cross-references? Dewey’s and Heidegger’s answers revolve around two terms which will be analyzed and put into dialogue: for Dewey the key term is “habit,” for Heidegger it is “*ethos*.”
- 14 Let us start with habit. Alexander defines habit as a “disposition to kinds of activity by marking out general avenues of conduct” (Alexander 1993: 384). Fesmire widens the definition of habit, affirming that “Dewey helpfully uses the term ‘habit’ broadly to encompass not only private behavioral patterns but also heritable interpretive structures such as symbol systems, stories, beliefs, myths, metaphors, virtues, gestures, prejudices and the like.”¹⁵ Dewey himself will try to define habit as that “human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity” (MW.14:

31). From all these different definitions it should be clear how habit is the answer to the question posed above. Dewey considers habit as attempts, on the part of humans, to “incorporate an environment within themselves” (*ibid.*: 38). This activity of incorporating the situation, however, is the same thing that art attempted to do. For this reason, Dewey states that “habits are arts” (*ibid.*: 15); they are arts that help us “make the situation ours” and adjust ourselves *with* it (and not simply *to* it). The operative and mobile character of habits, which Dewey claims as part of his attempt to define them, is once again linked to their situatedness. In this, the habit proves to be completely different from any type of routine, and indeed proves to be essentially “plastic.”¹⁶ Habits, then, are the key concept for understanding the interaction of the human being with the series of references that constitutes the world, because “habits enter into the *constitution* of the situation” (MW.7: 120; Alexander 1987: 145). They are constitutive for the creation of a situation because they frame the context for action and interpretation, in a manner not unlike, as Kestenbaum notes, the way Heidegger’s *Verstehen* opens up a world.¹⁷ In its historical plasticity and artistic capacity to incorporate and make the situation meaningful, habit thus becomes central. Indeed, as Dewey himself summarizes, “through habits formed in intercourse with the world, we also in-habit the world” (LW.10: 104).

15 The theme of inhabiting serves as a natural bridge to introduce Heidegger’s analogous term: *ethos*. Heidegger defines it as follows: “ἦϋος means abode, place of dwelling. The word names the open region, in which humans dwell.” (HGA.9: 354). *Ethos* does not therefore have to deal primarily with ethics, but with dwelling. It is this dwelling that defines ethics as a set of behaviors. Art and aesthetic experience, in this context, play a decisive role. In fact, it is art, and poetry in particular, that allows humans to make-themselves-at-home.¹⁸ That is, it is art that makes the environment a habitable world; that prepares the house so that humans can dwell in the world as the place-event of meaning. Equally, as Hölderlin’s verses state, “Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch wohnet / Der Mensch auf dieser Erde.”¹⁹ Human dwelling, his *ethos*, is an artistic-poetic *ethos* because art is the force that, more than others, can establish the world as a habitable and meaningful home. Curiously enough, Dewey himself uses the metaphor of dwelling in relation to art, when he says, for example, that “in the field of art, there are many mansions; artists have built them” (LW.10: 315). More significantly, thanks to art “man finds himself more at home, since he is in a world that he has participated in making. He becomes habituated” (*ibid.*: 163). Completing the sentence, we mentioned above “through habits formed in intercourse with the world, we also in-habit a world. It becomes a home, and the home is part of our every experience.” (*Ibid.*: 109). Art is therefore an eminent way through which humans orient themselves in the system of significant references that constitutes the world, establishing and inhabiting it. We in-habit the world *through* and *thanks-to* our habits, and the set of our habits constitutes our *ethos*, which in turn means in-habitancy. This circularity, which allows a dialogue between the two authors, is not accidental, but is founded on their similar descriptions of the situation. It is the result of the same attempt at a projectual response to thrownness, an attempt that is for both an eminently artistic construction of shared meanings, like the building of a common house.

16 Before moving to the clarification of the second fundamental term, that of “horizon,” we still have to draw a last corollary regarding the concept of “meaning,” this being that only within an artistically in-habited world do things for the first time take on a real meaning. This has a double sense: on the one hand, things take on meaning only

when they are inserted into a series of shared meanings, i.e., within a world. In this way, things acquire what Heidegger calls “*Verlässigkeit*,” that is, the reliability, the habit of being an integral part of a set of references.²⁰ On the other hand, this means, as Dewey says, that “through art, meanings of objects that are otherwise dumb, inchoate, restricted, and resisted are clarified and concentrated” (LW.10: 138). Art, Heidegger tells us, causes things to be liberated in their being-things; to be for the first time considered not in the light of an external end (as happens with tools), but intrinsically, in terms of their very being.²¹ Works of art are therefore significant in themselves and through their significance they open up portions of the world, allowing humans to orient themselves, to inhabit them, and to become habituated within them. This meaning-making and world-building activity of art is possible by virtue of its peculiar way of looking at things; a way that, curiously enough, both Heidegger and Dewey call “love.” Dewey says that “craftsmanship to be artistic in the final sense must be ‘loving’; it must care deeply for the subject matter upon which skill is exercised” (LW.10: 54).²² Heidegger states that “Such love [*Mögen*] is the very essence of that ability [*Vermögens*], which not only can perform this or that, but can make something ‘essentialize’ [*wesen*] in its origin, i.e., let it be” (HGA.9: 316). This power is the power of the artist, who for both Heidegger and Dewey become the model for the *ethos* of human poetic inhabitation on Earth.²³ This inhabitation is therefore a construction that has care and regard for things; that makes them beautiful and meaningful.²⁴ It removes the veneer of routine from things and illuminates and preserves them in their meaning and in their ability to create meaning.

3.b. Horizon

- 17 What has been said may suffice to make the concept of meaning a little clearer and to show the meaningfulness and the meaning-generating capacity of the work of art. The second term to examine in order to understand how art can establish horizons of meaning is therefore that of “horizon.” From a historical point of view, a solace for those who want to establish a dialogue between Hermeneutics and Pragmatism and in particular between Dewey and Heidegger, comes from the common source that inspires the discussion of the concept of horizon, namely the debate between William James and Husserl.²⁵ To a first approximation, the term horizon can be defined as that from which a meaning becomes what it is. In this first sense, the term horizon coincides with that already explained of world: it is the totality and unity of the series of meanings from which a single event can become meaningful; can become a reference in the series of references. This meaning of horizon, however, is still a static meaning that requires further development and determination.
- 18 The first of these developments is one that investigates the link between horizon and truth. Each thing, in its constitution as a thing, is never already open and manifest in itself, but it is an event within a mobile field.²⁶ Dewey says “Another trait of every *res* is that it has focus and context: brilliancy and obscurity, conspicuousness or apparency, and *concealment* or *reserve*, with a constant movement of redistribution” (MW.10: 223). Similarly, Heidegger says: “The being [*das Seiende*] can be as being [*als Seiendes*] only if it stands in and out of the clearing [*Lichtung*].” (HGA.5: 40). The similarities increase if we think of Heidegger’s translation of ἀλήθεια as “un-concealment,”²⁷ and of the topic of the retracting-reserve (*Sichversagen*) of things (HGA.65: 15). But what does art have to do with all this? It has relevance because art has the task of making the event-like

character of the object explicit. Art must clarify how every object truly *is*, as it detaches itself from a horizon that in turn is in art foregrounded and presented as the qualitative unit of aesthetic experience.²⁸

- 19 The concept of horizon, if it metaphorically stands for the open field *within* which and *from* which something appears or is disclosed, also literally connects to a spatiotemporal dimension that cannot be left out. The work of art in fact, by establishing a horizon of meaning, is also the origin of the spatiality of the world it created. This is possible of course, provided that space is not the absolutely empty and calculable space of the Cartesian plane, but that meaningful space that is linked to action and movement; the space in which we feel “homelike.”²⁹ The space opened up by the work of art is the space made habitable by it. It is the space in which we feel at home and the space of our trusted habit: “As the world opens itself, all things get their time and haste, their distance and nearness, their width and narrowness.” (HGA.5: 31).³⁰
- 20 As with space, the same applies to time. The work of art is in fact the conveyor of a very peculiar temporality. Dewey says that: “art celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is.” (LW.10: 24). Or again, he claims that in art “what is retained from the past is embedded within what is now perceived and so embedded that, by its compression there, it forces the mind to stretch forward to what is coming” (*ibid.*: 187). The work of art is a concentration, one might say, of what Heidegger had called the three “horizontal schemes of ecstatic temporality” (HGA.24: 418-28). The work of art arises in a present that takes on the burden of its being-always-already-thrown in a pre-established horizon, a horizon that however, in that moment opens again towards a new future. Art, then, is the concentrated point where these three horizons converge and where the possibility of a reversal is shown: this reversal is precisely the establishment of a new horizon of meaning.³¹ The work of art, then, not only has the task of making the situational, horizontal, and therefore spatiotemporal dimension of human living clear, but it has an operational character. Art establishes the horizon of truth as a mobile space-time for the inhabitancy of humans.³²
- 21 The very ability of the work of art to open new possibilities leads to a further determination of the concept of horizon: its mobility. Mobility is nothing but the consequence, once again, of the situationality of human existence. Dewey affirms: “For although there is a bounding horizon, it moves as we move.” (LW.10: 197). In our continuous interaction with the different situations that are presented to us, we feel the need to adapt ourselves and our horizons of meaning to the different stimuli of the environment. We, in fact, inhabit the world through our *ethos* and our habits in a mostly unconscious way, oblivious to the horizon in which we are always-already immersed (MW.14: 125). At a certain moment, however, our in-habitancy feels a “hitch” (Fesmire 2003: 35). It stops being something natural and, in ceasing to function, it is brought to light.³³ At this point, art can provide us, as we have seen, with the tools to focus on the horizontality of experience, as well as those to create a new horizon of meaning.
- 22 Art, however, is not only a way to come to terms with the ever-changing rhythm of life. In turn, it is the cause and provocation of this change. The emergence of a work of art has an explosive capacity for a horizon of meaning. It constitutes a “seizure” in our habitual inhabitation of a world of meaning. As Alexander explains: “Seizure marks a significant break with the routine habits of ordinary perception, for we are suddenly

aware of the possibility of an experience in a world.” (Alexander 1987: 253-4). The experience that is opened and inaugurated in seizure is first of all an aesthetic experience. Art, in a paradigmatic way, in fact “throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things; it quickens us from the slackness of routine” (LW.10: 110) and “it presents the world in a new experience” (*ibid.*: 88). As a consequence, the first impact of a work of art is initially dis-orientating (*un-heimlich*³⁴) and dis-habituating (*un-gewönlich*³⁵). It is precisely these two characteristics of the seizure (Heidegger calls it *Stoß*³⁶) of art that have the task, *via negationis*, of interrupting the slumber into which one can fall when one becomes too habituated within a fixed horizon. Art can thus recall the eventual character intrinsic to every establishment of a horizon of meaning. This necessity on the part of art to provoke a seizure is, again, grounded in the ineradicable situatedness of human existence. Since human life is a constant doing and undergoing, it follows that in coming to terms with the ever-changing problems that arise, humans are not given a fixed answer, a foothold to which to cling. The solutions previously adopted, that is, the already established horizons of meaning, are never a guarantee for the future. For this reason, Dewey and Heidegger say in unison that human life is a path of constant hazard.³⁷ The hazard is the leap toward that unordinary that unfolds new habits and horizons of meaning for our *ethos* on Earth. Art, ultimately, appears to both Heidegger and Dewey as an eminent way to engage in this hazard and thus open up the event in which a set of meanings is revived for new horizons of inhabitancy.³⁸

- 23 This dimension of openness inherent to the work of art can be further clarified if we consider what Dewey calls “imagination.”³⁹ Imagination is a peculiar vision that “elicits the possibilities that are interwoven within the texture of the actual” (LW.10: 348). As Alexander explains more simply, imagination is “the capacity to understand the actual in light of the possible” (Alexander 1993: 371). It follows that imagination is not the imaginary, i.e., a faculty that has its end in a realm separate from the world. On the contrary, imagination becomes a power that goes beyond mere individual ability and manifests itself in the capacity to bring to light precisely that inaugural character mentioned above. Imagination is the force that allows one to break out of a given horizon, to put it to the test, to destroy it and thus open up space for another. Dewey says: “Imagination [...] terminates in a modification of the objective order, in the institution of a new object. [...] It involves a dissolution of old objects and a forming of new ones.” (LW.10: 170-1). If one understands imagination in this way, then it is also possible to establish a dialogue with Heidegger on this issue. If, in fact, at first glance Heidegger himself seems reluctant to link the essence of poetry with imagination,⁴⁰ this is because by imagination he means a merely subjective and unreal faculty. On the contrary, what Heidegger, recalling the Greek sense of *poiesis*, calls “poeticity,” which for him constitutes the essence of the entire art,⁴¹ is precisely this ability to actuate truth as the opening of a set of meanings. Art must re-question the horizon in which being has meaningfully unfolded to humans in order to create the event of the new.⁴² If it is true then that “aesthetic experience is imaginative” (LW.10: 276) it will not be surprising that if “philosophy is said to begin in wonder and end in understanding,” contrarily “art departs from what has been understood and ends in wonder” (*ibid.*: 274). This happens because “possibilities are embodied in works of art that are not elsewhere actualized; this embodiment is the best evidence that can be found of the true nature of imagination” (*ibid.*: 272). Art is the best example of imagination (in the sense of Dewey) and poeticity (in the sense of Heidegger), because it is the force that more than any

other has in its own constitution the need to create that seizure that opens new horizons of meaning for human inhabitancy.

- 24 The concept of horizon has now been more precisely determined, including its relation to the sense of “meaning” that had emerged in the first part of this section. However, one determination still remains to be analyzed; that which has to do with the amplitude of the horizon. Amplitude can take on, in Heidegger and Dewey, a double meaning: amplitude as an intersubjective dimension and amplitude as a historical dimension.
- 25 Regarding the first point, it should first be noted that both Heidegger and Dewey profess a profoundly more-than-subjective aesthetic. Just as for Dewey it is not possible to say, “I experience,” but rather “It experiences,”⁴³ so too for Heidegger, in aesthetic experience, what is important is not the “artist’s signature,” but the bare fact that the work has been created, the “*N.N. fecit*” or the “*factum est*” (HGA.5: 52-3).⁴⁴ Under the perspective of non-subjectivism, it is also possible to dissolve what, as Wood (2013: 246) notes, might appear as the most obvious contradiction between the aesthetics of Heidegger and Dewey. For Heidegger, “the lived experience [*das Erleben*] is the element in which art dies” (HGA.5: 67)⁴⁵ while Dewey titles his aesthetics text *Art as Experience*. The reason is exactly the same as that which will force Dewey himself to abjure the very term experience, namely that “‘Experience’ had come to mean only the process of ‘experiencing’ and to exclude what was experienced.”⁴⁶ As long as experience is understood as *Erlebnis*, that is, as a subjective process of experiencing, the term is not suitable to encompass the phenomenon of art. Heidegger will therefore try to recover a different sense of experience, this time linked to the term “*Erfahrung*,” a sense similar to that in which Dewey intended his “experience” in *Art as Experience*.⁴⁷ Art, however, is not only something more-than-subjective in its creation or fruition, but also in its creations of horizons of meaning. Art, in other words, can create these horizons insofar as it is communication. Communication, here, is to be understood literally as community-creation, “the making of something in common” (LW.12: 252). Communication is participation to that same horizon of meaning, opened by art, in which man can inhabit the Earth.⁴⁸ Works of art are the perfect forms of communication (LW.10: 110) because for both Dewey and Heidegger they have a special relationship with the essence of language. This essence, in fact, lies for both not in the expression of an individual subjectivity⁴⁹ but in the power to create values and create a community. Language, in a broad sense, is “the tool of tools” (LW.1: 134). It is the medium for the creation of horizons of *meaning* and the common root of *all* art (LW.10: 241; HGA.5: 61-2).⁵⁰ It follows that language and communication develop their highest potential only in art; only in that peculiar institution that is the aesthetic experience. For this reason, Heidegger says that “language itself is poetry in an essential sense,”⁵¹ and Dewey states that “all communication is like art” (MW.9: 8-9).
- 26 If it is true that, as communication, art is the institution of a common *ethos* through which a community establishes its inhabitation of the Earth, then one last sense of horizon remains to be investigated: horizon as historicity. We have already seen how the set of meanings, as horizon, is not something motionless but an event, a rising and a fading, a seizure and a habit. It follows that, as one could not strictly speak of a meaning, but only of a *series* of meanings, so one should not speak of a horizon, but of a *series* of horizons, which historically succeed one another. Art is the creation of these different horizons of meaning and is therefore an essentially historical experience.

Every culture has its own art, that is, its own way of establishing and ushering the horizon of meaning within which to live. Through art, every historical community has its own way of knowing itself and its destiny (LW.10: 333; HGA.5: 65). In this series of historical horizons, which is in fact the history of art, there is neither repetition nor end (LW.10: 147; HGA.5: 64-5). This, once again, is the implication of that ineluctable situatedness that permeates human life. In the changing conditions of history, which in its essence is the history of the arts,⁵² there is no completion and no final moment; every beginning becomes an end which in turn calls for a new beginning.⁵³ History is a succession of different stories and humans, Rorty rightly says, are called to produce a “continual reweaving of a web of beliefs” (Rorty 1990: 26).⁵⁴ The set of these webs of beliefs is what Heidegger obscurely calls the “mountain range” of the destinies of being⁵⁵ and what we have come to call, more soberly, “the horizons of meaning.”

4. Conclusion

- 27 The preceding chapters have been an effort of translation between two very different vocabularies and philosophical styles. The attempt at dialogue between Heidegger and Dewey on the potentialities of aesthetic experience has led to the discovery of more than a similarity. To summarize, for both authors, works of art are ways of establishing horizons of meaning in all the multifaceted dimensions that this expression has assumed throughout the argument. This does not mean, however, that there are not some potentially irremediable differences. Firstly, their divergence on the relationship between art and science is remarkable. According to Dewey, in fact, the possibility of a new consideration of art depends on the recognition of the inevitability of science in all its scope. On the contrary, Heidegger thinks that science is the offspring of a calculating way of thinking that has nothing to do with poetic and philosophical meditation.⁵⁶ More clear differences concern the question of corporality and the more strictly political implications that art has in the modern world.
- 28 A more detailed discussion of these concepts, however, would require a deeper consideration that is beyond the scope of this work.⁵⁷ What we intended to do here was to demonstrate first of all the possibility of creating a dialogue between Heidegger and Dewey from the point of view of aesthetics. If what has been said so far is true, this dialogue is not only possible, but also fruitful. Fruitful because it is not limited to some incidental considerations but has precisely to do with the status and meaning of the aesthetic phenomenon as such. Art is in fact for Dewey and Heidegger the most powerful activity available to humans to establish their inhabitation on Earth, to create horizons of meaning. Starting from this similarity it is therefore possible to shed a new light on both authors and to grasp their original and complementary ideas. Finally, starting from a renewed comparison between Heidegger and Dewey, even the broader debate on Hermeneutics and Pragmatism could find new fertile ground and new impetus.

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NOTES

1. If the comparison between Heidegger and Dewey, especially after Rorty, has enjoyed a good deal of attention from the secondary literature, the same cannot be said of the comparison between their two aesthetic theories. The only text addressing this issue is Wood 2013. By showing how art can perform a similar task in Dewey and Heidegger, the hope is to shed a light also on an *aesthetic* comparison between them and to raise a new debate.

2. The works of Martin Heidegger will be quoted following the *Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe*, published by Vittorio Klostermann, from now on abbreviated to HGA, followed by the volume number and page number. HGA.5: 26. All translation are mine.
3. The works by John Dewey will be quoted following the critical edition published by Southern Illinois University Press under the editorship of Jo Ann Boydston. Citations give series abbreviations, followed by volume number and page number: EW=The Early Works; MW=The Middle Works; LW=The Later Works.
4. See *Die ontotheologische Verfassung der Metaphysik*, in HGA.11 and, concerning aesthetics, *Die Zeit des Weltbildes* in HGA.5, as well as *Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst*, in HGA.6.1.
5. HGA.6.1: 77-8: "Great Greek art remains without a corresponding intellectual-conceptual reflection on it."
6. See, for example, HGA.54: 140-4; HGA.40: 98-108.
7. "One thing is sure; the unity cannot be attained by preaching the need of returning to the past. Science is here, and a new integration must take account of it and include it" LW.10: 343. For Heidegger, see HGA.65: 504: "The overcoming of metaphysics, however, is not a rejection of previous philosophy, but the leap into its first beginning, without wanting to renew it, which remains historiographically unrealistic and historically impossible."
8. Concerning Dewey, see the works by Shook and Good: Good 2005, Shook 2000, Shook & Good 2010, and Dreon 2020. Concerning Heidegger, see Gadamer 1971, Seubert 2003, Frishmann 2010, Grossmann 1996, and Pöggeler 1984.
9. See Alexander (1987: 119).
10. See Hook (1974: 103).
11. "Dasein is not first based on the fact that it arranges to enter into a relation to nature, but [it is] first of all free behavior towards nature in the midst of it. It is already disposed in it. The Dasein is itself does not master this disposedness in the midst of the pervasiveness of being [*Seiendem*]. Therefore, we say: Dasein is thrown into being [*Seiende*]. The thrownness belongs to the being-in-the-world." (HGA.27: 329).
12. In Dewey, as Alexander states (Alexander 1987: 136), this disposedness is constituted through a "double barrel," both cultural and naturalistic-animal-corporal. We will return to this problem in the conclusion: here it is sufficient to note how Wood himself notes this problem and tries to solve it (Wood 2013: 251-3).
13. HGA.5: 35: "The world is the self-opening openness of the wide tracks of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people. The earth is the unforced coming forth of the continually self-closing, and in that way, self-sheltering. World and earth are essentially different from each other and yet never separated. The world is based on the earth, and the earth rises through the world." A possible confirmation of this interpretation comes from HGA.65: 371, where Heidegger connects *Zeit-Raum* to *Sein und Zeit*. For a possible dialogue with Dewey, see Wood (2013: 251-9).
14. HGA.5: 35: "The opposition of world and earth is a contention."
15. See Fesmire (2003: 10); Alexander (1987: 142); and more generally Kestenbaum 1992.
16. For the appropriateness of this term, which comes from James, see Fesmire (2003: 18).
17. See Kestenbaum (1992: 31).
18. See HGA.53: 36-51.
19. "Full of merit, yet poetically dwell / humans on this earth." See Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin in HGA.4: 33-48.
20. HGA.5: 19: "The tool-being of the tool consists in its serviceability. But this itself rests in the fullness of an essential being of the tool. We call it reliability."
21. See HGA.5: 46. For this same difference between work of art and instrument in Dewey, see LW.10: 146; and LW.10: 181.

22. See also LW.4: 241: "Actions directed by thought, such as are manifested in the works of fine art and in all human relations perfected by loving care." For the discussion of the term love, also regarding Dewey's ethics, see Alexander (1993: 393-4).
23. Alexander (1987: 262) and the chapter called "The Moral Artist" in Fesmire (2003: 107-30).
24. An interesting insight comes from Heidegger's discussion of the term "*Schonen*," for which see HGA.76: 268, and HGA.7: 151-3.
25. For a discussion of the concept of horizon in Husserl, see Geniusias 2012. For its importance to hermeneutics, see Gadamer (1972: 250-3). For the mutual influence between James and Husserl, see again Geniusias (2012: 41-51) and Fesmire (2003: 43).
26. See HGA.5: 41: "The open place in the midst of being [*des Seienden*], the clearing, is never a rigid stage with a constantly drawn curtain, on which the play of being [*des Seienden*] takes place. Rather, the clearing happens only as this twofold Unconcealment. Unconcealment of the being, that is never only a present-at-hand substance, but an event. Unconcealment (truth) is neither a property of the things in the sense of being [*des Seienden*], nor a property of propositions."
27. See, among others, HGA.54: 14-41.
28. See for example LW.10: 196-9.
29. In Dewey see LW.10: 212-7.
30. Also see HGA.13: 203-10.
31. I think one could in this way interpret the obscure paragraphs on space-time and the turn in the truth-saving event in HGA.65: 371-88.
32. See HGA.53: 153-83.
33. See Alexander (1987: 140), who points out the similarities with *Sein und Zeit* and and Heidegger's example of a hammer (HGA.2: 93-4).
34. On this term, see HGA.40: 162-70.
35. See HGA.65: 480-2 and HGA.5: 53.
36. HGA.5: 53.
37. LW.1: 43; HGA.65: 475: "This state is the original allocation of the time-space play, into which the Beyng [*Seyn*] protrudes: the Da-sein. It is essentially [*west*] as hazard." LW.10: 276: "All conscious perception involves a risk; it is a venture into the unknown."
38. "The putting-into-work of truth pushes open [*aufstößt*] the ab-normal [*das Un-geheure*] and at the same time pushes over [*umstößt*] the normal [*das Geheure*] and what one thinks for it. The truth that opens up in the work can never be proven or derived from what has come before. What has come before is refuted in its exclusive reality by the work" HGA.5: 63. "The function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness" LW.2: 349.
39. On Dewey's theory of imagination, see Fesmire (2003: 64-8).
40. See HGA.5: 59: "All art, as it lets the event of the arrival of the truth of the being as such happen, is essentially [*im Wesen*] poetry."
41. See HGA.5: 59-60: "The essence of art, on which the work of art and the artist depend, is the putting-into-work of truth. From the poetic essence of art, it derives/happens that it opens up an open place in the midst of being [*des Seienden*], in whose openness everything is different than usual. By virtue of the project of the unconcealedness of being [*des Seienden*], which is put into the work and is thrown to us, everything ordinary and hitherto existing becomes an un-being [*Unseienden*]."
42. See HGA.5: 62.
43. This example comes from Alexander (1987: 135).
44. On these issues, with reference also to Hegel, see Siani 2020.
45. On this very sentence, see Amoroso 2015.
46. Quoted in Alexander (1987: 70).

47. The similarity between the two concepts of “*Erfahrung*” and “experience” can be traced, once again, to the common Hegelian root. See Heidegger’s essay on *Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung* (HGA.5: 115-208) and, for Dewey, EW.1: 155, where he speaks of the “absolute meaning of experience.”
48. See LW.10: 240.
49. See LW.1: 141-2 and HGA.12: 7-30.
50. For both authors, this signifies the primacy of poetry over the other arts. See LW.10: 249 and HGA.5: 62.
51. See HGA.5: 62.
52. “Poetry is the carrying ground-force of history,” HGA.4: 42; LW.1: 290: “The history of human experience is a history of the development of arts.”
53. See LW.1: 82-3.
54. On this theme in Dewey and Heidegger, see also Rorty (1990: 74).
55. See HGA.71: 278, among others. This is also the interpretation given by Schürmann 1982.
56. See HGA.7: 37-66.
57. Useful references to help explore these issues can be found in: Shusterman 1990, Stroud 2002, Chamberlain 2013 and Shalin 2007. Concerning the political implications of the role of art, see Rorty’s and Derrida’s interpretations of Heidegger’s utopic pessimism (Rorty 1991: 24, and Derrida 1972), compared to Dewey’s faith in reformation and learning (see Alexander 1987: 131).
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ABSTRACTS

This article aims to investigate the possibility of a dialogue between Dewey and Heidegger, in particular on the role art plays in establishing horizons of meaning. After a brief introduction where the possibility and appropriateness of such a dialogue is justified, the first chapter investigates Heidegger and Dewey’s interpretation of the difference between the aesthetic experience of the ancient world and the modern world: while in the modern world art is locked up in museums and excluded from the affairs of life, in the ancient world it was at the center of the experience of meaning. In the following section, the ability to create horizons of meaning is identified as the possibility for art to become central again in the modern world. To argue this, the two key terms of horizon and meaning are investigated, showing the many points of convergence between Dewey and Heidegger’s theories. In conclusion, the argument is drawn to a close, showing both the important similarities and some fundamental differences between the two aesthetic theories of Heidegger and Dewey.

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From a Remote Pedestal to Everyday Life

The Social Role of Art in Gadamer and Dewey

Elena Romagnoli

1. Introduction

- 1 Hans-Georg Gadamer and John Dewey are two pivotal figures of hermeneutics and pragmatism, respectively. My aim is to show that, despite the different philosophical contexts in which their conceptions emerged,¹ Gadamer and Dewey share a double intent: the critique of the aestheticism typical of the modern age, and the attempt to recompose the continuity between art and everyday life. Moreover I will claim that this common goal entails a fundamental reassessment of the relation between the work of art and the public – a reassessment that has crucial consequences on the social role of art.
- 2 My aim is not at all to assert that the two positions perfectly overlap. I rather want to stress the fact that these communalities show the possibility of a fertile, and partially overlooked, dialogue between hermeneutics and pragmatism. In the last few decades, a growing number of scholars – in particular the so called “post-analytic pragmatists,”² such as Rorty (1982) and Shusterman (2001)³ – have devoted significant inquiries to the dialogue with hermeneutical philosophy. However, the role of art in this picture remains partially overlooked.⁴ I believe that the reflection on Gadamer’s and Dewey’s conception of aesthetic experience will help clarify certain fundamental and maybe unexpected commonalities between the two positions. For both, art constitutes a fundamental key to reassess the basic assumptions of the philosophical tradition: in contrast with any dualistic conceptualization of the distinction between subject and object, the two focus on the interaction between human beings and their world.
- 3 I claim that both Gadamer’s and Dewey’s reflections on aesthetic experience lead to highlight the social role of art and its connection to other human practices, without taking refuge in a nostalgia for the “great art of the past” and without suggesting that

art “lost its aura” in the contemporary world. In this respect, they develop a reading of art that can tackle the most important innovations in technology and everyday life, uncoupling art from the theory that sets it upon a remote pedestal, as mere “art for art’s sake.”⁵ Moreover, this comparison will cast a new light on Gadamer’s philosophy, often accused of being an anti-modern or conservative theory:⁶ the comparison with pragmatist philosophy is precisely what enables us to show new potentialities in Gadamer’s thought,⁷ thereby overcoming some American philosophers’ reluctance to dialogue with the hermeneutical tradition.

- 4 In this paper, I will first show the commonality between Gadamer and Dewey in relation to their critiques of the role of art in the modern age. Secondly, I will show how this critique relates to the aim of rethinking the aesthetic experience as a perfection of everyday life. Finally, I will show the consequences of this analysis on the reassessment of the relation between the audience and the work of art; this is strictly connected to the proposal of a different relation between the individual and society.

2. Art for Art’s Sake. A Shared Critique of the Aestheticism of the Modern Age

- 5 A fundamental point of convergence between Gadamer and Dewey consists in their critique of the modern concept of art, accused of being secluded from everyday life and considered a mere aestheticism.⁸ Indeed, both authors propose a peculiar historical-anthropological reading of the consequences of the separation of art from life, a way in which they tackle the vexed question, first raised by Hegel, of the “past-character of art”:⁹ what is the role of art if “neither in content nor in form is art the highest and absolute mode of bringing to our minds the true interests of the spirit” (Hegel 1975, vol. 13: 9), or, we can say, of society? This question is connected to the tendency, typical of the modern age, to distinguish art from any other dimension of life.
- 6 As is known, Dewey specifically devotes his philosophical inquiry to art in the decade between 1925, in chapter IX of *Experience and Nature*,¹⁰ and 1934, with the development of his theory in *Art as Experience*, the fundamental work that Dewey entirely devotes to art. *Art as experience* has an anthropological and a theoretical starting point. Both meet in the fundamental aim that underpins Dewey’s essay: “To restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms that are works of art and the everyday events, doing and suffering, that are universally recognised to constitute experience.” (Dewey 1934: 9). Indeed, Dewey’s intent is to criticize those theories that deny any connection between the aesthetic experience and other kinds of experience, upholding the unique value of the work of art:¹¹ a conception he calls the “esoteric idea of fine art.”¹²
- 7 Dewey’s anthropological argumentation is based on the awareness of a historical fracture that occurred in the role of art, focusing on the contraposition between the role of art in ancient Greece and in the modern age.¹³ For the Greeks, art was strictly connected to the life of the community and was not conceived as an aesthetic product: this is exemplified by the Parthenon, which “has aesthetics standing only as the work becomes an experience for a human being” (Dewey 1934: 10). Indeed, the Parthenon emblematically manifested the Athenian citizens’ connection to the entire community: it was an expression of the religious and political sense of citizenship, built “not as a work of art, but rather as a civic commemoration” (*ibid.*). With modern industry and

commerce, a historical change happened, so that art lost its indigenous status and acquired a new one, i.e., being fine art and nothing else (*ibid.*: 15). Dewey underlines that art is now created as a product for sale. This is connected to the birth of museums, that he considers monuments to nationalism and imperialism: every nation was required to possess a collection of plundered specimens, as a symbol of power (*ibid.*: 14). Moreover, he conceives modern artists as exemplars of aesthetic individualism and isolation that end up in eccentricity (*ibid.*: 37).¹⁴ All of this led to the phenomenon that Dewey (1934: 14) defines as “art for art’s sake,” or “the compartmental concept of fine art” (*ibid.*): i.e., the idea that art must be set “on a remote pedestal” (*ibid.*: 11) distant from everyday life.

- 8 Like Dewey, Gadamer considers art a fundamental key to his philosophy: as is well known, the first part of *Truth and Method* (1960) is entirely devoted to art. It is subdivided into two distinct conceptual phases: the first aims to highlight the limitations of the so-called “aesthetic consciousness,” while the second tries to conceive art, once again, in relation with truth. Following Heidegger’s reflections,¹⁵ he states that the birth of historical consciousness, the symbol of nineteenth-century historicism, went hand in hand with the relegation of art to the context of the *Erlebnis*, namely the isolated experience of the individual, detached from any connection to common life. The aesthetics of *Erlebnis* considers the artistic experience something totally alien to life: “Aesthetic experience is not just one kind of experience among others, but represents the essence of experience per se. As the work of art as such is a world for itself, so also what is experienced aesthetically is, as an *Erlebnis*, removed from all connections with actuality.” (Gadamer 1989: 60). *Erlebnis* represents the modern tendency of experiencing art as an individual moment that is separate from everyday life.
- 9 Like Dewey, Gadamer focuses on the role of art from a historical point of view, opposing the Greek conception to the modern one and underlying that, in the Greek world, art was understood in connection to nature as its perfection: fine arts were considered “a perfecting of reality, not appearances that mask, veil or transfigure it” (*ibid.*: 71). Modern age brings forth a new consideration of art, described as a process of abstraction: “By disregarding everything in which a work is rooted (its original context of life, and the religion or secular function that gave it significance), it becomes visible as the ‘pure work of art.’” (*ibid.*: 74). This process of “aesthetic differentiation” is connected to practical and anthropological implications: “the ‘universal library’ in the sphere of literature, the museum, the theatre, the concert hall.” (*Ibid.*: 75).¹⁶ Moreover, the separation of art from the domain of common life is expressed by the figure of the artist, free to the point of being eccentric: his creativity and independence lead to the figure of the bohemian artist, totally separated from the common life of society (Gadamer 1989: 76).
- 10 This issue can be summarized as the common consideration that Gadamer and Dewey give to the above-mentioned “past-character of art”: in modern age, art acquired a new role, no longer connected to the community and its rituals, and became a form of aestheticism. Gadamer has explicitly focused on this Hegelian claim¹⁷ and, in *Truth and Method*, he refers to Hegel’s thesis of the “past character of art,” quoting the expression “the beautiful fruits torn from the tree” (Gadamer 1989: 160)¹⁸ to underline how the role of art changed in our society. As for Dewey, the reference to Hegel’s aesthetics is less explicit,¹⁹ though it turns out that he understands the pastness of art as the loss of

self-evidence of art, that is detached from social and political life. In contrast, Dewey claims that “works of art that are not remote from common life, that are widely enjoyed in a community, are signs of a unified collective life. But they are also marvellous aids in the creation of such a life.” (Dewey 1934: 87).

3. Aesthetic Experience as Perfection of Everyday Life

- 11 What emerges is that the two philosophers manage to discuss the role of art in the context of the twentieth century, highlighting the separation of art from everyday life, as well as its confinement to the individual sphere, eradicated from the life of the society. These historical and anthropological reflections are prompted by a common theoretical critique of the dualist conception of art (attributed to Kant),²⁰ as well as the aim to formulate an integral conception of experience (that has Hegel as its common model).²¹ For both, experience stems from the original interaction between human and the world:²² the conception of isolated art is the emblem of a wrong concept of experience as such. It follows that reassessing the role of art can be considered a fundamental way of reconsidering the relation between the human being and the world: this means opposing a philosophy of aesthetic experience to the aestheticism of modern age.²³
- 12 For sure, Dewey shows a specific aim to affect the relation between art and education in the American society of the twenties:²⁴ “In the degree in which art exercises its office, it is also a remaking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity.” (Dewey 1934: 87). This aim is obviously not precisely shared by Gadamer. However, far from being a merely conservative or mere classicistic theory,²⁵ hermeneutics can be seen as practically capable of providing key answers to the question of the modern role of art.²⁶ In the fundamental essay *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, Gadamer actually claims that “the understanding of what art is today present a task for thinking” (Gadamer 1998: 9). For both Gadamer and Dewey, art must be a reassessment of reality, a praxis able to influence everyday life.
- 13 I claim that Gadamer’s and Dewey’s critiques of modern art do not represent a merely coincidental consonance, being rather rooted in the common reassessment of experience as integral experience, as opposed to any dualistic theory that is associated with the modern age. Indeed, they aim to re-establish the abandoned continuity between art and everyday life.²⁷ The two authors share the claim that art is the *perfection* of ordinary experience: there is neither an abyss nor pure indistinction between the two. The perfective nature of art relates to the reassessment of the concept of experience as integral experience. Indeed, both Gadamer and Dewey aim to conceive experience in a holistic way: experience is not a single, isolated event, fruit of a genius’s creation, but rather a process or activity that constitutes a human praxis.²⁸
- 14 The relevance of Dewey’s concept of experience comes to the fore in *Experience and Nature* and it achieves an explicit connection to aesthetics in *Art as Experience*.²⁹ Dewey states that an experience can be defined as such when “the material experienced runs its course to fulfilment” (Dewey 1934: 42). He mentions several common experiences taken from everyday life, such as an accomplished task (consuming a meal, playing a match, etc.). The common element is the fact that “such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an* experience.” (*Ibid.*). Taking his cue from such assumption, he states that the element that gives unity

to that experience is a “quality” (*ibid.*: 44). This is for Dewey the *aesthetic* aspect that constitutes every experience: even “an experience of thinking has its own aesthetic quality” (*ibid.*: 45). What distinguishes a proper aesthetic experience from any other lies in the fact that the former does not merely aim at the end of movement, but rather at the movement together with its completion: in an intellectual experience, the end is a value in itself, whereas, as Dewey states, in the aesthetic experience “the end, the terminus, is significant not by itself but as the integration of the parts [...] a drama or novel is not the final sentence” (*ibid.*: 61).

- 15 Every artistic phenomenon is experience and, more importantly, a proper experience must be originally aesthetic for it to be *an* experience: this is emblematically expressed in the title of *Art as experience*, which exemplifies such binomial relation. Dewey connects this claim to the relation between the organism and its environment, with a nod to the Darwinian tradition. In brief, every organism lives in a certain environment and contributes to the constitution and development of that environment. The very existence of the organism is structured on the basis of its relation with the environment: this relation alternates phases of harmony with phases of dyscrasia, in a certain rhythm, and the restoration of harmony constitutes the moment of maximal wellbeing for the organism. This argumentation is situated at the basis of Dewey’s conception of aesthetics, as he himself mentions: “These biological commonplaces are something more than that; they reach to the roots of the aesthetic in experience.” (*ibid.*: 20). According to Dewey, the restoration of the harmony with the environment, after a period of “disruption and conflict,” provides “a consummation akin to the aesthetic” (*ibid.*). The specific characteristic that distinguishes the human being from other living creatures consists in this awareness, which translates in the emotion for the fracture or for the renewed equilibrium.
- 16 Despite the manifest differences that set them apart, in particular the reference to the Darwinian terminology, a similar reflection on the concept of experience can be found in Gadamer’s crucial argumentation, which presents the history of two fundamental words, i.e., *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, the German terms for “experience.”³⁰ Gadamer aims to criticize experience as *Erlebnis*, by reassessing the concept of experience in relation with truth, by referring to *Erfahrung* as an integral experience that does show the dynamical process of the relation between the human being and the world. In particular, he states that “if the concept of art is defined as appearance in contrast to reality, then nature no longer represents a comprehensive framework. Art becomes a standpoint of its own and establishes its own autonomous claim to supremacy.” (Gadamer 1989: 71). In this respect, he advocates the need to rethink experience in a different way, “so that the experience of the work of art can be understood as experience [*Erfahrung*]” (*ibid.*: 84).
- 17 In the transition from Kant’s idea of art as “expression of the moral” to the Hegelian concept of “presentation of man with Himself” (*ibid.*: 43), Gadamer sees a fundamental step as an emblem of the reassessment of art as *Erfahrung*, namely as an integral and processual experience (*ibid.*: 84-5): “For this we can appeal to Hegel’s admirable lectures on aesthetics. Here the truth that lies in every artistic experience is recognized and at the same time mediated with historical consciousness.” (*ibid.*: 84). From this point of view, art is connected to truth, overcoming a dualistic subject-object view: “The work of art is not an object that stands over against a subject for itself. Instead, the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes

the person who experiences it.” (*Ibid.*: 103). This is emblematically expressed by the concept of play: the subject is not the player but the play itself. This element is called by Gadamer the “medial sense” (*ibid.*: 105),³¹ which helps to compare the play with the work of art. The distinctive feature of the play is the fact that it is “self-represented,” and the transition to art consists in the fact that this event is represented for someone: “That this possibility is intended is the characteristic feature of art as play. The closed world of play lets down one of its walls.” (Gadamer 1989: 108).

- 18 Remarkably, even though their terminology differs in many respects, the two authors show notable similarities that converge in the conception of aesthetic experience as a consummation, namely a perfection of everyday life. Dewey speaks of experience as “heightened vitality,” mentioning that human appetites are “transfigured”³² when reflected in the mirror of art. Gadamer similarly claims that art is an experience of “transformation [Verwandlung]” that modifies he who undergoes it, an “increase in being” (Gadamer 1989: 135) where the play achieves ideality (*ibid.*: 110).³³ In this sense, they both aim to rethink art as an “open process” that can never be exhausted.³⁴ Such an exhaustion would be the death of the “organism” (Dewey) or the end of the “play” (Gadamer).³⁵ This point can help rethink Gadamer’s conception of art (in particular his “*pars construens*”) that has been accused of being a metaphysical or idealistic theory, unable to account for contemporary phenomena.³⁶ In light of the comparison with Dewey’s position, some of this Gadamerian claim can be set apart and those reductive interpretations can be overcome, while developing a line of thought that already featured in Gadamer.

4. Creator and Spectators: the Democratic Issue of Art

- 19 Gadamer and Dewey converge in the attempt to reconnect the aesthetic experience with everyday life, while stressing the processual aspect of the experience in which the subject is engaged: something that is strictly connected to the reconsideration of the relation between the work of art and the public. This has relevant implications for the role of art in society, as explicitly claimed by Dewey and implicitly present in Gadamer as well. These implications can be made more explicit precisely via the comparison with pragmatism.³⁷
- 20 That an aesthetic experience is intrinsically processual entails, for the two authors, that art is not something preestablished that is received by the spectators. On the contrary, the experience of art is created when the artistic product comes into contact with the “spectators” and is able to change their habits, thus creating a new world. Art is not just a mirror representation of the world, but rather a productive process whose development depends on the different circumstances of the context where it is situated, without this implying a mere relativism.
- 21 As I previously underlined, when it comes to the concept of play presented in *Truth and Method* and developed in *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, Gadamer stresses that the participant plays an active role in shaping the experience:³⁸ the same goes for the role of the spectator in the constitution of the artistic experience. In *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, Gadamer appears to abandon the “metaphysical” approach to art derived from Neoplatonism,³⁹ adopting an anthropological approach, when it comes to the concepts of play, symbol and feast. The notion of play in particular is understood as self-presentation: “Play appears as a self-movement that does not pursue any

particular end or purpose so much as movement as movement, exhibiting so to speak a phenomenon of excess, of living self-representation.” (Gadamer 1998: 23). The peculiarity of the play entails that “the act of playing (*spielen*) requires a ‘playing along with’ (*mitspielen*)” (*ibid.*). The concept of play is explained as participation, thus overcoming the subject-object dichotomy. Gadamer explicitly supports the applicability of this claim to contemporary works of art, that requires the active participation of the public: “I think this point is enormously significant for the contemporary discussion of modern art. What ultimately concerns us here is the question of the work. One of the basic impulses of modern art has been the desire to break down the distance separating the audience, the ‘consumers,’ and the public from the work of art.” (*Ibid.*: 24).

- 22 Moreover, it is relevant to underline that Gadamer develops this understanding of the mutual relation between the work of art and the spectators in the analysis devoted to poetry in his later writings, where poetry becomes predominant over the other arts.⁴⁰ The participation of the spectator emerges in the fact that, for Gadamer, every reading or interpretation of a poem provided by the reader has an indissoluble connection to the poem itself, thus re-constituting and increasing the meaning of that work of art. Thus, every reader plays a fundamental role that is comparable to that of the creator: they participate in the formation of the work of art: “An interpretation is correct only when it is finally able to disappear completely, having entered completely into a new experience of the poem.” (Gadamer 1997: 165). This entails that it is possible for the readers to be *on the same level* as the poet: the view of the author does not come from a privileged standpoint, being rather one of the many interpretations that constitute the meaning of the work of art.
- 23 As for Dewey, already in his early works,⁴¹ he strongly criticizes the separation between the so called “artistic” aspect (i.e. the act of production, making and doing), and the “aesthetic” aspect (i.e. the experience of appreciation and perception).⁴² In particular, he complains that “we have no word in the English language that unambiguously includes what is signified by the two words ‘artistic’ and ‘esthetic.’ Since ‘artistic’ refers primarily to the act of production and ‘esthetic’ to that of perception and enjoyment, the absence of a term designating the two processes taken together is unfortunate.” (Dewey 1934: 53). He claims that, on the contrary, a true work of art must be artistic as well as aesthetic, framed for enjoying a receptive perception. In fact, art is what binds activity and reception together: only in that moment of unity can an experience be a proper experience. When the artist creates a work of art, that creation must include a continuous act of perception, which enables them to modify their work in progress. Symmetrically, the perceiver of the work of art is not placed in a purely passive position: in order to perceive, the beholder must *create* their own experience, in a way comparable to that of the artist. Following Dewey’s terminology, the perception is an act of going out of the “energy” of the organism in order to receive, not a withholding of “energy” (as in usual experience the organism has with the environment).
- 24 Indeed, Dewey rejects the theory of the genius that creates the work of art in his interiority and then sends it out to be passively received by the public. Actually, every experience must be inherently active and passive at the same time. This means that an act of perception is present in the creation itself: “The process of art in production is related to the esthetic in perception organically [...]. Until the artist is satisfied in perception with what he is doing, he continues shaping and reshaping.” (*Ibid.*: 56).⁴³

Moreover, the act of perception is not merely passive, but entails an act of creation: the contact with the work of art starts a complex structure of movements that are associated with a certain emotion and tend to assimilate that specific experience (Dewey 1934: 60ff.): a process of organization that is connected to the specific situation of the perceiver. All of this is very similar to what happens to the creator of the work of art.

- 25 This fundamental reassessment of the relation between audience and creator is connected to the fact that every aesthetic experience is *situated*: it is shaped by its interactions with the environment. Dewey highlights the situation where every work of art, as well as every event, is set in a specific context, “has a *local habitation*” (*ibid.*: 96). In this respect, he emblematically speaks of the “act of expression,” which believes to be at the root of the work of art, a “fusion between the single element of art and the environment” (*ibid.*: 92), as the result of the interaction with the environment. The “fusion” between the internal emotion and the external event creates a new object belonging to a multitude of “spectators.” Moreover, Dewey states that the author “did not approach the scene with an empty mind,” but rather with a receptive mind, and this implies that there is “bias and tendency” at work. The work which results is “a function of what is in the actual scene in its interaction with what the beholder brings with him” (*ibid.*: 93).
- 26 Gadamer similarly states that an aesthetic experience can be possible only if it is situated, namely recalling the historicity of every experience⁴⁴ – as opposed to historicism, accused of historicizing everything except its own point of view (Gadamer 1989: 255ff.). In the “hermeneutical situation,” the perceiver as well as the creator are inevitably situated, and that does not prevent the understanding of the “other,” being instead the only chance of building a proper relation between human beings. This implies that the spectators play a fundamental role, by contributing to the constitution of the work of art. Each reader engages in this process from the specific situation they find themselves in: “No reader can understand without specialities, and yet every reader understands only when the speciality of the occasion is sublated by the universality of occasionality.” (Gadamer 1997: 134).
- 27 To sum up, for both authors the work of art is never something pre-established, coming from the artist’s inner world and then simply given to the public. Art is not a privilege of the elites produced by the elites, but rather something universally accessible. In both authors, this peculiar understanding implies a social conception of art. In this respect, Dewey clearly stresses the democratic aspect of the work of art, which can thus have an ameliorative purpose in the lives of the individuals.⁴⁵ Dewey urges the spectator to perform an activity that makes the work of art itself possible, claiming that “the one who is too lazy, idle, or indurated in convention to perform this work will not see or hear. His ‘appreciation’ will be a mixture of scraps of learning with conformity to norms of conventional admiration and with a confused, even if genuine, emotional excitation.” (Dewey 1934: 60-1).
- 28 Art is set into the very social fabric of the democratic society envisaged by Dewey. In fact, he highlights the connection between art and politics, with the intention to rethink art beyond elitism, which entails the massification of custom for the majority of the population.⁴⁶ The core aspects of this conception hold true for Gadamer as well, who proposes a sort of “ameliorism” in the use of the mass media. The modern forms of art, connected to the new technologies, are not a purely negative element per se, but

only when “the passivity that is produced when the channels of cultural information are all too instantly available” (Gadamer 1998: 51). Gadamer states that “it is a profound mistake to think that our art is simply that of the ruling class” (*ibid.*) and moreover, referring to all modern social technologies and mass media, he continues: “We should recognise that all these things can be used in a rational way.” (*Ibid.*). For Gadamer, only at the time our “thirst of knowledge” is proactively applied to these phenomena would a real experience of art be possible.

- 29 By toning down some aspects of Gadamer’s conception of art (namely the metaphysical overtones in *Truth and Method*), a way of considering Gadamer’s reflection on art as a reflection of the individual in connection to society can be found: a theory that can tackle contemporary forms of art.⁴⁷ No reader or spectator is a passive receptor of the work of art, being rather on the same level as the author: both contribute to create and expand the meaning of the work. This entails that, as for Dewey, for Gadamer too the artist is not a mystical, isolated figure but rather an “interpreter or creator” among many, namely the spectator:⁴⁸ both are placed in society.
- 30 In the scenario of the contemporary philosophies of art, hermeneutics and pragmatism do show a corrective approach to the role of art in modern society, as opposed to mere destruction and justification:⁴⁹ they point to the possibility to reassess the role of art, without banning a form of art on account of its being “too popular.”⁵⁰ In both authors, the reassessment of the aesthetic experience has practical impacts on the reassessment of the relation between the work of art and society.

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NOTES

1. For Gadamer, theological hermeneutics and historicism; for Dewey, anthropology and Darwinism.
2. See Kremer (2018: 48).
3. On the relation between pragmatist aesthetics and Gadamerian philosophy, see again Kremer 2018. Moreover, Shusterman himself has stressed the relevance of Gadamerian philosophy for his turn to Pragmatist Aesthetics, see Shusterman 1988.
4. Recently, the connection between hermeneutics and pragmatism has been at the center of in-depth inquiries in the studies of Bernstein 2010 and Fairfield 2011. However, they do not focus on the concept of art. For this topic, see the works of Gilmour 1987, Jeannot 2001, Kirby & Graham 2016, and Dreon 2018a.
5. For a practical application of the Gadamerian conception of art to contemporary and less classical phenomena see Nielsen 2016. As for Dewey, it is sufficient to mention an exhibition of contemporary artists at the *Museum Ludwig* of Köln, explicitly inspired by Dewey's claim of rethinking art as connected to everyday life, see *John Dewey, Who? New Presentation of the conception of Contemporary Art*, curators B. Engelbach, J. Mitchell, Museum Ludwig, Köln.
6. See Habermas 1981, Caputo 1987 and Bernasconi 1995. In contrast to these readings, I claim that a complete understanding of Gadamerian philosophy requires that we consider not just *Truth and Method* (1989), but also the series of subsequent essays that Gadamer focused on art, gathered in *Gesammelte Werke* (1985-1995) VIII and IX.
7. See the scholarly tradition, inaugurated by Risser 1997, Vilhauer 2010 and recently developed by Walhof 2017 and George 2020, that interprets hermeneutics underlining the theme of the "sensus communis" and the democratic implication as implying an openness to the other.

8. It is merit of Dreon 2018a to focus this fundamental point. She also notes that Dewey arrives to this analysis 26 years before Gadamer's reflection.
9. By "past-character of art," Hegel means that, after its "classical" phase in Antiquity, art ceases to represent the highest moment of the absolute: with the coming of the Christian revelation, art must make way for religion and philosophy. This in no way means the "end" of art in the modern world, as the recent *Hegel-Forschung* has underlined, e.g. Gethmann-Siefert 1994. On the contrary, the specificity of pastness, namely the loss of self-evidence, constitutes an improvement of art in its modern manifestations.
10. In particular in the huge volumes of Dewey's writings, the theme of art is present in his early works (see Dewey 1887), despite not being at the center of a specific analysis, as it happens starting from the chapter of *Experience and Nature* (1925). In this work, however, the role of art is considered in light of the "systematic" intent as the culmination of nature, connected to a more "idealistic" terminology (see Dewey 1925: 293-4). While in *Art as experience* (1934) art arrives at an autonomous and predominant position. For a development of Dewey's conception of art, see Alexander 1987.
11. In particular, Dewey's controversy is targeted to the theories of Clive Bell, a British art historian, the upholder of an irreducible difference between works of art and other human activities. See Bell 1914.
12. See Dewey (1934: 90).
13. In the section of *Experience and Nature*, this point was not addressed. Conversely, he focused on the Greek depreciation of art, conceived as a creative practice: in fact, practical activities were considered to be below theoretical activities, namely, contemplation, which belongs to *episteme*. See Dewey (1925: 266-8).
14. See also Dewey (1925: 272-3).
15. See Heidegger's famous essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* in Heidegger (1971: 65-6; and 77ff.) and his critique of art as *Erlebnis* in Heidegger (1979: 77-91).
16. This does not mean that Gadamer shares the socialist overtones of Dewey's thought. See Sigwart 2013.
17. He deals with this theme in other essays specifically focused on Hegel's past-character of art: *Ende der Kunst? - Von Hegels Lehre vom Vergangenheitscharakter der Kunst bis zur Anti-Kunst von Heute*, in Gadamer (1985-1995, vol. VIII: 206-20), and *Die Stellung der Poesie im System der Hegelschen Ästhetik und die Frage des Vergangenheitscharakters der Kunst*, in Gadamer (1985-1995, vol. VIII: 221-31).
18. See Hegel (2018: 432).
19. Here, I cannot focus on their reception of Hegelian aesthetics. Suffice it to say that both authors have been influenced by Hegel's aesthetics, something that is well known in Gadamer (see, among others, Risser 2002) and less stressed when it comes to Dewey. See Shook & Good 2010 and, on the specific theme of the "past-character of art," Dreon 2020.
20. I cannot focus on their respective critiques of Kantian philosophy, nor on assessing the correctness of their analyses. Both authors consider Kant a symbol of the typical dualistic concept of the modern age, see Bernstein 2021 and Fairfield 2011.
21. Dreon 2020 clearly states that, in this respect, both are influenced by Hegel's conception of experience (expressed in particular in the *Phenomenology*) as well as by his idea of art as the concrete representation of the truth of a situated historical period (as in Hegel's *Aesthetics*).
22. Jeannot (2001: 6) speaks of the concept of "transaction" to express the relation between the individual and the world. I prefer to use the concept of "interaction" to express the communitarian and social aspect of experience.
23. Despite the author's limiting his analysis only to Gadamer's and Dewey's masterpiece, as to convergence not only in the critique of the role of the modern age, but also in the intention to rethink the concept of experience, the work of Jeannot (2001: 6-9), is relevant.

24. See Dewey 1938-1939.
25. In *The Relevance of Beautiful*, Gadamer explicitly claims that a proper concept of art must explain both the past and the contemporary forms of art: “I shall proceed initially from the basic principle that our thinking in this matter must be able to cover the great traditional art of the past, as well as the art of modern times (Gadamer 1998: 9). As for the concept of “tradition,” he often states that “of course, tradition means transmission rather than conservation” (*ibid.*: 49). For a comparison of Gadamer and Dewey as to the concept of play, see Doeblner 2012: he states that for Dewey tradition is “forward looking” and for Gadamer it is “backward looking,” but both relate to the past and the “classic” (Gadamer 1998: 7).
26. As appears in particular in Gadamer 1998.
27. See Jeannot 2001. Rasmussen & Gørgens 2006 also try to show such continuity and to apply this topic to the specific experience of “applied theatre practices.”
28. The two positions can be compared with the recent position taken by Bertram 2014 that explicitly stresses the role of the arts as human praxis.
29. His later philosophy has been considered a “philosophy of experience,” see Alexander 1987.
30. The two concepts had already been expressed by Heidegger (1971: 77ff.) and later systematized by Gadamer. For a reflection on the concept “immediate experience” from a pragmatist perspective see Dreon 2018b. For a broader analysis of the concepts of *Erlebnis*, *Erfahrung* (and *Lebenswelt*) see Iannilli & Matteucci 2021. The two authors argue for a more complex conception of *Erlebnis*, as presented in Dilthey, irreducible to an instantaneous and punctiform experience, as affirmed by Gadamer (*ibid.*: 44-7).
31. On the potential relation between Gadamer and Dewey as to the Schillerian concept of play in an anthropological sense, see Jeannot (2001: 4-5). See also Kirby & Graham 2016 for a comparison between John Dewey’s *Knowing and the Known* and Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* on the concept of play.
32. See Dewey (1934: 83).
33. Interestingly, the editors of the English version of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* use the word “consummation” to translate the German *Vollendung*.
34. See Kremer (2018: 53).
35. Gilmour focuses on some fundamental communalities, among which he proposes a parallelism between Gadamer’s concept of “transformation into structure” and the Deweyan argumentation that the medium changes the ordinary, natural elements of perception (Gilmour 1987: 211). However, he also claims that there is a fundamental difference in the role of science for the two authors, suggesting an incorrect and reductive reading of Gadamer’s philosophy. Here I cannot focus on this topic, but it is noteworthy to recall that Gadamer’s conception is not an antimodern or antiscientific theory, but rather he expresses the fact that science retains its value while being included in the more general horizon of human praxis. On this point see Marino 2011.
36. See Caputo 1987 and Bernasconi 1995.
37. Following a different path, Sigwart 2013 aims to make explicit the political issues of hermeneutics via the comparison with the Dewey’s philosophy (and Hannah Arendt’s too). In particular, he stresses how the political revindication of the “sensus communis” provided by Gadamer in the first part of *Truth and Method* is abandoned in the second part. However, the relation between the individual and the historical context can be intended as a “we,” i.e. not an individualistic experience at all, but rather a communitarian experience made by citizens in the community (*ibid.*: 9-18). See also Gilmour (1987: 211).
38. Vilhauer 2010 stresses the relevance of the play in Gadamer as a way to propose a different kind of experience as an alternative to the paradigm of the *Naturwissenschaften*. See also Grondin 2001.

39. As it emerges, in connection to beauty, at the end of *Truth and Method*, see Gadamer (1989: 472ff.).
40. See volumes VIII and IX of his *Gesammelte Werke*. See, in particular, the fundamental essay *On the contribution of poetry to the search for truth* and *Who am I and who are you?* (in particular, the Epilogue to the Revised Edition). Vessey 2010 claims that a fundamental difference between the two lies in the fact that for Gadamer there is a prominence to poetry, while for Dewey no preeminence is given. However, I do not agree with Vessey's conclusion that this happens because for Dewey language is a mere tool.
41. See Dewey (1971 [1894]: 301-2).
42. I do not mean to claim that such distinction features in Gadamer as well. I just want to show that Dewey's distinction goes in the same direction as Gadamer's reassessment of the spectators' role in the constitution of the work of art.
43. See also Dewey (1925: 267ff.).
44. See the fundamental concept of the "principle of history of effect [*Wirkungsgeschichte*]," Gadamer (1989: 299ff.).
45. See Dewey (1987: 181-90).
46. More than for Gadamer, Dewey's philosophical intent is strictly and explicitly connected to the political claim of democracy: see, among others, Westbrook 1991 and Cometti 2016.
47. See George 2020.
48. This aspect clearly sets Gadamer apart from the implications of Heidegger's conception of art (think of Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin as a mystical and prophetic figure). See Heidegger 2000.
49. In this sense, both Gadamer and Dewey are distant from the "shamanic" tones of Heidegger's philosophy as well as from the nostalgic shades of critical theory.
50. For a philosophical reconsideration of "popular arts" see Shusterman 2000.

ABSTRACTS

In this paper I tackle Gadamer's and Dewey's conceptions of art, showing a possible dialogue between American Pragmatism and Gadamerian Hermeneutics. Despite the obvious differences, it is possible to show fundamental commonalities between the two philosophies when it comes to the role of art. They share the double goal of critiquing the aestheticism of modern age, the conception of art as a mere "art for art's sake," and of recomposing the continuity between aesthetic experience and everyday life. I argue that this common goal entails a reassessment of the relation between the work of art and the public, a reassessment that has fundamental consequences for the role of art in our societies. The present comparison will also help shed new light on Gadamer's conception, often accused of being a merely conservative theory. For both Gadamer and Dewey art does not consist in a product of the elites that is given to the spectators: rather, the spectators cooperate with the author in the creation and development of the work of art itself.

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Utilitarianism as an Exercise of Suspicion?

A Challenge to Pragmatism and Hermeneutics

Ernst Wolff

1. Introduction: Pragmatism, Hermeneutics and Utilitarianism

- 1 In public life and everyday conversation, the influence of utilitarian accounts of action remains tenacious. Their pervasiveness in the face of decades of intellectual resistance to them is due, in the first instance, to the common-sense appeal of the basic utilitarian action model. The model is also bolstered by its authority in economics: “Utilitarianism has overtly triumphed in only one area of what were once termed the moral sciences, namely, economics” (Welch 2018: 14198).¹ It therefore stands to reason that whoever wants to understand modern societies and critique its injustices has to comprehend and confront this major component of its symbolic and institutional order. All of these claims can draw wide social scientific support.
- 2 However, one can trace a third reason for the continued influence of utilitarian accounts of action by following Ryle’s and Geertz’s well-known thought experiment, which demonstrates that it is the ambiguity of action that solicits its interpretation: through thick description one attempts to establish whether a boy is winking or twitching, or both... (cf. Ryle 2009 [1968] and Geertz 2000 [1973]). Examining likewise the ambiguity of what people are *doing* when they offer utilitarian explanations of action reveals that they are not only giving an account of agents’ motivations: they also exercise a critique of contending views of action. The fact that the utilitarian action model positions itself as a demystifying theory is thus a third reason for its prevalence.
- 3 The “utilitarianism” about which I want to reflect in this article is not, or at least not primarily, that of a tradition of philosophical ethics, nor is it the extremely sophisticated expositions of utility in the context of economic theory.² First, I have in mind “popular” utilitarianism as a persistent social phenomenon, as a handy action-

theoretical model in economic commentary, and (partially in response to the success it has in that domain) as a model explaining and describing action in other spheres of human interaction. Second, utilitarianism in this sense is also the target of an opposing current of social and action theory. This anti-utilitarianism has found a paradigmatic spokesperson in Talcott Parsons, but it is today also represented by a host of more or less related theoretical stances in many social sciences.

- 4 My intention, then, is not to participate in the debate about the degree of validity of contemporary proposals for neo-utilitarian theorizing in which much past critique has been absorbed, but to clarify how utilitarianism functions, and thus to explore what people are doing when they mobilize its central tenets (wittingly or unwittingly). Conversely, I hope to clarify what people face when they attempt to oppose utilitarianism. In this article I consider two scholarly orientations that typically assume that task: pragmatism and hermeneutics. One may perhaps object that I am setting up a “popular” version of utilitarianism against two forms of extremely sophisticated philosophical and social scientific theorizing. However, this is an illusion, since in advancing accounts of action both pragmatism and hermeneutics start off from the everyday actions of average people. Both are elucidations of people’s ongoing interpretative engagement with the world – both practice what Giddens calls a “double hermeneutic.” It is for their potential to *clarify* everyday action – in this case the practical deployment of a utilitarian understanding of action – that pragmatist and hermeneutic approaches to action are of interest and that they can be harnessed.
- 5 Some further elucidation is therefore required on what I have in mind when I speak about pragmatism and hermeneutics. Within the limitations of this article, but also due to the limits of my own competence, I refer to selections from pragmatism in its sociological form, and from post-Heideggerian hermeneutics.³
- 6 Hans Joas’s early work serves as a guiding example of *pragmatism*. His work lends itself perfectly to our purposes, because of his in-depth knowledge of and declared indebtedness to pragmatism⁴ in general, and because of the way in which he presents his pragmatist action theory as an alternative to utilitarianism⁵ in particular.
- 7 Using Paul Ricœur as primary reference for *hermeneutics* is a less obvious choice, especially because the text from his oeuvre that figures centrally in my argument – the first book of *Freud and Philosophy* (1970 [1965]) – does not fit in with the problem in an obvious way. However, deploying this text in the context of reflection on the interpretation of action is consistent with those readings of his work that follow his concern with action from the early phenomenology of the will in *Freedom and Nature* through to the hermeneutics of the “acting and suffering human” in *Oneself as Another* and his other late writings. One such reader of Ricœur is Ricœur himself (cf. Ricœur 1990, 2000; and Ricœur 2013 can be read in this way too). Admittedly, he accords a central place to the emergence of philosophical hermeneutics from a long history of reflection on the art of studying texts – *Freud and Philosophy* testifies to this. Nevertheless, even there, the general reach of Ricœur’s thought spanning “from text to action” is at work, as I elucidate below.
- 8 Finally, I need to declare an aspect of my own perspective on hermeneutics, which prohibits me from setting up the relation between pragmatism and hermeneutics as a relation between a philosophy of doing things versus a philosophy of reading texts. Such a view on their relation can be circumvented by accepting a central tenet of Heidegger’s early philosophy: through a phenomenological reading and appropriation

of Aristotle's *praxis*, Heidegger demonstrates (cf. Heidegger 2003 [1922]; Volpi 1988) how interpretation and understanding are part of human existence. Praxis as an event of understanding is the core of what I first learned, from Carl Friedrich Gethmann (1988), to call Heidegger's "pragmatism."⁶ Taking this term literally requires reading Heidegger's hermeneutics of *Being and Time* somewhat against the grain by anthropologizing its ontology. Doing so also leaves one free to critique Heidegger's underestimation of the external anchoring of interpretive existence⁷ or his skewed presentation of action.⁸ When the detour of interpretation through external signs of meaning is subsequently taken seriously – as Ricœur correctly insists one should – this makes it possible to understand both social action and society as symbolically constituted phenomena. Having added these critical provisos, my initial adoption of a Heideggerian perspective allows me *not* to consider hermeneutics as *related* to pragmatism from the outside, as it were, but rather to affirm that hermeneutics *is* a kind of pragmatism.

- 9 The article thus connects two kindred approaches to social interaction – pragmatism and hermeneutics – when they are faced with an influential rival: utilitarianism. The argument engages obviously more than only Joas and Ricœur, as the two guiding authors, as is indicated to some extent in the footnotes. The argument of the article unfolds in three steps. First, I present the essential traits of the utilitarian paradigm in action theory, together with critiques of the paradigm, as Hans Joas (partially with Wolfgang Knöbl) has articulated it. Then, pragmatism is advanced as a response to the failures or lacunae of utilitarianism. Secondly, I take the debate with utilitarianism from Joas's pragmatism into Ricœur's hermeneutics. Ricœur's famous distinction between hermeneutics as the recollection of meaning and hermeneutics as the exercise of suspicion is used to foreground two competing ways of understanding utilitarian claims. Most significantly, I demonstrate how utilitarian claims can *de facto* serve as a way to exercise suspicion. Third, the relevance and implications of coordinating pragmatism and hermeneutics in this way are developed in a brief conclusion. In this way I respond to the invitation to contribute to this special number of this journal on "pragmatism and hermeneutics" and thus make a contribution, albeit a delimited one, to the question of their relation.

2. Joas: Pragmatism as Anti-Utilitarianism

- 10 Let us now turn to a significant example of how the promotion of a pragmatist framework of theorizing and doing research is undertaken from the perspective of a critique of utilitarianism. Already in his own early contribution to a theory of social action, *The Creativity of Action*, Hans Joas declares: "There is no better way of introducing the discourse on the theory of action than to study Parsons' arguments and the possible objections to them." (1996 [1992]: 8). This declaration invites us to read Joas's more extensive exposition on Parsons, written with Wolfgang Knöbl (cf. 2009 [2004]), together with his independent social theoretical work.
- 11 It is well known that Parsons (1949 [1937]) developed his own voluntaristic theory of social action on the basis of his convergence thesis, and in opposition to utilitarian action theory. Indeed, Parsons's theory is premised on his critique of utilitarianism. However, instead of considering utilitarianism in any strict sense, Parsons deals with utilitarianism as an action-theoretical tendency.⁹ This is not a sign of a lack of

intellectual rigour, but rather allows Parsons to claim theoretical depth-penetration for his critique, by identifying utilitarianism even where it is not explicitly asserted. In so doing he licences a reading of his critique as capturing the central tenets of utilitarianism in the wider sense, in particular of what may be called “popular” utilitarianism.

- 12 According to this reading, a theory is “utilitarian” when, and in as far as, it defines action by its striving for the maximization of utility, where the determination of utility is random (cf. “randomness of ends” in Parsons 1949 [1937]: 60). The corollary is the *first problem* with utilitarianism: its truncated view of human action, reducing action to the calculation of the most efficient means to be deployed in order to reach certain (randomly established) aims (Joas & Knöbl 2009 [2004]: 27-8). Hobbes serves as model for this understanding of utilitarianism. Hobbes spelt out the consequences of this understanding of motivation in its most radical terms, namely as the warring of all against all. From this derives the *second problem* of utilitarianism: a fundamentally Hobbesian account of social interaction as the strategic instrumentalization of everything for the individual’s own (egotistical) pursuit of utility maximization cannot account for *de facto* social order (cf. *ibid.*: 30-1).
- 13 These two problems call for some retheorizing of action in a way that *can* account for order. According to Parsons, there are two forms of positivism which take up this challenge by accounting for the convergence of ends by constraining factors, either internal or external to agents, but this leaves hardly any room for what social actors know as action (*ibid.*: 33-4; Joas 1996 [1992]: 12). In short: “To Parsons’ mind the dilemma utilitarianism faces thus consists of it having either to assume that free will exists and therefore to assert that goals vary at random, or conversely to assume that goals do not vary at random, at the cost of no longer being able to find a place for free choice and individual decisions in its conceptual framework.” (Joas 1996 [1992]: 11). To reformulate this idea in a positive form, if we want to hold on to a theoretical understanding of both action *and* social order, this requires an account of the *de facto* convergence of ends (at least to the degree to which they converge), by real actors.
- 14 However, before we get there, we need to highlight a *third problem*: utilitarian theories are premised on an exaggerated view of the rationality of action (*ibid.*: 28), a view which is promoted by the component of the *calculation* of utilities that action supposedly needs to maximize. Attempts to refine utilitarianism have led to more circumspect ways of speaking about utility: preference, interests, goals and the like. However, these terms are also more vague (leaving aside their content, emergence and change), to the point where they carry little more than analytical claims (preferences are those things or values that are preferred by agents – cf. Joas & Knöbl 2009 [2004]: 95-6; and similarly Caillé 2009: 15-6). And since this retains the vagueness about ends, the weight of theorizing about action still falls rather on the calculation of the course of action than on the setting of values.¹⁰
- 15 Joas acknowledges the significance of Parsons’s critique of utilitarianism, but the two part ways on how to deal with the challenge of utilitarianism and its shortcomings. Joas’s own attempt is decisively informed by insights from pragmatism (cf. Joas 2005).¹¹ His own contribution to action theory is not of interest here; let us rather consider how he understands pragmatism, and how this could be considered the means by which to defend an anti-utilitarian stance.

- 16 Joas's switch from the Parsonian view to pragmatism is evident from the following statement: "Pragmatism is, certainly, no less critical of utilitarianism, than were the classical theorists of sociology. It does not, however, attack utilitarianism over the problem of action and social order, but over the problem of action and consciousness" (1993: 18). How can pragmatism hope to achieve this? By its central traits, which are presented by Joas in five key points:
- 17 (1) Pragmatism is clearly a theory of *action* (Joas 1993: 18; Joas & Knöbl 2009 [2004]: 125). This sets up pragmatism as a possible "challenger" to utilitarianism, while also offering an alternative to Parsons's own action model. The pragmatist approach differs from that of Parsons, as we have just seen, by starting out from the link between action and consciousness, rather than from the problem of social order.¹² (2) Accordingly, the pragmatist understanding of consciousness is directed *against a Cartesian ego-centeredness*, which takes consciousness – with its radical doubt, anthropological dualism and all – as the starting point of action (Joas 1993: 18-20, Joas & Knöbl 2009 [2004]: 125-7). By contrast, pragmatism proceeds from the fact that action is always situated. Thought is, as it were, organically linked to action and emerges from problems in action situations (Joas & Knöbl 2009 [2004]: 127).¹³ (3) While people are situated in more or less familiar contexts of action, sometimes practical problems arise. The *solutions to action problems* may involve conscious reflection, but people may also bypass such reflection, relying instead on habit (Joas 1996 [1992]: 128-9; 1993: 22). (4) In some versions of pragmatism, notably Mead's, specific attention is accorded to agents as mutually constituting each other's actional contexts. In this way, interaction involves the entire *social reality*. (5) Interaction is symbolically mediated (Joas 1993: 23; ¹⁴ Joas & Knöbl 2009 [2004]: 128). Symbols, including norms and values, require *interpretation* (in a way that cannot be found in Parsons), because "symbolic interactionism assumes neither the consistency nor the deterministic character of internalized norms" (Joas 1993: 44; Joas & Knöbl 2009 [2004]: 123, 128f.).¹⁵
- 18 In a 2006 interview, Joas¹⁶ summarized the major defining traits of pragmatism in terms of its anti-foundationalism (overlapping with the anti-Cartesianism indicated above), the prominence of creative intelligence (notably in problem-solving), the social character of the self, and fallibilism (as in the interpretation of symbols, where the truth is always established only provisionally). These defining traits of pragmatism as a theory of action capture the five points above. I also use these traits below to facilitate co-ordinating pragmatism with a hermeneutics of action.
- 19 These elements suffice to establish firmly an action theory which avoids three constitutive weaknesses of utilitarianism, pointed out above: pragmatism advances (a) a more encompassing, less truncated view of the variety of human action, beyond the strategic maximization of means by which to attain ends, (b) it accounts for the sociality of agents and social order, albeit in a different way from Parsons, and (c) it opens a view to human rationality beyond calculation, namely as residing in the varieties of situated, practical reason and innovation. One implication of Joas's position is that these anti-utilitarian gains should be assumed to hold to a greater or lesser extent for all theories of social interaction that share these major traits of pragmatism. Below, I argue that it holds for the hermeneutics of action, but the same argument could be made, for instance, for the phenomenological approaches of Schütz, and of Berger and Luckmann.

20 We have now rendered Joas's general view on pragmatism and demonstrated how this fits his reconstruction of utilitarianism as a problem. Yet this discussion generates a number of questions:

- All along, utilitarianism is considered from the perspective of the claims it makes: "utilitarian" is this set of claims. That which is *done* in making such claims, their "illocutionary force" still has to come under scrutiny. Studying the meaning of statements in the whole variety of their practical enactments and textual inscription is one of the tasks of hermeneutics, although this task is obviously not exclusively that of hermeneutics.¹⁷
- On the side of the solution, one has to recognize that the pragmatist combination of an anti-Cartesian non-foundationalism with a fallibilistic understanding of creative solution-finding places the motivation of action in a "black box" to which neither agents nor observers have simple access. I do not mean to say that no pragmatist theory of motivation is possible.¹⁸ The point is that at the theoretical level, pragmatism knowingly accommodates a space of uncertainty in its own understanding of action, an uncertainty that requires deciphering for the sake of the interpretation of action.¹⁹
- Finally, any anti-utilitarian theory of action, including pragmatism, has to be able to clarify the *de facto* pursuit of maximizing interest.

21 I evoke the third point again below, but the focus of the discussion now turns to the first two of these points.

3. Ricœur: Utilitarianism as Suspicion and Recollection

22 Although I cannot recall having read a discussion of utilitarian action theory by Ricœur,²⁰ it is not difficult to demonstrate the substantial convergence of his views on action with those of Joas. All the defining elements of pragmatism, as Joas identified them, can be identified in the text that occupies us here: Book 1, the problem statement, of *Freud and Philosophy*.²¹ However, since it is not the primary objective of that text to establish the core elements of an action theory, Ricœur's position on action in it should be affirmed and augmented with references from other parts of his work (the references in my footnotes substantiate the following claims). Five traits characterize Ricœur's position: (1) it is concerned with action;²² (2) it is characterized by an anti-foundationalist view of agency;²³ (3) agents are understood as social interactors;²⁴ (4) these interactors are engaged in acts of fallibilistic interpretation of the social and material reality in which they are situated;²⁵ and (5) interactors advance creative solutions to actional problems.²⁶ These five points were also the five defining traits of pragmatism, according to Joas. The similarities on this high level of generality are sufficient to allow for drawing a fruitful connection between Joas and Ricœur, while remaining close enough to the detail of the work of each not to be superficial.

23 With these similarities established, one could transfer insights from Joas into the framework of Ricœur's thought. Accordingly a convincing argument can be made to confirm that the general thrust of Ricœur's action theory is anti-utilitarian. Once this is affirmed, one is set up to consider how his thought can be used to elaborate both a critique of utilitarianism and an alternative to it. However, instead of outlining what this could entail, I would like to use this section of my article to consider one potential Ricœurian contribution in more detail. It is not a question posed by Ricœur, but one

that I see emerging from the alliance established with Joas. How can Ricœur help us to think on, further from where we left Joas above? He can help us in coordinating and clarifying the first two issues named above, namely the illocutionary force of utilitarian claims-making and pragmatism's black box of action.

- 24 Consider the fact that one encounters utilitarianism as a set of claims. Now, *Freud and philosophy* is, as the original French title says, a book "On Interpretation." In it, Ricœur aims at advancing our understanding of what we do when we try to grasp symbols and other forms of language utterances. In this context, what is symbolic is "all the ways of objectivizing, of giving meaning to reality" (Ricœur 1970 [1965]: 10) and more specifically any "set of signs considered as a text" (*ibid.*: 26) – including interpretative and explanatory claims, such as those we encounter as utilitarian. Interpretation struggles with the fact that language is symbolic, in other words, language operates by means of signs that have *double* meanings, and that, precisely for that reason, require an interpretative effort (*ibid.*: 8).²⁷
- 25 But are there not numerous forms of hermeneutics? Indeed, Ricœur defends the startling theses (i) that interpretation is not just one thing but many, (ii) that the divergent guises of interpretation are in conflict with each other, and (iii) that there is no over-arching meta-hermeneutic. To make some headway in this complex field of competing forms of hermeneutics, Ricœur highlights two forms (1970 [1965]: 27), chosen for the fact that, as polar opposites, they best illustrate a major tension running through the whole field of interpretation: "According to the one pole, hermeneutics is understood as the manifestation and restoration of a meaning addressed to me in the manner of a message [...]; according to the other pole, it is understood as a demystification, as a reduction of illusion." (*Ibid.*). This gives us Ricœur's famous distinction between a hermeneutics of recollection and a hermeneutics of suspicion, for which the phenomenology of religion and psychoanalysis serve respectively as paradigmatic examples. It is important to bear in mind that other examples also fit this distinction, as we will see.
- 26 Let us have a quick look at the two contrasting modes of interpretation.²⁸
1. *Hermeneutics as the recollection of meaning* should not be equated with mere acceptance of what is transmitted, but requires the appropriation of what can be received after critical scrutiny by a reader who still wishes to receive something from that which is interpreted. Ricœur's characterization of this considered reception of meaning as the formation of a "second naivety" (1970 [1965]: 28) is therefore unfortunate.²⁹ What is really at stake is the willingness to receive a meaning that is not simply projected or created by the reader, a willingness which accompanies the process of interpretation throughout its critical efforts. The aim of critical, scholarly work remains to receive meaning or to be addressed by something text-like. However, given Ricœur's strategy of presenting the two different kinds of hermeneutics in polar opposition, the critical component of the first kind of hermeneutics is underemphasized. The point is that a recollective kind of interpretation strives to receive what no causal, functional or genealogical explanation (1970 [1965]: 28) of the "text" can give us. This "giving" is evidently not direct, since it passes through the non-obvious immediacy of the first meaning of symbols. It is true that Ricœur uses the phenomenology of religion as a prime example of the exercise of such a hermeneutics; yet, one would entirely lose the point of his argument if one were to think that this is meant as a first building block for religious faith. The point is the receiving meaning.³⁰
 2. Perhaps no concept of Ricœur has been so widely adopted than that of an exercise or *hermeneutics of suspicion*. Famously, the three masters of this art are Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Their demystification strikes directly at that which is supposedly "said" by symbols

and thus “received” by the scientific reader. They do so by questioning the very consciousness implicated in meaning: what parades as meaning in the mind is not what it seems to be. What is offered as truth is a lie; in what appears, something is hidden (cf. Ricœur 1970 [1965]: 33-4). Therefore, “all three create with the means at hand, with and against the prejudices of their times, a mediate *science* of meaning, irreducible to the immediate *consciousness* of meaning. What all three attempted, in different ways, was to make their ‘conscious’ methods of deciphering coincide with the ‘unconscious’ *work* of ciphering which they attributed to the will to power, to social being, to the unconscious psychism” (*ibid.*: 34). Surprisingly, what these three attempts lack in scientific coherence and accuracy does not in fact invalidate their work of demystification.³¹ Yet, as theoretical enterprises, their objective is more than mere scepticism or destruction (cf. *ibid.*: 33) – they aim at an advancement of human existence in the form of emancipated praxis (Marx), the liberation of power (Nietzsche) or a life which flourishes more freely (Freud) (cf. *ibid.*: 34-35). Despite these family resemblances, Ricœur was the first to recognize the internal differences between practitioners of this form of thought (*ibid.*: 32). And this then elicits the question: how long is the list of possible figures of mastered suspicion?

- 27 Having outlined these two hermeneutic approaches, I want to ask not “which one is most appropriate for interpreting utilitarian claims,” but rather “like which kind of hermeneutics does utilitarian claims-making behave?” Is it more similar to the phenomenology of religion, in exercising a hermeneutics of recollection, or is it more akin to the exercise of suspicion? Mostly, people rather understand it in the sense of recollection, or at least of a “heuristics” (cf. Welch 2018: 14200), but there is nothing that prevents us from considering it as being akin to the exercise of suspicion.³² Undoubtedly, the second part of this observation is less obvious, but it has never been claimed that Marx, Nietzsche and Freud have exhausted the possibilities of such suspicious hermeneutics.³³ Therefore, if I want to maintain that utilitarian claims have to be taken in *both* ways (see §4, below), it is necessary to show first how utilitarianism functions as a hermeneutics of suspicion. When Parsons deployed a wide sense of the term utilitarianism, he gave himself the means by which to unmask the functioning of utilitarian logic, even in places where it was, in the strict sense, absent. I now want to turn Parsons’s argument on its head and demonstrate why utilitarian claims can function like a suspicious response.
- 28 Let us follow the traits considered above, to demonstrate the profile of utilitarianism as the exercise of suspicion.
1. Very often utilitarian reasoning may observe that action is not simply what common actors claim it to be, or what they think it means – it is in fact the pursuit of maximal interest.
 2. This implies that utilitarianism distrusts the common sense (consciousness) of what valuable action is. At first sight, utilitarianism’s emphasis on the abilities of the calculating subject may seem to be exactly the opposite of the subject-critique of the three masters of suspicion. Nonetheless, utilitarianism works by shedding doubt on the situated self: while you think you act out of generosity or social commitment, something else is happening – you are maximizing utility.
 3. Thus utilitarianism may claim that what appears on the surface to be motivated by many other concerns and ways of engagement, are actually symbols to be deciphered; moreover, the traditional variety of motives attributed to action are in fact forms of obscurantism which require work to overcome. Just as for Marxists bourgeois culture hides the reality of the class struggle, so the possible modes of understanding action mask the reality of the pursuit of individual interests. Or again, just as for Nietzscheans, weak and uncreative life has to be unmasked for the resentment it is against the will to power of strong legislators, so

social arrangements which do not let the struggle for interest maximization run its course represent a vestige of the smothering of this pursuit of interest and has to be unmasked as such.³⁴

4. In this sense, utilitarianism poses as a “*science of meaning, irreducible to the immediate consciousness of meaning*” (Ricœur 1970 [1965]: 34). Moreover, utilitarianism is not mere scepticism about the way the world seems to be, but a constructive proposal. The fact that it cannot perfectly withstand critical scrutiny, does not – in Ricœur’s terms – prevent utilitarianism from functioning as a suspicious hermeneutics.
 5. By furnishing a view on what action really is, utilitarianism can parade as an aid in liberating people from the trappings of what social interaction only seems to be, and thus contributes to unlocking people’s full potential for realizing whatever they deem important to pursue.
- 29 To conclude, what I represent here is not advocacy for neo-utilitarian theorizing, but a demonstration of how utilitarian claims may be offered, or received as offering, a demystifying account of social interaction, an interpretation according to which is “denounced a multitude of ruses and falsifications of meaning” (Ricœur 1970 [1965]: 17), in a way similar to popular “Marxist,” “Nietzschean” or “Freudian” critique (cf. *ibid.*: 32-3).³⁵
 - 30 Once this has been recognized, an illuminating perspective is opened on the persistently persuasive power of utilitarianism. This strength can be demonstrated in relation to the three problems of utilitarian action theory identified above (§2).
 - 31 If the *first problem* of utilitarianism is that it truncates action, reducing it to the calculation of efficient strategy by which to attain aims, it may be claimed that for utilitarianism to function as a hermeneutics of suspicion, it does not need to deny the existence of other dimensions of action – it simply needs to assert that only the maximization of utilities is decisive and that the others are marginal to that. Besides, the identification of the good, of substantial aims, is none of its business. The demystifying function consists precisely in unmasking wider accounts of action as exaggerating such other dimensions of action and thereby serving as an excuse for inefficiency, or for illegitimate claims to substantial morality, while one really only knows *that* people pursue their own interests.
 - 32 If the *second problem* of utilitarianism is that it cannot account for *de facto* social order, it can again claim that whatever other account for social order one advances is ultimately underpinned by the strategic concern of opportunistic collaboration. Otherwise, order can at least be partially accounted for by the pursuit of more sympathetic interests, or by the relative equilibrium of competing interests. Moreover, more profoundly, as a hermeneutics of suspicion, utilitarianism may consider an account of social order not to be on its agenda. Besides, it may claim to account for the *change* of social order with reference to people’s pursuit of their interests. Accordingly, the persistence of any status quo may be construed as a mechanism to curb the renovating potential of everybody’s maximization of interests.
 - 33 If the *third problem* of utilitarian theories is that they are premised on an exaggerated view of the rationality of action, as a hermeneutics of suspicion utilitarianism has a double response. Most significantly, the calculation of interests can be claimed to inform action tacitly (in other words, such a calculation is effective even when it is not consciously carried out). On the other hand, it can retort that it identifies utility maximization as the real driving force of action, rather than accepting the

irrationalism or mystification of other models of action. Utilitarianism can account for realism about the need to accommodate sacrifices in policy, which can be too difficult in more normatively informed views on the needs of society.

- 34 Again, these three points do not amount to a rehabilitation of utilitarianism, but aim to account for its persuasive power by considering its mobilization as a hermeneutics of suspicion. Granting utilitarianism's ability to represent itself as a hermeneutics of suspicion can account for its apparent ability to overcome, or at least to side-step, the critique of utilitarian action theory in everyday practice.
- 35 This makes utilitarian suspicion a very tenacious adversary of hermeneutic and pragmatist theories of action. Let us look back at the discussion thus far to consider this dilemma. In action, people engage understandingly with their environment. When their actions are challenged, they modify their attention to their action, a modification which is the start of a theorizing view on action. Both pragmatism and hermeneutics grant that it is only in a secondary movement that agents thematize their daily engagements. This indicates in the negative the kind of philosophy that would always be the adversary of pragmatism and hermeneutics: dogmatic Cartesianism, rational action theory, and the like. But the descriptive plausibility of this point – even its anthropological modesty – comes at a price. This secondary movement can never fully recuperate the motivation of action. Agents, even those who reconstruct their motives when they are faced with tests, do not simply have immediate access to this black box. Yet, since the content of this box is quite important for understanding the meaning of action, one may well want to ask what other non-agential, non-subjective or asocial forces have an impact on action. This question can be formulated a bit differently: the action that we saw played out, what is it a sign of, and how are we to read it? In response, any form of examination that can lay claim to hermeneutic competence in signs and reading may offer assistance here. One contender for competence in this respect is utilitarianism, claiming amongst other things that it is able to identify what happens in that black box. It is therefore hermeneutics' and pragmatism's descriptively perfectly accurate commitment to non-foundational, situated subjectivity that makes them vulnerable to the suspicious force of the utilitarian action model. To be sure, utilitarianism gives a truncated view of this situated action, but it is a view which common agents encounter as an appealing clarification of the ways in which they engage with their environment.

4. Conclusion: Pragmatism, Hermeneutics and Tasks of Anti-Utilitarian Thought

- 36 In this article I have combined pragmatist and hermeneutic insights to give an account of a certain kind of conduct, namely the making of utilitarian claims. In doing so, I have not only advanced our understanding of utilitarianism and its remaining success, but I have also shown what a tenacious adversary it is among competing interpretations of action. The material considered is clearly insufficient to constitute a comprehensive anti-utilitarian project. However, it allows us to identify three tasks for such a project: a theoretical, a strategic and an ethical task.
- 37 I have made the case that utilitarian claims-making function like an *exercise of suspicion*. For the sake of clarity, let me emphasize that this does not exclude understanding

utilitarianism as a species of *recollection of meaning*, as is often done. Like the Geertzian anthropologist, who has to decide if a boy is twitching, winking, or both, social scientists are challenged by utilitarian claims-making to establish what they are actually dealing with. But if neither pragmatism nor hermeneutics has any reason to renege on its anti-utilitarian commitment, what is to be done? Taking cognizance of the fact that utilitarianism exerts a persuasive effect, it seems advisable to start by giving utilitarian claims some benefit of the doubt: utilitarianism too is an attempt to find a theoretical description of existing reality – part of which can be confirmed by practice – and it too suggests a direction for seeking solutions to practical problems, or at least offers guidance for those who do. This warrants the recollective interpretation of utilitarianism. A *first task* for any anti-utilitarian theory should thus be to give an account (a better one!) of those kinds of human conduct which seem to best support utilitarian theory, from which utilitarianism draws part of its coherence and persuasiveness (this is the third point I made at the end of §2). This point does not need to be belaboured, since there are already various theoretical proposals for doing so.³⁶ This concession does not require us to neglect the valid critique of standard utilitarian claims – as exemplified here by Joas. Indeed, such critique is essential to demarcate the limits of the validity of these claims and thus to open the way to more appropriate theorizing. Also, pragmatist and hermeneutic approaches in the social sciences draw a part of their contemporary relevance from their continued opposition to utilitarianism.

38 This concession gives a foothold for utilitarianism considered as an exercise of suspicion. But one can clarify further what this means. As an exercise of suspicion, utilitarianism is always related to other views on human action to which its suspicion applies. This implies that when common agents and social scientists are confronted with utilitarian claims, they find themselves in an action problem as theorized in pragmatism and hermeneutics: how should they proceed when they are confronted with the conflict of recollective and suspicious interpretations of actions in the absence of an overarching interpretive framework? This action problem is real, but that does not imply that either interpretation or action grinds to a halt. It rather impels agents to think further; it calls for an innovative response. Hence, by clarifying the suspicious challenge of utilitarianism's illocutionary force, we have restored its place in practice, as practice is theorized in pragmatism and hermeneutics. This clarifies why the theoretical relativization of utilitarianism will never suffice as an anti-utilitarian strategy, and will rather direct us back to the need for studying utilitarianism as part of our practical lifeworld.³⁷ In other words, the theoretical limitation of utilitarianism (the first task) has to be complemented by a work of arbitration in the concrete situations of interpretation and action. This is the *second, strategic, task*.

39 Highlighting in this way the strategic dimension of anti-utilitarianism foregrounds the need for assessing the real-life effects of policies, actions, procedures that are guided by utilitarian calculation. But here too utilitarianism is already waiting for its opponents with something like a formal promise. Above we saw that the exercise of suspicion is accompanied by a more subdued, but significant objective of the increase of agents's freedom. This is why the masters of suspicion are so often viewed as advocates of a progressive social critique, and this certainly holds for utilitarianism too. And yet, there is no reason to assume that the formal fact of exercising suspicion, in the sense outlined here, is sufficient to guarantee a promise of progressive effects. The question is then how to distinguish between desirable and undesirable forms of suspicious hermeneutics. Hence, it should be clear that the practical thrust of the present

argument widens the requirement for an anti-utilitarian action theory from a theoretical to a practical, and ultimately an ethical, dimension. But such an assessment cannot be rounded off without some form of normative orientation. Clarifying the ethical basis or normative orientation of anti-utilitarianism should thus be considered a third major task.

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NOTES

1. It is worth noting that this action model is adopted for heuristic or pedagogical reasons even by authors who do not subscribe to it as a comprehensive vision of human action, cf. for example, Généreux (2001: 23-30).
2. On how complex the description of utility can become, see Barberà, Hammond & Seidl 1998.
3. An altogether different question is the assessment of utilitarianism in American pragmatism (cf. Crimmins 2021: 240-2 on James and Peirce; Welchman 1997: 153-68 on Dewey). This falls entirely outside of the current investigation.
4. In a later retrospective, Joas declared: "In my sociological work, I see myself as deeply influenced by at least two different national traditions, namely the German tradition of historicism and hermeneutics on the one hand and the American tradition of pragmatism on the other." (2009: 15). In this context, Joas has in mind a very broad understanding of hermeneutics, one which includes interpretive sociology. As far as philosophical hermeneutics is concerned, Joas refers to Dilthey, characterizing a part of his own work as "affirmative genealogy" with explicit reference to Ricœur, but without clarifying his relation to hermeneutics, let alone post-Heideggerian hermeneutics. Although his more advanced study of "affirmative genealogy" again evokes pragmatism and Ricœur, it is explicitly centred on Troeltsch, but this takes us too far beyond the scope of the current article (cf. Joas 2013 [2011], Chapter 4). I do, however, come back to this point later in this article.
5. This opposition to utilitarianism holds for classical pragmatism in general, as Barbalet 2009 points out.
6. Cf. Gethmann 1988. This has been repeatedly confirmed and qualified by other scholars with reference to different parts of Heidegger's work and to various pragmatist authors, for example, by Van den Bossche 2007, Okrent 2013 and Fabbrichesi 2019. Finally, important for the remainder of the essay is Hans Joas's assessment that "Heidegger's thinking has strong pragmatist features" (2015: 567), which Joas supports with reference to his own prior work (Joas 1993: especially 103-7, 257-9).
7. For a critique of the shortcut of mediation, see Ricœur (1991a: 1-20).
8. See for example, my critique of Heidegger's understanding of the technical dimension of action in Wolff 2008.
9. Although they recognize that such a broad use of the term can be problematic, later Joas and Knöbl relativize the importance of this point (compare 2009 [2004]: 27, 49-50).
10. This tendency comes more clearly to the fore in some strands of neo-utilitarianism, as described in a later chapter by Joas and Knöbl (2009 [2004], especially 107-22). The point about analytical claims had previously been made by Hannah Arendt (e.g. 2000 [1964]: 176-7).
11. It is arguably possible to demonstrate that Boltanski and Thévenot's differences with Bourdieu can be traced back partially to their rejection of what they perceived as "utilitarian" moments of his thought. However, such a line of argument would give use a less clear example of the pragmatism-utilitarianism relation, and besides, as with Joas, the development of their theoretical design is obviously more complex. Charles Camic 1998 considered Joas's own work on the creativity of action as it relates to Parsons's action theory.

12. Yet the problem of order is not thereby discarded: “Pragmatism’s theory of social order, then, is guided by a conception of social control in the sense of collective self-regulation and problem-solving.” (Joas 1993: 18). Joas’s development of macro social theory from his initial work in action theory is explored by Knöbl (2011: 300-10) and does not concern us here.

13. Joas states: “As it has been presented above, pragmatism’s theory of action is radically different from the models of a sociological utilitarianism. In their exclusive recognition of rational action, these models are incapable of giving an account of activities deviating from this model of rationality other than as deficient modes of action. They produce a residual category of nonrational action which does not permit the reconstruction of the phenomenal diversity of action.” (1993: 24).

14. Cf. Joas (1993: 24): “Human behavior becomes oriented to the possible reactions of others: through symbols, patterns of reciprocal expectations of behavior are formed, which, however, always remain embedded in the flow of interaction, of the verification of anticipations.”

15. Also on utilitarianism and normativism, none of which can explain the emergence of values, cf. Joas (2000, especially 13-4).

16. See Grimmmer, Joas and Sennet (2006: 24-5), where Joas draws explicitly on Bernstein (1992). To be precise, he lists an additional trait, “metaphysical pluralism versus monism,” which is of less significance for my discussion. The same points are also presented by Joas and Kilpinen (2006: 323).

17. Here I use “hermeneutics” in a narrow sense, to include only modes of thinking which self-identify with that term. However, in another context, it may be useful to use “hermeneutics” in a larger sense (as we do here with “utilitarianism”), in which case it may include significant parts of the work of analytical philosophers of speech acts, sociological ethnomethodologist (notably Garfinkel), scholars of symbolic interaction (such as Goffman), pragmatists (like Boltanski and Thévenot), critical theorists (parts of Honneth’s work) and others.

18. To use a different example, see the significant place accorded in this respect to Mead by Honneth (1995: Chapter 4).

19. If I read this correctly, none of Joas’s work on accommodating insights from “postmodern” identity critique invalidates this point – cf. Joas (2000: Chapter 9, and 1996 [1992]: Chapter 4.4).

20. There are few references to or discussions of utilitarianism in Ricœur’s work. See, for instance, his critique of utilitarianism (Ricœur 1992: 230-1; 1991b: 201-2, 265), where he takes it to task for the idea of sacrifice of sections of society (as opposed to the Kantian idea of persons as aims in themselves). A valuable study on Ricœur and utilitarianism is that by Monteil 2016. However, what Monteil calls Ricœur’s “critique en creux de la raison utilitariste” (2016: 349) is focused on utilitarianism as a normative system, rather than a theory of action.

21. Indeed, Joas himself partially made this point: “Both pragmatism and hermeneutics are anti-foundationalist, fallibilist, emphasize the social character of the self, reflect on the conditions of inquiry, and are inherently pluralistic.” (2009: 17). Since Joas himself indicates this proximity, and already refers to older literature which affirms this proximity of the most basic orientation of pragmatism and hermeneutics, there is no need to belabour the point here – suffice it to demonstrate that it certainly applies to Ricœur too. In this context, Joas himself refers to important studies of Bernstein 1983 and Habermas 1983. More recent studies include those of Begby 2014 and Vessey 2016. In all of these texts, Ricœur is absent. Nevertheless, one notes that this does not reflect the situation in French pragmatism, in which Ricœur played a significant role, at least for some time – cf. Dosse (1995: Chapter 14). Michel 2019 may be read as a counter-example at least inasmuch as he considers Ricœur as a hermeneutic interlocutor.

22. In the third section of the chosen passage in *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricœur outlines his view of a decentred, reflexive self that discovers itself in the “act of existing” (1970 [1965]: 45) and gets to know itself in interaction with the objects of nature and culture with which the self interacts and in the actions by which this happens (cf. *ibid.*). Correspondingly, Ricœur emphasises the “côté

pratique et éthique de la réflexion” – what one may in today’s parlance call a practical relation to self. In the terms of *Oneself as Another*, the attestation of the capability to act comes about only in the light of actions done, in a certain way, by someone who identifies him/herself thereby as an agent.

23. As presented from and against Descartes in Ricœur (1970 [1965]: 43-4). This is reaffirmed in the Introduction to *Oneself as Another* (Ricœur 1992: 1-23).

24. Whereas the social situatedness of agency is not very clear in the chosen section of *Freud and Philosophy*, it is constantly presupposed in Ricœur’s early socio-political writings, e.g. *History and Truth* (Ricœur 1965). Nevertheless, Johann Michel is correct in pointing to Ricœur’s increasingly explicit and elaborate engagement with questions of intersubjectivity from the 1970s onwards (cf. Michel 2006: Chapter II), which Ricœur then consolidated, for instance, in *From Text to Action*, *Oneself as Another* or *The Course of Recognition*.

25. The point of interpretation is evidently key to this *Essay on Interpretation*, Ricœur’s (1970 [1965]) subtitle. One’s situatedness among things is a mainstay of the phenomenological concept of worldliness and articulated with pathos by Ricœur: “[T]he initial situation from which reflection proceeds is ‘forgetfulness.’ I am lost, ‘led astray’ among objects and separated from the center of my existence.” (1970 [1965]: 45). Todd Mei 2016 construed a large part of Ricœur’s approach to truth as a form of fallibilism.

26. Since there is no over-arching meta-hermeneutics, the conflict of interpretations compels agents to arbitrate between competing interpretations in practice (as discussed later in this article). This way in which irresolvable theoretical tensions propel people to practical arbitrations is a golden thread that runs through Ricœur’s work, as can be seen, for example, in his understanding of initiative (Ricœur 1991a: 208-22, similarly Ricœur 1988: Chapter 10) or prudence (Ricœur 1992: Chapter 9 and other later writings).

27. He states that “language itself is from the outset and for the most part distorted: it means something other than what it says, it has a double meaning, it is equivocal. The dream and its analogues are thus set within a region of language that presents itself as the locus of complex significations where another meaning is both given and hidden in an immediate meaning.” Ricœur (1970 [1965]: 7). What concerns us here is not Ricœur’s approach to symbols, specific to this phase of his work, but the double meaning of which language in general is capable. On the continuities of the theme of symbols in Ricœur’s later work, see Barash 2019.

28. It is one of the curious developments of Ricœur’s thought that this terminological distinction disappeared from his own work quite soon. I do not wish to speculate about the reasons for his changing his mind, or to trace the variety of subterranean continuities – these have already been explored by Scott-Baumann 2009. Suffice it to note that “attestation,” a major action theoretical concept of his later hermeneutics of human capabilities, is presented as somewhere between the excessive and the deficient claims regarding agency in Descartes and Nietzsche respectively. On this, cf. the introductory chapter by Ricœur 1992 and the place of attestation in Ricœur’s work (Amalric 2011).

29. Elsewhere I have demonstrated that this idea of the reception of meaning after scholarly work (the “post-critical naivety” or “informed sympathy”) is repeatedly mobilized in Ricœur’s early understanding of the work of hermeneutics and applies to working in history, in the linguistic mediation of action, in religious symbols or in the cultural traditions of others, and does not have any (theological) apologetic stretch – cf. Wolff (2021: 140, 162, 164, 187-8). See also in the later work the notions of “naïve” and “critical” solicitude (Ricœur 1992: 273), “naïve” and “critical” *phronesis* (*ibid.*: 290).

30. In fact, *Freud and Philosophy* ends on a consideration of religious faith in and after psychoanalysis. But this does not affect the current argumentative context (1970 [1965]: 524-51). For a clarification on “being addressed” by symbols as it emerges in as a philosophical problem in Ricœur’s *Symbolism of Evil*, see Wolff (2021: 152-7).

31. “That the Marxists are stubbornly insistent on the ‘reflection’ theory, that Nietzsche contradicts himself in dogmatizing about the ‘perspectivism’ of the will to power, that Freud mythologizes with his ‘censorship,’ ‘watchman,’ and ‘disguises’ – still, what is essential does not lie in these encumbrances and impasses.” (Ricoeur 1970 [1965]: 34; translation modified).
32. Joas’s discussion of utilitarianism considers it rather as a species of hermeneutics of recollection, but in working on this article, I noted Joas and Knöbl’s comment that, for many authors, “neo-utilitarian approaches appeal because they wish to ‘unmask’ social reality” (2009 [2004]: 102, with reference to Etzioni). They compare this with Marx, in a way not dissimilar to what I do below.
33. Elsewhere I have demonstrated how Levinas’ ethics displays remarkable similarities with this form of thinking (cf. Wolff 2007: 329-33 and 2011: 169-73).
34. However, if I read this correctly, there is nothing in this use of utilitarianism to explain why the underlying motive of action conceals itself (i.e. masks itself in a symbolic meaning).
35. The broad notion of utilitarianism used here raises the question of whether there are not substantial traits of utilitarianism in these masters of suspicion. Caillé (2009: 16), for instance, makes this claim, but without working out the point. The extent to which there may be an undercurrent of utilitarianism (in the sense used here) running through Marx, Freud, Nietzsche is a question worth examining, but one beyond the scope of the current article. Based on my first explorations, I remain undecided; hence my decision to present utilitarianism here as a fourth, independent version.
36. Cf. for instance Caillé (2009: Chapter 1) or, partially, Honneth (1995: 165-6). Even Parsons, in developing his own action theory, allows for the “permanently valid precipitate” of radical positivism, utilitarianism and idealism; cf. Parsons (1949 [1937]: 718-9).
37. Here I have studied the illocutionary force of utilitarianism by using rather abstract theoretical argumentation. The study could be expanded by considering the fact that some recourse to utilitarian-styled critique is almost unavoidable. This can be supported with reference to Caillé (2009: 25) and by examining critiques such as the identification of “hermeneutic contradiction,” in the sense of Boltanski (2011: 84-93). Clearly, the second task requires more detailed sociological documentation.

ABSTRACTS

This article examines pragmatism and hermeneutics as kindred approaches to action as they face the persistent influence of utilitarianism in social life. The essential traits of the utilitarian paradigm in action theory are presented, together with critiques of the theory, as articulated by Hans Joas (partially with Wolfgang Knöbl). Pragmatism is then presented as a response to the flaws of utilitarianism. Next, the debate with utilitarianism is traced from Joas’s pragmatism to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. Ricoeur’s distinction between hermeneutics as the recollection of meaning, and hermeneutics as the exercise of suspicion, is used to foreground the argument that making utilitarian claims can function as an exercise of suspicion. Finally, some implications of coordinating pragmatism and hermeneutics in this way are outlined.

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Essays

Entanglement and Non-Ontology

How Putnam clarifies the Link between Aesthetic and Ethical Value

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This research work is supported by national funds through FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., in the context of the celebration of the program contract foreseen in the numbers 4, 5 and 6 of article 23.^º of D.L. no. 57/2016 of 29 August, as amended by Law no. 57/2017 of 19 July.

1. Introduction

- 1 The *Vittorio Emanuele II Monument*, which stands between the Piazza Venezia and the Capitoline Hill in Rome, right on the ancient heart of the city, is interesting for the disparate reactions it arouses in natives and (some) tourists. While many of the latter may feel attracted by the massive heap of white marble with its profusion of statues, reliefs and columns, and probably see it as majestic, imponent, magnificent, imposing, grand, etc., some natives are actually prone to describe it with derogatory terms such as “the typewriter” and “the wedding cake,” seeing it rather as pompous, ostentatious, out of place, grandiose, in sum, *distasteful* and, therefore, *ugly*. Another way of putting it is to say that the appropriately backgrounded observer cannot avoid seeing the whole thing as *kitsch* of a certain kind; the kind associated with grandiloquence of power and vulgar appropriation of the past in the language of affectation. Describing it as “the typewriter” or “the wedding cake” captures the impression of its enduring effect on the urban landscape and its distinctive kitschy element: these words invite comparison between experience of the monument and the imagined experience of a gigantic replica of a typewriter or wedding cake, so as to bring out the true aesthetic aspect of jarringness, incongruousness, in sum, *inappropriateness*. They are more than just derogatory expressions voicing a negative attitude; they introduce a perspective, a way of seeing.¹

- 2 These are not simply judgements made on the basis of sense perception and a *sui generis* reaction to the experience of certain shapes, masses, volumes, textures, lines and colors. They are riddled through and through with diverse contextual elements which are social, historical and cultural: the monument itself is a political statement made through architecture (in fact, a series of related political statements: from celebration of unified Italy under the Savoy dynasty to “Altar of the Fatherland” and its use during Italian fascism). The unsuspecting tourist, through the perspective of an uninformed gaze, might just see continuity where the properly backgrounded subject sees disruption, the intrusion of a foreign body carving a perpetual scar on the flesh and surface of the cultural organism which is the city – a disruption that may perversely operate through the pretense of continuity, a mimicry of ancient grandeur that not only falls short of it but quickly betrays itself as mockery – unwilling parody being an important thread in the phenomenon of kitsch. But then again, the uninformed gaze might also see generosity instead of guile, or unconventional straightforwardness instead of political cunning, deviousness and deceit. To be able to see such things one requires training, no less than to recognize the shape of a chord progression in music or the intricate play of meanings in a well-crafted sentence. It takes time, a diverse combination of the virtues that Hume (1985) ascribed to the “ideal judge” (though always in a real life and therefore less than ideal state) and probably some more, all of which presupposes a further condition, which is personal growth, development, or, in one word, flourishing (which always comes in a variety of imperfect degrees, as is to be expected in real life experience). In other words, it is not the same as a machine built yesterday and running an algorithm in order to detect the presence of a “real” (mind-independent) property, or a barometer measuring air pressure.
- 3 It is now time to explain the point of this little slice of *Lebenswelt*, of actual experience in the lives of individuals, and, in fact, what it presents us with is a raw illustration of the complexities involved in apparently simple attributions of aesthetic value to things, as well as what is involved in real cases of aesthetic disagreement. It is a concrete example of how the question of value is pressing, unavoidable and ongoing for us, even if it is discarded by some philosophers, from the comfort of the armchair, as irredeemably obscure and mysterious. As Hilary Putnam phrased it, “the question of fact and value is a forced choice question. Any reflective person *has* to have a real opinion upon it” (Putnam 1981: 127).
- 4 And we could go further and say, as the example shows, that not only “reflective” persons are unavoidably confronted with the more speculative question of how fact and value are related. Also the common citizen of contemporary Rome and the more or less barbarian tourist one may find in its streets are unable to avoid value judgements and disagreement about them – even the option of being indifferent to marble monstrosities and the like generates further disputes that are ultimately about value and is only intelligible as an option from the standpoint of creatures who, like us, are bound to make value judgements. Even if there is a question of scepticism about the objectivity of value being a theoretically consistent view, it cannot be *pragmatically* consistent, short of a radical change in “the texture of the human world” (*ibid.*: 141) akin to Putnam’s thought experiment with the “Super-Benthamites.” And if there is a role to be played here by philosophy it is to provide us with a measure of understanding of the phenomenon, even if not with knowledge of any new “facts of the matter.”

- 5 Other features of the example are the following: 1) it suggests that, in our actual experience, concepts of aesthetic value are more often than not *entangled* with concepts of ethical value; 2) it provides at the same time a vivid case of what Putnam calls the entanglement of factual descriptions and value judgements; 3) it suggests, against the grain of traditional theorisation in aesthetics, how Putnam's idea of a "pragmatist enlightenment" in philosophy opens up a promising new approach to the understanding of value, from the standpoint of how it actually works in our lives; how aesthetics, as well as ethics, can be fruitfully seen as a "system of interrelated concerns, which are mutually supporting but also in partial tension" (Putnam 2004: 22), which is what cases of aesthetic disagreement like the one we describe above most notably exemplify.
- 6 Our aim here is a quite modest one. We want to look at Putnam's project of an "ethics without ontology," focusing on some crucial aspects of it, namely: a) the entanglement of fact and value; b) the idea that standards of correction in a certain domain are not exhausted by the *description* of either natural or non-natural facts (what he calls "objectivity without objects"); c) the idea of "[understanding and learning to] imaginatively identify" with a "particular evaluative outlook" (*ibid.*: 69) as the crucial mechanism by which we are able to apply *thick concepts*;² and, finally, d) the idea of a "pragmatist enlightenment," by which one abandons the illusion of an "absolute conception of the world," or the traditional project of grounding ethics on a metaphysics, be it an "inflationary" one (such as the Platonic variety, which posits "non-natural properties"), or a "deflationary" one, in its "reductionist" or "eliminationist" varieties (*ibid.*: 78). With our eyes set on these aspects, we attempt to draw important lessons for the project of a joint approach to aesthetic and ethical value, not as two isolated domains but taking seriously the pervading entanglement of both, as suggested in the example of "aesthetic disagreement" with which we started. This should provide us with an outline of a possible way of extending Putnam's project so as to include the aesthetic domain; or perhaps we should call it the outline of a contextualist approach to aesthetics that draws on Putnam's project for ethics. The plausibility of such a proposal will be shown by establishing connections between Putnam's remarks and recent developments in both aesthetics and ethics. We conclude by suggesting that a fruitful way of pursuing the connection between aesthetic and ethical value could be found in co-opting resources from virtue ethics. Here we take advantage of Putnam's appeal to the concept of *human flourishing* (Putnam 1981). The modesty of the aim lies in the fact that here we can only gesture towards a "research program," and not conclusively demonstrate that we need aesthetic value to understand ethical value and vice versa. But even this is very much in tune with Putnam's pragmatic approach.

2. Casting Light on the Problem

- 7 Value permeates the lives of people. We may lack a clear understanding of how this is so, but we do know that certain things matter to us more than others, that different things matter quite a lot to us in very different ways and for different reasons. The fact that each one of us is the unique *subject of a life* and not merely a belief-forming machine with a perceptual system (the sort of picture that might be evoked by expressions such as "cognitive agent") is inextricably bound with the concept of value.

Plausibly, nothing matters more to us than our own lives and how they relate to the lives of others (following the Aristotelian idea that humans are fundamentally social and political animals). After all, why would any particular object or experience matter to us if not from the point of view of how those things acquire a place, status and “directionality” within the context of our lives as structured wholes (Levinson 2004), unfolding in a way we could describe as “narrative-like” (Goldie 2012)?³ Also plausibly, we cannot make sense of the idea of “living a life,” by contrast with simply “being alive,” if we do not think of ourselves as creatures for whom *valuing* is a crucial activity, the activity without which there simply are no *structured practices* that distinguish the living of a life from the mere state of being alive or a “mechanical” sequence of such states, to employ the Deweyan metaphor. A corollary of all this is that the connection between aesthetic and ethical value may seem mysterious and dubious from the standpoint of the armchair, but it is forced on us from the standpoint of *embodied experience*, such as, for instance, the experience of being confronted with a marble monstrosity that is not simply there to be an object of sight, but screams at us, telling us how we should go about in our valuations, by shaping our relationship with the environment, not just through conceptualization but through bodily interaction. So what we need from a philosophical approach is to make sense of this phenomenon, and this is what we believe Putnam’s pragmatic approach may assist us in doing.

3. Putnam’s Project

- 8 Putnam famously contended that there is no absolute conception of reality to be found behind the diversity of our language games. According to an absolute conception of reality, what is *real* would be identified with what is accessible from any point of view (Putnam 2004; McNaughton 1988; McDowell 1985). The problem with this idea, according to Putnam, is that we cannot make sense of such a point of view, a God’s eye point of view, for that would, among other things, incur the “illusion that there could be just one sort of language game which could be sufficient for the description of the whole of reality!” (Putnam 2004: 22). He further argued that both metaphysical realism and anti-realism presuppose such a point of view, and that this is the main reason why both ethical and aesthetic values have been regarded as suspicious, not *real* “entities”: they have no place within the absolute conception of reality, the true description of “what there is,” sought by those committed to “Ontology.”
- 9 The challenges posed by such putative entities as values were identified long ago. For instance, Hume stated that “Vice and virtue [...] may be compared to sounds, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind” (Hume 1972, Book 111, 51: 203). Evaluative properties are thus not real properties of objects, but rather a manifestation of the mind’s “propensity to spread itself on external objects.” Two centuries later, Mackie argued along the same lines: moral values and moral facts are not the sort of thing that can be part of the “fabric” of the world. Suppose, for instance, that we describe a homicide. There will be certain aspects of that action that are factual, that belong to the constitution of the world: “X pierces Y with a knife,” “blood gushes out,” etc. And it may also be a fact about the world that someone, or the society as a whole, *considers* that action to be wrong. However, there is in the world no fact that consists in the action itself being wrong; evaluative properties are not real, they are merely the “projection or

objectification of moral attitudes” (Mackie 1977: 42). A related view in aesthetics is that of the “aesthetic attitude theorists,” in the line of Bullough (1912), and Stolnitz (1960), who provide psychological explanations of aesthetic experience, a line that goes back to Kant (2000) and ultimately to Hume’s “projectionism.”⁴

- 10 It is also to Hume that Putnam traces back what he calls the dichotomy between *facts* and *values*, which, through the influence of logical positivism has become an entrenched cultural institution in the 20th century, holding its sway up to our time well after the philosophical ideas underpinning it have been long demolished, according to Putnam, by moves in philosophy that he sees as having been propelled by the influence of American pragmatism, e.g. Quine’s (1951) criticisms of the analytical-synthetical distinction or the thesis of conceptual relativity. And it is precisely this absolute contrast between facts and values that Putnam diagnoses as the cause of the current deadlock between realist and anti-realist approaches to ethical (and aesthetic) value, and thus the persistence of the “ontological program,” in its inflationary and deflationary varieties. So the current deadlock is between positing mysterious non-natural properties (the Plato-Moore line) to buttress our evaluative discourse; to reduce value properties to some other thing (explain them away); or to eliminate them from our “ontology” altogether. In aesthetics, the deadlock is between varieties of aesthetic realism that posit equally mysterious (though not non-natural) aesthetic properties,⁵ resorting to the metaphysical notion of supervenience, via the work of Sibley (1959; 1965) in order to make them palatable (Zangwill 2001; Zemach 1997);⁶ and varieties of anti-realism, mostly of Kantian inspiration (Scruton 1996), with the eliminationist strand represented by authors like Dickie (1964) and Cohen (1973). To break this theoretical impasse generated by the “ontological program,” Putnam proposes his “pragmatic pluralism,” which, in his words, “does not require us to find mysterious and supersensible objects behind our language games” so that “the truth can be told in language games that we actually play when language is working” (Putnam 2004: 22).
- 11 These are, in broad outline, the terms of the discussion. A realist about value (in the pragmatic sense of “realist”), who holds that the evaluative properties of things are real and (at least some) value attributions objective, must answer this challenge. Putnam, however, will argue that the true problem lies in the terms of the discussion themselves, namely, with the concept of a “real property.” So a pragmatist leap out of the deadlock must contemplate a reform of the conceptual vocabulary with which we approach these issues.⁷
- 12 And what is a *real* property? Under some interpretations, a real property is one that can be characterized without reference to the experiences or responses of the observer – real properties would then be physical properties of objects, such as mass and position, which exist in the world itself, independently of us. In other words, real properties are “mind-independent” properties. These would be the primary qualities of objects, as they are described by our best scientific theories. In contrast, secondary properties are dependent on the sensibility of the observer, and while they can still be said to be a part of the causal structure of the world, in the sense that our perceptions are *caused* by “real properties,” value properties seem to be further removed from it.⁸ Normally, the model for thinking about evaluative properties is that of secondary qualities, and thus they would not be real in a proper sense.⁹

- 13 Of course, this understanding of what a real property consists in, is subsidiary of the absolute conception of reality to which Putnam objects; and he objects to it for at least two different yet related reasons. First, he denies that the scientific viewpoint gives us a factual, neutral and objective description of the fabric of the world as it is in itself, independently of any particular perspective. Second, he also denies that those properties or qualities that cannot be characterized without reference to observers' responses and sensibilities should be considered any less real. Since we are in no position to tell which properties are accessible from any point of view, it is preposterous to contend that only those properties accessible from that point of view are real. And given that Putnam rejects the absolute conception of reality, then the idea that values are nothing more than "projections" of human attitudes or beliefs, to be contrasted with the world "as it is," ceases to make sense.
- 14 How does then Putnam understand evaluative properties, exactly? Let us first consider a simpler case: the example of colour. Secondary qualities, in general, are understood in terms of dispositions of an object to present a certain kind of perceptual appearance. An object's property of "being red" is to be understood in virtue of that object being such that, under the appropriate circumstances, it looks red to a suitable class of observers. In other words, it has a power to elicit experiences of red in normal observers, under standard conditions of observation. It is a quality of the object that is dependent on how humans (or other relevantly similar beings with colour vision), with a sufficient degree of visual acuity and under appropriate lighting conditions, visually experience the object. Is it then a subjective or an objective property? The property of "being red" is subjective in the sense that it is only conceivable in terms of certain subjective states it originates – something "being red" means that something "looks red" to someone. However, this is not to mean that this property does not genuinely belong to the object, in the sense that an object being such that it looks red to someone is not dependent on the particular experience of looking red to someone on a particular occasion, and also in the sense that the application of colour predicates is not an arbitrary practice with no standards of correction.
- 15 Evaluative properties – even if we apply to them something like the model of dispositional properties – are of course much more complex than colour properties. But the whole point is that they are to be understood as similar to *real* dispositional perceptual properties of objects, which will appear as such-and-such to ideal observers under ideal conditions, and not merely projections of the human mind. According to Putnam, evaluative properties cannot be characterized without reference to the responses of observers,¹⁰ but they are not unreal or arbitrary; in fact, they are precisely the kind of properties about which the judgments of rational inquirers can be expected to converge. For sure, convergence about value is widespread, but if lack of convergence was *overwhelmingly* more widespread than convergence, social life would hardly be possible at all. But even though the life of a society may reach dramatic or even desperate levels of conflict, unrest, and disintegration, it always falls short of a Hobbesian "state of nature." For obvious reasons, lack of convergence in matters of value is far more conspicuous to us than the unbroken chain of convergences that sustain everyday life, even throughout periods of terrible disruption. Obviously, it is hardly ever the case that everyone converges on some specific question of value; but then again, that is hardly ever the case on any kind of question. Furthermore, if we follow Putnam's reasoning, we will find evaluative aspects in practically all sorts of

factual questions. To give just one example in the case of art, what makes it possible that certain artworks appear to us as “unconventional,” highly original or revolutionary is precisely the background of convergence (e.g. the fact that our experience of artworks is organized by “artistic categories” (Walton 1970), for instance in being grouped into *styles*) allowing variations and departures from the “pattern” to be visible at all. The general lesson here is that in matters of value, lower level discontinuities presuppose a background of higher level continuities, on the basis of which the discontinuities will either be resolved or transformed into something else. This may be somewhat confusing, but it is exactly what Putnam means when he suggests that we need “a complex vision of human nature” if we are to grasp the common ground between aesthetics and ethics (Putnam 2004: 8).

- 16 Obviously, the notion of “ideal observer,” in the case of colour, differs from the notion of “ideal observer” when applied to the case of values; or better yet, what counts as an ideal observer differs from one case to the other. In the case of colour, what we have in mind is just statistical normality. In the case of values, we will not derive a standard of correction from a statistical norm; rather, the notion of merit will be involved (McDowell 1998). When a certain situation is perceived as cruel, this *merits* some response (e.g. disgust, moral reprobation, etc.), in the same way as when some situation is perceived as funny (e.g. when the telling of a joke is perceived as funny, laughter is not merely a causal effect but a *merited response* to that kind of situation, and this specific type of merited response is what constitutes the point of telling a joke and makes evaluation of jokes possible).
- 17 This is the point where the concepts of *context* and *evaluative outlook* enter the picture (Putnam 2004: 69). An evaluative outlook is what enables us to see an action as *cruel*, a situation as *funny* or a passage as *fustian*, or, indeed, a broodingnagian marble monument as jarring, ostentatious and kitsch. The discernment of value properties can be clarified by the idea of trained visual perception: to “perceive” moral and aesthetic properties one must become the right kind of person, with a repertoire of appropriately developed skills. The right kind of person is one with a trained sensibility – in developing perceptual and conceptual powers, tools and skills, the agent is *ipso facto* developing her ability to discern these properties. This also requires an understanding of both ethical and aesthetic ascriptions of value in contextualist terms: judgements are relative to groups of people (not isolated individuals) in concrete historical situations and, ultimately, to forms of (social) life. We shall return to this line of thought later on.
- 18 A promising line of argument for a contextualist approach of this kind must involve an analysis of the so-called *thick evaluative concepts*, just as Putnam does (Putnam 2002: 34). In contrast with *thin* evaluative concepts, such as *good/bad* and *right/wrong*, thick concepts involve both descriptive and evaluative elements. Examples of thick ethical concepts, as we mentioned before, are *cruel*, *brave*, *temperate*, and *just*; examples of thick aesthetic concepts are *garish*, *graceful*, *dumpy*, and, of course, *kitsch*. A further interesting point to notice here, so as to bring the notion of ethical-aesthetic entanglement into the picture, is how thick *ethical* concepts are often used to make *aesthetic* valuations and, conversely, many thick aesthetic concepts are used to make attributions of moral value. McGinn (1997: 92-3) suggests a further category of thick concepts, which he dubs “terms of moral appraisal with a strong *aesthetic* flavour,” to which we would also like to add the notion of an aesthetic term with a strong *moral*

flavour, *kitsch* being perhaps the best example.¹¹ We cannot come to see something as kitsch if we are not also able to see it as the *aesthetic manifestation of certain traits of character* in people who produce and consume or use it.¹²

- 19 All of this suggests just how aesthetic and ethical values are no less entangled than description and valuation are.
- 20 To characterize an action as cruel is both to describe and to appraise it. Thick concepts illustrate the idea that there are no discursive situations or practices (e.g. scientific discourse) in which we are simply describing reality as it is, reporting pure or brute facts, on the one hand, and discursive situations and practices in which we are simply evaluating reality (e.g. everyday moral discourse and art criticism), by projecting our attitudes onto it, on the other hand. As Putnam argues, both our factual descriptions of reality and our evaluative assessments of it are a constant entanglement of facts and values, such that it is not possible to pull the evaluative and descriptive components apart. He plausibly contends that it is not possible to disentangle the descriptive component of concepts such as *cruel* from its evaluative component (as, for instance, Blackburn (1981; 2006) intends) precisely because knowing how to apply concepts such as *cruel* is only possible once a certain evaluative outlook is formed and made available – and an evaluative outlook has a conceptual, an affective and also an imaginative dimension, all of which are deeply interconnected. As Putnam sees it (Putnam 2002: 38), the descriptive and evaluative components of thick concepts are impossible to disentangle because the descriptive content of the concept is in part determined by the evaluative content – only someone who can understand the evaluative point of defining an action as cruel or a monument as absurdly kitsch is able to apply those concepts in new cases. In other words, one learns how to play that particular language game.
- 21 Stressing the role of thick evaluative concepts and the importance of the formation of an evaluative outlook is also to stress the contextualist dimension of value ascriptions without abandoning the idea of realism and objectivity about values. Value properties such as cruelty and kitschiness are real properties, and judgements of value are susceptible of being true or false: we can misjudge or make mistakes about ascriptions of value, and we can get things right. However, values cannot be characterized without reference to the responses, skills and the historically informed, socially embedded experience of observers. Putnam's lesson is that we need not to give up the idea of realism and objectivity about values, but we do need to cast aside the idea of an absolute conception of reality. In particular, we need to relinquish that conception not for the sake of reclaiming the reality of values, but basically because we are unable to make sense of it. The attempt to ground evaluative discourses and practices outside the normative terrain is a modern *idée fixe* that became attached to a notion of scientific objectivity brought about by the development of modern science; but the very idea that it is possible to take such a step back and define what the world is in *itself*, the perpetual temptation of thought to go outside of itself, is the source of many philosophical (pseudo?)problems, and no doubt of many philosophical misunderstandings.
- 22 Still in line with his internal realism, which basically denies “that there are any [experiential] inputs which are not themselves to some extent shaped by our concepts, by the vocabulary we use to report and describe them, or any inputs which admit of only one description, independent of all conceptual choices” (Putnam 1981: 54), Putnam's project of an ethics without ontology shows us a way of resisting that

temptation, while not giving up on the notions of correctness and objectivity. Putnam had no intention to blur the difference between true and false judgements, objective and subjective knowledge, right and wrong inferences. But he held that what actually makes the difference is not what we usually think it does: more specifically, what makes the difference are not metaphysically objective facts independent of our discursive practices.

- 23 One objection with which a contextualist approach of this kind is inevitably faced is that of the threat of cultural relativism and particularism. As we have seen, judgments of value so conceived are relative to groups of people (not to isolated individuals) and, ultimately, to socially shared forms of life. If judgements of value are culturally local, and the intelligibility of value concepts relies on particular practices of particular cultures, then how can we aim at a universal or cross-cultural evaluative language, since we cannot just assume here a possibility of convergence (Williams 1985)? Putnam (2002) countered this move by arguing that a realism of thick concepts does not inevitably lead us into relativism. First, there is no reason to assume that thick evaluative concepts cannot be universally or cross-culturally shared (think, for instance, of the concepts we use to articulate our experiences of beauty). Second, critical reflection on our own practices is always possible, even if from an internal standpoint. Nor is there a reason to believe that this critical, reflective step back would only be possible if our evaluative practices and discourses were underpinned by metaphysically objective facts. In Putnam's words, "There are many sorts of statements – bona fide statements, ones amenable to such terms as 'correct,' 'incorrect,' 'true,' 'false,' 'warranted,' and 'unwarranted' – that are not descriptions, but that are under rational control, governed by standards appropriate to their particular functions and contexts" (Putnam 2002: 33).
- 24 Standards of correction are internal to practical reasoning, which is true of any kind of conceptual or cognitive activity, not just ethical reasoning or art criticism. We draw here another lesson from Putnam's pragmatic approach. The objection of circularity that some have voiced is, according to Putnam, simply misguided, for, he argued, it is not possible "to provide *reasons which are not part of ethics for the truth of ethical statements*" (Putnam 2004: 3). And this should not be a problem since it is exactly similar to what happens in science, which is our paradigm of objective discourse. "Normative judgements are essential to the practice of science itself. [...] [J]udgements of 'coherence,' 'plausibility,' 'reasonableness,' 'simplicity' and of what Dirac famously called the beauty of an hypothesis, are all normative judgements in Charles Peirce's sense, judgements of 'what ought to be' in the case of reasoning." (Putnam 2002: 30-1). These normative values of coherence, simplicity, etc., are what Putnam calls epistemic values, which can also be cast as *aesthetic* values for theories (Zemach 1997). When a scientific theory is evaluated as simple and coherent (which also counts as a reason for believing it to be true), "[...] it is not that we have some way of telling that we have arrived at the truth *apart from* our epistemic values and can, so to speak, run a test to see how often choosing the more coherent, simpler, and so on, theory turns out to be true *without presupposing these very standards of justified empirical belief*. [...] [I]f these epistemic values do enable us to correctly describe the world [...] that is something we see through the lenses of those very values. It does not mean that those values admit an 'external' justification." (Putnam 2002: 32-3).

4. Bridging the Aesthetic and the Ethical

- 25 It is now time that we focus on the entanglement of aesthetic and ethical value. We described a series of important features in Putnam's project of an "ethics without ontology," a project which flows from his well-known thesis about the profound entanglement of factual descriptions and value judgements, so that any description will inevitably contain evaluative elements, countering the deep-seated dichotomy between an objective realm of facts and a subjective realm of values:

Knowledge of facts presupposes knowledge of values. This is the position I defend. It might be broken into two separate claims: (i) that the activity of justifying actual claims presupposes value judgments, and (ii) that we must regard those value judgments as capable of being right (as "objective" in philosophical jargon), if we are not to fall into subjectivism with respect to the factual claims themselves. (Putnam 2002: 137)

- 26 If Putnam is right, then objectivity in human discourse is not possible without a repertoire of value concepts. An objective conception of the world is not a neutral description of the facts from a God's eye point of view, for no such point of view is available nor can it be made sense of. Subjects of knowledge are also subjects who at the most basic level of their existence must perform acts of valuation. This is why we started by connecting the exercise and honing of our perceptual and conceptual skills and abilities in an actual case of aesthetic valuation with the idea of being a *subject of a life*, given our account of valuation as the feature distinguishing between the living of a life and the mere state of being alive. Knowing the world, acting on it and organizing it so that we may *recognize ourselves in it* are all actions carried out not by disembodied "cognitive agents" who happen to have this purely external relationship with a body and embodied experience, like belief-forming machines with a "perceptual interface"; these are all aspects (epistemic, ethical and aesthetic) of *one single thing* which is the living of a life, by a true subject of a life. This already establishes a framework for the disagreement between someone appalled before the sight of a marble monument and someone relishing the very same sight as a magnificent one. For it is only from the standpoint of a concrete "form of life," a life "being a certain way" (Levinson 2004), that the same monument can seem so vividly to exhibit such contrasting qualities. Mere perception, "aesthetic attitude" or any combination of psychological features in a single experience will not suffice. The whole "evaluative outlook" an individual develops in the course of her life, and which she gradually learns to "imaginatively identify" with, widening the boundaries of her experience, must be involved. And here lies a very important element: it is not implausible to assert that our dismayed native Roman will be able to put himself in the shoes of the beguiled tourist, for this will be part of the imaginative skills he must hone in order to be capable of making the aesthetic assessment he makes (as if he switches between seeing a duck-rabbit picture as a duck or as a rabbit); but it seems to be part of what enables the tourist to have *his* aesthetic assessment that he *can't* put himself in the shoes of our native, just as someone relishing in the "all too sickly smooth and bland" music of Bryan Adams cannot get into Zangwill's shoes and perceive in it a quality "like very sweet artificial-tasting fizzy drinks" (Zangwill 2015: 7). If he could, he would not be able to switch back from the rabbit to the duck. Obviously, we cannot provide a fully satisfactory demonstration of this point here; so for now we shall be content with plausibility.

- 27 We conclude this section with a lengthy quote from an author who, in his reflections about the continuity of aesthetic and ethical sentiment, strikes one as rather “Putnamian,” here and there, especially when he characterizes moral attitudes as “part of a continuum of normative opinions which mutually sustain one another” (Scruton 1996: 247).

Now there certainly seems to be an internal relation between aesthetic and moral judgement. In moral judgement it is usual to praise a man for certain qualities, and these qualities may be such that the question “Why is that a reason for admiring him?” normally requires no answer. Similarly, the analogous question asked of the aesthetic features of a work of art may also require no answer. And it is interesting to discover that the features of men and the features of works of art which are in this sense intrinsically admirable tend to coincide. We admire works of art, as we admire men, for their intelligence, wisdom, sincerity, depth of feeling, compassion and realism. It would be odd to acknowledge this, and yet to deny that there is a relation between moral and aesthetic judgement. [...] Even in the realm of abstract art, there is no way in which moral and aesthetic judgement can be neatly separated. If music were as abstract and unfathomable as is sometimes thought, then it would be impossible for there to be irony in music, or the deliberate exploitation of character. (*Ibid.*: 245-8)

- 28 Philosophers who object to the idea of grounding aesthetic normativity in ethical normativity often appeal to the phenomenon of “aesthetically discriminating moral brutes and aesthetically blind moral saints” (Zangwill 2015: 165), which suggests a radical discontinuity between the aesthetic and the ethical. Perhaps this picture is itself a consequence of thinking about ethics in terms of rules and principles, so that a connection between aesthetics and ethics would be demonstrated only if someone who acquired a set of moral rules would thereby be enabled to make appropriate aesthetic judgements. But maybe there is an alternative picture that can make better sense of the continuity between both domains.

5. A Virtue Theory Framework

- 29 One obvious place to draw inspiration for a contextualist approach to aesthetic-ethical value is Aristotelian virtue ethics. Within such a framework, ethical and aesthetic valuations may be contextually specific, but they are brought about by certain features of our reality, the elements of common human lived, embodied experience. That is why we can learn how to apply aesthetic terms from other cultures, importing new conceptual tools into the language game, so to speak: we grasp the “metaphors we live by” through the commonalities of embodied experience. We learn how to combine and recombine them in new, unexpected cases. This sort of approach connects the realist idea that there are value properties to be discerned with a measure of resistance to universal principles: the language of virtue cannot be translated into a set of universal rules and principles.
- 30 Putnam does not particularly stress the connection between his own pragmatist approach and virtue ethics (as, for instance, B. Williams and A. MacIntyre do apropos their own views), but he did most clearly state that “in ethics we need both Aristotelian and Kantian insights,” and the core of Aristotelian virtue theory, i.e. the concern with human flourishing, is precisely what gives shape to “our imperfect but indefinitely perfectible ability to recognize the demands made upon us by various values” (Putnam 2002: 134). He can also be seen as almost suggesting that the concept of virtue is the

perfect counterpoint to “a form of *monism*” that “reduces [...] all ethical phenomena, all ethical problems, all ethical questions, indeed all value problems, to just *one* issue, the presence or absence of this single super-thing *Good*” (Putnam 2004: 18-9). It was Aristotle who first objected to this form of monism by making explicit that ethics involves too many diverse questions and concerns to be captured by any rarefied abstract idea: “Not surprisingly, ethicists, starting with Aristotle, responded by pointing out that there are many questions concerning ethics, not only questions about good but questions about virtue, which cannot be usefully answered by talking about ‘the Form of the Good’” (*ibid.*: 19).

- 31 Also according to Putnam, the objectivity of value judgments is dependent on certain parochial capacities, and on an appropriately formed sensibility – here the idea of “understanding and imaginatively identification with an evaluative outlook” proves to be the decisive link – and is not reducible to universalizable norms or standards of correction. As he puts it, “the function of ethics is not, in the first instance, to arrive at ‘universal principles’” and “few real problems can be solved by treating them as mere instances of a universal generalization” (*ibid.*: 4). Applying evaluative standards correctly will thus depend on the circumstance of “seeing” correctly – it will be a matter of fine-tuning our perceptual and conceptual abilities, which are naturally influenced by our intellectual and practical formation/training (here McDowell employs the much more apt German word *Bildung*). Thus, the difference between someone with a trained sensibility and one who lacks such a trained sensibility does not rest at the level of the correct application of principles (of universalizability and consistency) or of a rational decision-making procedure, as is the case with deontologist and consequentialist ethical theories, respectively. A substantial part of the story to be told will depend on the idea of “perception,” as it is specifically applied to the ethical domain by Aristotelian theorists such as McDowell (1998), which is akin to the ability of *seeing*, and not merely *inferring* from non-evaluative cues, when an awkward piece of architectural display is or is not absurdly kitsch. In his turn, Putnam states quite clearly what he means by “moral perception”:

By “moral perception,” [...] I mean the ability to see that someone is, for example, “suffering unnecessarily” as opposed to “learning to take it,” that someone is “being refreshingly spontaneous” as opposed to “being impertinent,” that someone is “compassionate” as opposed to being “a weepy liberal,” and so on and on. There is no science that can teach one to make these distinctions. They require a skill that, in Iris Murdoch’s words, is “endlessly perfectible,” and that as she also says, is interwoven with our (also endlessly perfectible) mastery of moral vocabulary itself. (Putnam 2002: 128)

- 32 We believe that Putnam’s appeal to the concept of *human flourishing* provides us with a reasonable basis to vindicate a connection between aesthetic and ethical value, and we contend that when one thinks of morality in terms of virtues, the connections between aesthetics and ethics come out much more vividly than with other forms of ethical theory, and thus an approach to the intersection of both domains within the framework of a virtue theory not only seems like a promising avenue to expand Putnam’s project in order to include the aesthetic domain, but it also has precedents in similar developments attempted in epistemology (Zagzebski 1996) and the aesthetics of morality (Paris 2018; forthcoming). Trained visual perception of objects provides the appropriate model for the discernment of value properties, in both cases. Ultimately, a virtue theoretical framework covering epistemic, ethical and aesthetic values would perhaps mean not only the fulfilment of Putnam’s project, but also a clear sign that the

cultural institution of the fact/value dichotomy – another white marble monstrosity – is indeed collapsing, however slowly, before our eyes.

6. Conclusion

- 33 We attempted to sketch the outlines of a refreshing approach to the connections between aesthetic and ethical value by making use of Putnam’s project of an “ethics without ontology,” suggesting ways in which this project can help us to cast a new light on the way we think about aesthetics. Particularly, we argued that Putnam’s idea of how we are enabled to discriminate certain aspects of reality only by “imaginatively identifying with an evaluative outlook” is the true locus of the continuity between aesthetics and ethics, allowing us to see more clearly through the complexity of real life experiences of the entanglement of aesthetic and ethical value. To this we added the suggestion that a virtue theory framework is plausibly a fruitful way of complementing such a contextualist and pragmatist approach.

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NOTES

1. The idea is that “ways of seeing” reveal aspects of what is seen, which we would otherwise miss. For a fine illustration of this in the case of painting and photography, see Berys Gaut (2010: 30-1). John Berger (1972) is an obvious earlier source of such examples.
2. Concepts that combine descriptive and evaluative elements. Putnam’s favorite examples are moral concepts such as “cruel,” “brave,” “temperate” and “just,” but we shall return to this further ahead.
3. We believe this sheds a new light on statements such as “it is better to have a life that begins poorly and ends well than a life that begins well and ends poorly,” which is as close as one can get to an aesthetic-moral judgement, since it attributes aesthetic value to the “moral shape” of a life, in much the same way one could appraise the formal properties of a story, a painting or a musical work. On this topic, see Paris 2018.
4. Putnam doesn’t discuss these issues in connection with aesthetics, so what we do here is to fill in at least some of the gaps, in order to establish the relevant parallels and connections.
5. That they indeed *are* somehow mysterious is even explicitly recognized by the aesthetic realist (e.g. Zangwill) who endorses the “aesthetic metaphor thesis”: the idea that there are properties we cannot describe literally, only metaphorically. So, in this view, we employ the same word “sad” to people and music, but we express different concepts in each case. Musical sadness, for instance, is not literal sadness. What musical sadness *is* so that it is a real property, is shrouded in mystery. The anti-realist (e.g. Scruton) may say that we merely *imagine* music to be sad, without attributing any properties, and he will dissolve the mystery, but, so the aesthetic realist argues, only by sacrificing aesthetic normativity.
6. A non-naturalist “intuitionist” realism of the Moorean line, as we find it in Bell (with whom “significant form” takes the place of Moore’s “good”) having become unfashionable (Bell 1914).
7. We should set a caveat here. The idea of developing a pragmatist aesthetics is obviously not something new. For one, Richard Shusterman’s project of a “somaesthetics,” developed in a series of books (2008; 2012), comes obviously to mind. But here we are concerned specifically with how Putnam’s insights may help us in a joint approach to aesthetics and ethics.
8. “A secondary quality is a property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object’s disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance.” (McDowell 1998: 133).
9. However, Zemach (1997: 95-114), who is a realist about aesthetic properties, conceives of them as “tertiary properties,” which he defines as “phenomenal properties” further modulated by “desire,” and so this also counts as an approach modelled on secondary properties, with a peculiar twist. But it is not completely clear how Zemach is able to distinguish his approach from an anti-realist one, however plausible his explanation of aesthetic properties seems *from the point of view of our experience*.
10. “If something is a good solution to a problematical human situation, then part of the very notion of its being a good solution is that human beings can recognize that it is. We need not entertain the idea that something could be a good solution although human beings are in principle unable to recognize that it is.” (Putnam 2002: 108).
11. Another possible example would be the Japanese aesthetic term *wabi-sabi*. See: plato.stanford.edu/entries/japanese-aesthetics/.
12. Just like, ironically, for Zangwill (2015: 7) part of what makes the music of Bryan Adams so “cringe-making” is the fact that he “clearly intends his music to have aesthetic value” (an anti-formalist aesthetic judgement if there ever was one), so similar traits of people who relish in kitsch are part of what gives the notion of kitsch its substance.

ABSTRACTS

In this article we consider Putnam's project of an "ethics without ontology," focusing on some of its crucial aspects, namely, the entanglement of fact and value and the idea of forming and "imaginatively identifying" with a "particular evaluative outlook." We use that approach to shed light on the issue of value objectivity. Putnam's "pragmatist enlightenment" suggests a way of abandoning the traditional project of grounding ethics and aesthetics on metaphysics, preserving the idea of realism and objectivity about values. Ethical and aesthetic discriminations may be contextually specific and depend on the responses and the socially embedded experience of observers, but they are brought about by certain features of reality, far more complex than a domain of "objects" that would "correspond" to values. With our eyes set on these aspects, we draw important lessons for the project of a joint approach to aesthetic and ethical value, taking seriously the pervading entanglement of both, as suggested by the way we are able to apply the so-called thick concepts. This provides us with the outline of a contextualist approach to aesthetics that draws on Putnam's project for ethics. We conclude by suggesting that a fruitful way of pursuing this connection could be found in co-opting resources from virtue ethics.

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After Post-Truth Communication

A Problematic Return to Reality

Guido Gili and Giovanni Maddalena

Introduction

- ¹ The return to realism that emerged in philosophy and in communication studies at the end of the past century (Eco 1997; Ferraris 1997) seems to have found a more widespread acceptance in reaction to the phenomenon of fake news that has arisen in recent years (Gelfert 2018; Harsin 2018; Lazer *et al.* 2018). In fact, the majority of commentators on misinformation, disinformation and manipulation of news have accused social networks and the 2.0, 3.0, and 4.0 web¹ of having yielded to the culture of a postmodern “anything goes” (Ferraris 2017; Kalpokas 2018; Lorusso 2018; McIntyre 2018). Postmodernism on the philosophical side as well as constructivism on the sociological and communication studies side promoted what they viewed as a program of liberation in the second half of the last century. The possible reasons for this shift are many. However, an explanation that was often lurking between the lines was the need to avoid additional violence like that seen in World War II (Crosthwaite 2009). Pushed by a distrust of “the truth” and references to “reality” that were features of totalitarian experiences and authoritative governments in the twentieth century, researchers in these fields pointed out the inevitable lies and masks of those political experiments, refusing to acknowledge the traditionally assumed relationship between reality, truth, and communication that ended up with those experiences. They saw the positive side of the manifold possibilities of relativizing truth and of switching the roles of reality and communication: reality is a reflex of communication and not the other way around. Before this conceptual turn, many approaches, from dominant paradigm to critical studies, saw communication as somehow reflecting physical and social reality.² Postmodernists and constructivists, on the other hand, saw reality as merely coinciding with or being a product of communication (McLuhan 1962, 1964; Baudrillard 1995; Luhmann 2000). Nietzsche’s epigram about facts being anything but interpretation seemed to become universal wisdom (Nietzsche 1967, §481).

- 2 This reading of communication entered a crisis phase with the social network culture born from 2.0 web revolution (2004). As much as liberation from schemas of truth and the cage of reality was a democratic, progressive move, it was restricted to a small number of intellectual elites and mainstream mass media, and at the beginning this process of liberation could be controlled, but the advent of the social network culture allowed anyone to apply the relativistic strategies of the mass media. The two most important political events of 2016 – Brexit and the election of President Trump – both opposed by most traditional mass media, showed how easily communication via social networks could be manipulated and that the possibility of doing so was available to everyone. Even worse, social and political entities like the terrorist group ISIS demonstrated the extreme dangers of this kind of anarchic communication. The supposedly liberating effects of the postmodernist-constructivist culture were out of control (Maddalena & Gili 2020: 73-88).
- 3 The reaction could not have been other than an attempt to return to a connection between reality, truth, and communication. However, the searing critiques of this connection advanced in the last century are blocking an easy road back. A simple return to the correspondentist view of truth and to the view that communication reflects physical and social reality is now difficult both theoretically and practically. What kind of realism is possible now? How can practitioners of communication who cannot wait for the long run of scholarly research return to realism?
- 4 This paper first presents two solutions – a new form of positivism, applied above all to journalism, and improvements in critical thinking, especially insofar as they relate to the history of journalism; and critically examines their flaws and risks. It then concludes by presenting a pragmatist version of metaphysical realism à la Peirce as a plausible road to a rethinking of the relationship between reality, truth, and communication.

1. First Strategy. A New Positivism?

- 5 The concept of truth dies hard and continuously resurfaces in social discourse and interactions. All of the scepticism and disillusionment expressed since the era of the Greek philosophers notwithstanding, the human need for truth persistently remains. In everyday life, people frequently ask one another: “Are you telling the truth?” or “Is that really what’s going on?” It is worth noting that Grice’s conversational maxims, which attempt to define the fundamental requirements for communicative cooperation, include “do not say what you believe to be false” and “do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence” (Grice 1975: 46). Grice knows as well as we do that there are an infinite number of ways to contravene the teaching of these maxims, and that their intentional or unintentional violation is the norm rather than the exception. They are nonetheless points of reference without which communication could not exist. Moreover, credibility, which depends on interlocutors “telling the truth,” is the necessary condition of every communicative relationship. No relationship is possible unless we trust the other to speak sensibly and tell the truth. The quest for credibility applies not only to everyday relationships; for example, the credibility of journalism and the media is tied to their telling the truth and conducting the research necessary to do so. The credibility of a politician is also based largely on whether he or she tells the truth. A significant portion of political rhetoric, both positive and negative, appeals to

the trustworthiness of the speaker and to the related notion of “sincerity,” which is the subjective dimension of credibility, the attitude others perceive in a person who “wants” the truth (Gili & Panarari 2020).

- 6 The effect of the need to reconstitute the circle connecting reality, truth, and communication is that a mythical sense of “reality” is increasingly taking hold again, both in the most sophisticated philosophical debates and in journalistic culture. However, this return to reality is often linked to a sort of new positivism that connects reality with data and the possibility of scientific calculations and their verification. A number of philosophical authors are retrieved in this theoretical endeavor. Karl Popper’s falsificationism was a clear point of reference for them. More generally, the attitude of analytic philosophy, which is dominant in the majority of philosophy departments in the Anglo-Saxon world, had previously dug the ground for trust that a vaguely conceived scientific method would illumine the nature of reality.³ Broadly speaking, the technological successes related to internet applications restored a profound trust in science in the general public. Conceived in this way, the scientific method consists of a hypothetical-deductive pattern that operates on data: real is what emerges from this logical operation on “experience,” now defined and provided by the enormous amount of data now available through digital technologies. From this standpoint, it is worth noting that other traditions of thought also turned towards this new wave of positivist realism. Among many examples, we recall the subtle re-readings of Kant as a “realist” philosopher that are implied in a project attempting to join pragmatism and transcendentalism (Gava 2014). Here Kant’s transcendentalism and Peirce’s semiotics are taken together in order to show the relevance of references to a hard reality that is “out there,” as Richard Rorty used to say (Rorty 1982). We consider this a significant example because it bends traditions of thought that are far apart from each other towards a strong realism, and then this realism towards some sort of scientism or positivism.
- 7 This view goes hand in hand with support for a “scientific” version of scientific and technological research – the only philosophical construct able to deliver secure knowledge about what is real and thereby provide predictive capacity based on “big data.” A characteristic expression of this view in the field of communication is the new “scientific journalism.”
- 8 This scientific journalism 2.0 has been advocated by Julian Assange in defense of the WikiLeaks enterprise. Speaking from a Popperian background, Assange stated in the “writers’ kit” on the WikiLeaks website that contributors to the website should treat the documents they upload as “forensically” as possible, asking themselves whether the documents were verifiable or falsifiable. Lisa Lynch summarizes Assange’s view of scientific journalism in the following way: “Journalists serve as intermediaries presenting analyses to the public, but they must also provide the public with the means to recreate their analyses” (Lynch 2012: 50). In scientific journalism 2.0, anyone can check the data according to a scientific method and, therefore, making the reader the ultimate scientist conferring meaning on data.
- 9 Assange’s idea is that transparency and a scientific attitude must be the kernel of a new version of “objectivity” and that the credibility of the news must be related to these characteristics. This claim updates an older version of the same appeal to “science” in what Lynch calls scientific journalism 1.0, which was advocated by authors like Philip Meyer in the 1970s and Walter Lippmann in the 1920s.

10 Philip Meyer, a pioneer of data journalism, wrote a book in 1973 with the significant title *Precision Journalism*. The book has been so successful that it has been reprinted and updated several times, with important additions concerning the new possibilities offered by data collection and analyses of the significant developments in information technology (Meyer 2002). By clearly distancing himself from “new journalism,” in which journalists become storytellers, making extensive use of the literary tools of fiction to offer journalistic products that are enjoyable to read, Meyer proposes an ideal of “scientific journalism,” placing himself explicitly in the camp of Walter Lippmann, one of the fathers of American journalism and a strenuous defender of the value of objectivity, but with the explicit intention of overcoming the traditional meaning of “objectivity.” While new journalism pushes journalism towards the arts, Meyer’s proposal is that journalism should move towards science, “incorporating both the powerful data-gathering and analysis tools of science and its disciplined search for verifiable truth” (*ibid.*: 4). This means “treating journalism as if it were a science, adopting scientific method, scientific objectivity, and scientific ideals for the entire process of mass communication” (*ibid.*: 5). Meyer acutely grasps an important problem when he observes that the ideal of journalism’s objectivity often involves being satisfied with “cross-checking by consulting different authorities with different viewpoints and different interests” (*ibid.*: 10). He notes that this attempt to be objective actually “forces [journalists] into a relativistic stance that demands the unlikely assumption that all voices have an equal claim to the truth” (*ibid.*). Meyer believes instead that “precision journalism,” based on the collection and scientific analysis of large masses of data concerning the most diverse phenomena, can escape this trap by providing for “aggressive reality testing.” Consistent with these assumptions, Meyer also makes it clear that the attitude of the journalist, similarly to that of the scientist, must be based on certain indispensable pillars: *skepticism* (distrust any statement – even “if your mother says she loves you, check it out” – and always consider the truth to be provisional), *openness* (the results of every investigation must be replicable: “a good investigative reporter documents his or her search for truth, making a paper trail that other investigators can follow to reach the same conclusions”), *an instinct for operationalization* (the confirmation of a theory lies in its power to predict the results of an operational measurement), *a sense of the tentativeness of truth* (the truths that science and scientific journalism discover are welcomed when they improve our understanding, but with the recognition that they might be replaced by stronger truths in the future) and *parsimony* (“given a choice between rival theories, we generally prefer the simpler one [because] the best theory explains the most with the least”) (*ibid.*: 10-1).

11 Even without accepting Assange’s radical views as the only heir to the positions of Lippmann and Meyer, it is certain that a new data journalism has become one of the leading schools of journalism, relying on the same positivist philosophical background. Paul Bradshaw, a leading figure in today’s data journalism, fleshes out this attitude:

[...] we live in a digital world now, a world in which almost anything can be (and almost everything is) described with numbers. Your career history, 300.000 confidential documents, everyone in your circle of friends; these can all be (and are) described with just two numbers: zeroes and ones. Photos, video, and audio are all described with the same two numbers: zeroes and ones. Murders, disease, political votes, corruption, and lies: zeroes and ones. What makes data journalism different from the rest of journalism? Perhaps it is the new possibilities that open up when you combine the traditional ‘nose for news’ and ability to tell a compelling

story with the sheer scale and range of the digital information now available. (Gray, Bounegru & Chambers 2012: 2)

- 12 A particularly trenchant image of this radical turn towards data journalism and a positivist conception of reality and truth in communication is the 2017 *New York Times* ad campaign entitled “The Truth Is Hard.” More recently, in the COVID-19 period, CNN broadcast a campaign promoting “facts first” after having declared that “facts provide clarity/correct/unite/matter most.” Obviously, advertisements are not philosophies. However, the metaphors proposed by two major players in the communications field about the “hardness” of truth and the “firstness” of facts are significant for understanding the new popularity of the scientific shift we hinted at. The paradox is that, after having progressively eviscerated the power of communication to refer to reality, we now want to deny the possibility of multiple meanings, a possibility that has been pursued for a very long time, only to return to diminished and impoverished references to a merely numerical reality. After almost a hundred years, Lippmann’s positivist diagnosis that a reliable representation of social reality is only that which translates it into statistics of births, deaths, weddings, accidents, elections, and economic systems, consistent with the most reliable and definitive methods of knowledge known to science (Lippmann 1922), may be prevailing again. When it comes to narrating and interpreting complex and controversial events, this diagnosis necessarily leads us to surrender to the fact that ideological prejudice, imperfections of language, and constraints in the information production process inexorably encase the real world in stereotypical visions which are to a greater or lesser extent deformed.
- 13 This theoretical position eventually reverses the Nietzschean statement that “there are no facts but only interpretations” to read that there are no interpretations, but only facts. The point is that this return to a positivist realism simply erases all the important results of the critiques of a naïf realism presented by postmodern and constructivist authors. Moreover, it cancels the fine-grained analyses of the media that have demonstrated the relevance of the construction of the news to what we call truth and credibility. Finally, the appeal to data in this new form of positivism applied to communication leaves open questions about the possibility of pure transparency or pure objectivity: the risk is that only trivial and banal facts can be reported in this system and that we must leave unexplained large amounts of difficult-to-interpret data. We would have a realist account in which ideas and ideals, feelings and opinions, habits of actions and laws of interpretation, would not be considered real, even though they have a powerful impact on real lives, society, and politics.

2. Cultivating Critical Thought

- 14 The second strategy, which is often proposed by university professors, is a milder version of the first. While the first implies a commitment to a positivist vision of reality – real is what the scientific method verifies about data – and to a scientific communication of the news, whether it be the radical stance of Assange or more moderate data journalism, the second consists of investing in a more intentional education in critical thinking. It is hard to place critical thinking within the context of contemporary views of truth. Critical thinking looks more like a presupposition of more complex theories that can be based on both correspondentism and coherentism. It compels a strong view of a connection between reality, truth, and communication but

makes no pronouncements about the nature of any of these. As a habit of thought, we can connect it to the Enlightenment, but understood more as a movement of thought than as a discrete theory.⁴ In the terms we used in the first paragraph, critical thinking defends the traditional value of objectivity by relying on reason's capability of following other people's arguments and to engage in debate rationally and respectfully. At the bottom of the pleas for more critical thinking, we find the modern trust in reason as the key to understanding and mastering reality, but we do not find any ideological commitment to the value of data or absolute transparency. According to B. Hamby (2014), critical thinking is above all an agent-based attitude of inquiry based on the Socratic "willingness to inquire."⁵

- 15 Notwithstanding the widespread appreciation for this habit of thought, various intellectuals have lamented the fact that courses teaching critical thinking are too few in universities, and that students do not attend classes whose explicitly stated subject is critical thinking (DiGiovanna 2017). They see these failures as an indication that most people have let their guard down and cannot adequately identify fake news and debunk lies.
- 16 Media literacy refers to an ability to decipher the media and their processes, particularly with respect to digital media, the internet, and social media. It is not only a matter of enabling users and recipients to master communication technologies or to equip themselves with a wealth of knowledge about the contents and languages of the media, but also of making the mechanisms and processes that guide the selection, packaging, and presentation of the content they see and hear more visible and intelligible to citizen-users, and therefore also of understanding the organizational and operational processes of the media themselves, the processes of newsmaking, and the processes of political and commercial influence (see Livingstone 2004; Livingstone, Van Couvering & Thumin 2005; Buckingham 2003, 2007, 2017; Frau-Meigs, Velez & Michel 2017; Bulger & Davison 2018).
- 17 However, the diffusion of media literacy as a strategy to combat misinformation and fake news is anything but obvious and there are aspects of ambivalence and possible "perverse effects," even if unintentional, to which we would like to draw attention. In our view, as much as this strategy is necessary, it is insufficient for two reasons. First, we do not believe that teaching syllogisms, fallacies and rhetorical devices or decoding media languages and production processes is enough to arm recipients against the risks of manipulation, partially because deception often involves a decision about what not to show, so that the receiver does not know what was excluded or distorted. The most dangerous kinds of fake news are not the easily debunked factoids or deepfakes (see Maddalena & Gili 2020: 11-34). The more uncertain area of pseudo-events, quantitative deformation, qualitative alteration, omissions and choices related to contextualization, continuity, separation, and the hierarchy of news are far more dangerous to our societies and more difficult to detect, signal and avoid.
- 18 Additionally, we believe that this strategy is ultimately inadequate because it usually reinforces the role of mistrust and scepticism. This point is not obvious, but the Enlightenment roots present also in Dewey's seminal work and the "willingness to inquire" as a virtue practiced by the critical thinker are inevitably subject to mistrust in the face of common-sense certainties and scepticism about commonly shared arguments. This is not an argument against critical thinking per se, but scepticism, understood as withdrawing from the pretence of truth and systematically suspending

belief in all sources, is at the root of the problem of post-truth and therefore unlikely to be its solution. This risk has been highlighted by various scholars who have observed that there is a general tendency to consider media literacy to be a process of individual emancipation based on strengthening the individual's capacity for judgment, a process that is intimately related to the affirmation of the individualistic spirit that characterizes late modernity (Beck 1992). This individualistic vision is accompanied by the exercise of methodical doubt, which leads to absolutizing one's own point of view and distrusting all authority and mediation, including that based on scientific expertise and expert knowledge (for example, in the medical field, as we saw during the Covid-19 pandemic). More generally, as danah boyd has noted, media literacy has predominantly been taught in the U.S. as education to the culture of doubt alongside the more traditional celebration of individual freedom and responsibility (boyd 2017; Bulger & Davison 2018).

- 19 Unfortunately, there is a misconceived notion of inquiry that naively advocates doubt as the most important principle of research. As Charles S. Peirce underlined, this is true only when we are referring to a "real doubt"; that is, to a doubt that stems from a surprising phenomenon that destroys our previous certainties (Peirce 1992: 127-32). Research moves forward on the basis of previous certainties and on trust in what has been handed down to us, even though these certainties and trust are often founded only on our habits and way of life (Wittgenstein 1969). A consistent scepticism would lead to a stalling of inquiry and open the door to various forms of conspiracy theories. Unfortunately, these impediments to research and conspiracy theories have often been the results of this attitude in the world of news and communication.
- 20 The sceptical attitude on which critical thinking relies also carries a negative risk for social relationships: it potentially leads to a mistrust of everyone in a situation in which large chunks of reality can only be known indirectly by trusting the narratives and stories of others (Elias 1991). This is true not only for what we are taught by or learn verbally or in written form from those we know, but also for what we learn from books, newspapers, television news, documentaries and films. If this mistrust were to become a normal habitus in social relationships, it would create generalized suspicion, paralyzing relationships.
- 21 At the macro level of society, all of this represents a risk of an impoverishment of trust and of the overall relationality present in society. One can undoubtedly agree with Niklas Luhmann (2000) that trust and distrust can be two equally rational strategies in the management of social relations, depending on particular situations and contexts. In certain circumstances, therefore, an attitude in which suspicion, excessive circumspection and distrust prevails may appear more rational. However, it should not be forgotten that trust is a "delicate" social resource (Dasgupta 1988) which spreads and strengthens if it is cultivated, but perishes if it is not defended and supported. And if relationships and trust networks become narrower, general sociality dries out and eventually collapses.
- 22 The dangers to social life deriving from a lack of trust and reciprocal credibility seem greater than the dangers of the spread of fake news. The sceptical attitude fostered by critical thinking cannot protect social life because the remedy is worse than the disease. A second important objection about the excessive emphasis on media literacy is more political. Industry leaders (Google, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft) have promoted digital and media literacy initiatives by supporting and financing non-profit

organizations and educational institutions in the U.S. and Europe whose underlying principle is that educating youth in critical thinking is fundamental to fighting against the manipulation of news. It has not escaped many observers, however, that the insistence on media literacy as the main strategy to counteract misinformation and manipulation – which was recently implemented to counter the infodemic that followed and aggravated the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic – is a too-convenient solution that shifts the responsibility for these negative effects from the owners and managers of mainstream media and platforms to public institutions that are not able to develop adequate media education policies (especially in schools) or, even worse, to the users of media and platforms themselves. In this sense, the responsibility for the spread of uncontrolled and fake news is placed on individuals who are “poorly educated” in the use of reason and unable to interact with the media with the appropriate critical-rational tools (Bulger & Davison 2018; Livingstone 2018; Barbieri, Natalini & Selva 2021), avoiding a focus on the economic and political interests that contribute to a much greater extent to producing these effects.

3. A Proposal of Rich, Relational Realism

- 23 These two solutions – positivist realism and a sceptical critical attitude – seem insufficient to meet the challenge of responding to the problem of post-truth communication, and we believe that it is time to seriously consider the problem of the relationship between reality, truth and communication in a new way. The first solution, after years of sophisticated constructivist analysis, seems too weak and lacking in the means to explain the highly complex phenomena of our day. The second solution seems not to recognize that post-modernism has its roots in a sceptical attitude. Instead, we need a “rich” realism, based on a continuity of meaning between the reality of references and consciousness, a realism that knows how to harness the fruits of recent theoretical reflections, understands the essential contributions of constructivism, and is as free as possible of any debt to power and particularistic views pushing partial and interested conclusions as the only truth. A new consideration of the nature of data, of the kind of reasoning that we need, and of the kind of education we can propose will arise from this different realism.
- 24 Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), the founder of pragmatism, proposed an interesting form of realism that can be helpful in the current situation. Peirce read the alternatives of realism vs nominalism in a peculiar way that can help us understand the communication crisis that we have highlighted. According to Peirce, it can be believed that universals are real, yet one is still a nominalist if he/she thinks that universals are hopelessly beyond the inferential capacities of humankind. Nominalism affirms an unbridgeable gap between reality and reason, while realism affirms a continuity between them (Peirce 1998: 341-4). So defined, nominalism is the background of constructivism and postmodernism: since actual reality is unattainable, we can construct our own according to our interpretation. On the other hand, realism is the view that reality and knowledge are in continuity and, therefore, to the extent that our knowledge is always partial, it derives from, and must respect, the reality from which it stems, even when it displays its constructive capacities (Forster 2011; Maddalena 2015b).

- 25 In a deepening of his early positions, the late Peirce believed that if research were pursued long enough, we would eventually reach the truth (“in the long run”). This formulation of Peirce’s theory of truth is not easily understood because it has often been depicted as the “convergence theory of truth” by authors like Quine and Rorty.⁶ In his seminal studies on the topic, Christopher Hookway underlined that Peirce’s proposal differs at its origin from a convergence theory of truth by assuming a reciprocal belonging between reality and signs that express it (Hookway 2004). Peirce’s semiotic studies distinguished two kinds of “objects”: a “dynamic” object and an “immediate” object (Peirce 1998: 498). The object to which we refer in our discourses and, more generally, by our signs, is the immediate object, which belongs to the sign itself since the sign is already an image of the object. When I say “in my studio there is a table,” everybody understands the reference even without seeing the table and without the need for further questions. (Two, three or four legs? Square or round? And so on.) On the contrary, the *dynamic* object is the table as it actually is in my studio, which becomes different from itself with each passing instant, since reality never stops changing, even if only slightly. In his mature semiotics, Peirce suggested that we refer to the immediate object, while the dynamic object will reveal itself only at the ideal end of any inquiry. At the end of an inquiry, truth and reality would coincide if the inquiry pursues knowledge about the table in my studio, revealing all its potentialities. Truth becomes a future conditionality; that is, a regulative idea that directs our inquiries or, as William James put it, a new way to understand correspondence (James 1916: 69). Using philosophical definitions, we can say that Peirce accepted a metaphysical realism – of the most extreme stripe, as he used to say (Peirce 1998: 180) – or an objective idealism pragmatistically corrected (Maddalena 2019). This is an original view in which reality is caught in change as a transition among modalities. This evolution of reality is also a progressive determination of initial ontological vagueness. Therefore, reality as completely determined will emerge indeed at the end of the research and, if we pursue it with even a “half desire” of discovering the truth, “that desire would at length conquer all others, could experience continue long enough” (Peirce 1998: 47). Reality and truth will coincide in the end, but they cannot possibly do so today, in actuality.
- 26 Peirce defended this view in his courses on the history of science. However, it is the spirit of the lab, as opposed to the spirit of seminars, that causes him to think that when a community of researchers is eager to inquire into something, they will eventually succeed by means of correcting and helping one another. Moreover, he tried all of his life to explain the evolution of reality with his research on continuity and the possibility of taking an active part in this evolution. A key tool in this work were his studies on existential graphs. His results were incomplete but some of them have recently been completed in the studies of the Colombian school of Fernando Zalamea (Zalamea 2012; Vargas & Moore 2020).
- 27 It is not possible in this short article to fully present or explain these results. However, we can make a threefold application of them to the current problems of post-truth and fake news dialoguing with the previous strategies of solution. We call our proposal “rich, relational realism.” Its origins can be found not only in Peirce’s philosophy but also in some significant contemporary approaches in contemporary mathematics, philosophy and sociology.
- 28 First, a conception of reality that comes after post-modern critiques of realism must not limit reality to what we can demonstrate by starting from data. Peirce eventually

disarticulated the terms “reality” and “truth,” deepening the metaphysical meaning of the first. Reality was conceived of as a threefold realm of logical ontological modalities: possibility, actuality and necessity. Beyond the existence of what we feel, see and touch, namely, the world of “actualities” that form the kernel of our data, even in their electronic reformulation, there are worlds of “possibilities” and “necessities.” In technical words, Peirce described them as such: actuality is the realm in which the principles of contradiction and excluded third hold at the same time, possibility is the realm in which the principle of contradiction does not hold (while the principle of excluded third holds), necessity is the realm in which the principle of excluded third does not hold (while the principle of contradiction does) (EP2: 501). In non-technical words, this means that reality is more capacious than we usually think it is. There are facts that can be apprehended by our senses, like a person, a cat, a tree, and a stone, but there are also other kinds of effective reality. A dream about the future has its own (possible) reality, while natural laws that we do not touch are operative (necessary) realities in our lives at every moment. A family, an association, and a nation are kinds of relational realities whose necessary bonds go well beyond the physical presence of single individuals, and can spark every sort of possible and effective consequences. Fictional characters from literature, cinema, television and elsewhere have their own reality. A person could be inspired by the character of Porfiry, the magistrate in *Crime and Punishment*, to himself become a judge, or could be spurred to become an engineer by the desire to create the suits worn in *Robocop*.

- 29 Words and relationships that we develop online, so decisive for the fake news problem, have their own form of reality and must be considered real. They are neither “just fancies” that we can dismiss easily nor “arbitrary constructions” that we can change at will. These points of view reflect a stern nominalism, according to which knowledge does not depend on reality. On the contrary, we have to pay attention to these kinds of reality, which, using an ancient and imprecise language, are both objective and constructed by human intervention. Consequently, saying that reality has various modalities does not mean that truth does not exist nor that it is impossible to discover it through the effort of our studies. Contrary to what many constructivist authors have said, a changed typology of reality does not imply the disappearance of truth. Truth will always involve a correspondence to reality, but since reality is more complex than purely sense-related data or electronic sequences, truth comes “in the long run” if inquiry is sustained for long enough over time.
- 30 A second characteristic of a rich, relational realism is the overcoming of a dualism between theory and practice, giving birth to a new kind of criticism that is not only based on demonstrative reasoning. This is also a legacy of American pragmatism: human beings grasp reality by performing actions. We perform experiments to understand nature, we produce proofs to understand mathematics, and we write, draw or sculpt to understand human nature. In general, we do not understand through analytic means first and practical means second. In real life, every creative act, be it mathematical, scientific or humanistic, takes shape by means of particular actions; we can call these actions “gestures” (Maddalena 2015a). Our communicative acts are gestures, or means to understanding the world. Following certain constructivist insights – like those of Austin, Foucault, and Goffman – practices and habits of action can be considered to be embodied reasoning. In these habits of action, which include communicative habits that have become part of the use of our technological tools, we are always developing a comprehension of reality. This fact would allow us to interpret

the electronic instruments of the digital revolution as an integral part of the effort of human reasoning to understand the world. Like the manufactured stone tools that characterized primitive human beings, and the tools for writing and eventually printing that developed into mass communication media, present-day electronic and digital tools are means of perceiving and reasoning about the world. We understand our world through the tools we use, and they in turn, as McLuhan rightly pointed out (McLuhan 1962, 1964; McLuhan & McLuhan 1988), modify our perception of reality. There is nothing abnormal about what is happening with today's technology. Human beings always reason by means of their instruments. When we communicate through our computers, tablets, and smartphones, we embody and develop a conception of reality and of the world. Knowing these habits of action, and what they imply, is now vital, if we do not want to surrender to cognitive and social mechanisms of our own creation that are derived from these same tools. In order to be effective, education to critical thinking and media literacy must enter into this field of technology in a way that is not just abstract. This is a kind of task that it is easier to perform in social groups than alone.

- 31 Third, from a sociological standpoint, this rich realism also becomes relational, responding to the social need for an answer to the problematic issues we tackled at the beginning of this paper. The philosophical attitudes necessary to achieving this realism require common research into the relational nature of human beings (Archer & Maccarini 2013; Donati & Archer 2015; Dépeltau 2018), research which may provide a possible answer to the social problem of fake news. The places in which we are most likely to listen to criticism are small circles bounded by reciprocal trust. Families, neighborhoods, communities, unions, political clubs and parties are examples of social realities in which we participate freely and share common goals – places where we trust other members. Given the existence of common goals in these places, the critical thinking at work there is not done in a sceptical way and references to truth are not limited to positivist data. In these groups or communities, people need to attain these common goals and they need the interpretation of data. This is the everyday reformulation of the community of researchers that was saluted by Peirce. From a sociological and political point of view, these realities are called intermediate institutions of civil society, meaning that they stand between the naked citizen and the state (Rosboch 2018). In them, the citizen is armed with his or her human relationships. The relevance of these associations and communities was the keystone of Alexis de Tocqueville's appreciation for American democracy (Tocqueville 2000). In fact, free intermediate institutions are intrinsically democratic, since they require forms of internal dialogue and deliberation. Certainly, they do not produce democracy automatically: there are plenty of families, groups, communities, and associations that are not democratic. However, the risks of authoritarianism and self-referentiality are lower than in those realities in which the citizen remains alone in relationship to power. In short, an essential – perhaps *the* essential – condition for the survival of a democratic, pluralistic society is that standing between centralized state institutions, large public organizations, the mainstream media, and individual citizens there exists an active and well-defined intermediary layer of groups, communities, associations, and local media where people can meet and recognize one another. Such a layer serves as a filter for the influences of these large institutions. As some of the most important critical observers of mass society have maintained since the 1950s (Arendt 1951; Nisbet 1953; Kornhauser 1959), when this filter layer erodes and weakens to the point of

failing in its essential function, the result is a “naked society” which renders individuals atomized and defenceless against influences, conditioning and manipulation from above, while at the same time exposing institutions to pressures from below, from the mass of individuals stripped of significant relationships with one another, and can therefore be easily infiltrated by professional agitators and manipulators.

Conclusion

- 32 Even though the big political events that triggered the issue of fake news and post-truth have passed, the trouble with this topic remains (Tiercelin 2021). In fact, the political debates uncovered the real situation of the problematic status of the relationship between reality, truth, and communication in our epoch. This paper has presented three theoretical-practical mental habits related to this entanglement, looking at both its philosophical and sociological aspects. The argument of the paper is that after the postmodern deconstruction of the aforementioned plexus in the second part of the twentieth century, philosophy and sociology of communication turned to a more realist approach. This has given rise to some possible solutions to the issue of fake news and its cultural background of post-truth.
- 33 Here we examined some new shadows of realism that lean towards a sort of new positivism or new scientism. The communicative reflex of this theoretical attitude is the culture of disintermediated journalism, as proposed by Julian Assange, or various forms of big data journalism. The claim is that this form of communication is more scientific and, thus, more respectful of “the” (single) reality. We object that this form of positivism risks allowing only trivial forms of communication, those that present “objective” data, and discards all of the analyses of communication of the past century that explained the decisive role of human constructions in creating the reality we communicate. In this sense, neo-positivist and scientist points of view about reality risk becoming naïf in their self-claimed reliability.
- 34 The second strategy examined is the recourse to critical thinking, here understood as confidence in argumentative human capacities and the need to teach them as much as possible in educational settings. As much as this strategy may be useful, we think it is insufficient because of its weak theoretical foundation, which often relies either on rationalism or on scepticism. Both grounds would seem to provide soil for the growth of the conspiracy theories and social solipsism that are important parts of the problems of fake news and post-truth.
- 35 Finally, we proposed a rich relational realism based on Charles S. Peirce’s studies on reality and mathematical continuity. Peirce’s Scotist realism introduces many different realities, including the metaphysical reality of relationships. Epistemically, this metaphysical realism allows for a positive look at tools that humans forge in order to develop their knowledge of reality. These tools are both parts of reality and developers of reality, a fact that causes the dichotomy between constructivism and realism with respect to communication to disappear. Finally, this metaphysical realism suggests that real relationships like families, groups, associations, and parties; namely, small groups bounded by reciprocal trust and common goals, defined also as “intermediate institutions,” are possibly the most credible players in the fight against fake news and the post-truth mentality.

36 Also Berger and Luckmann, at the end of the last century, recalled the importance of these intermediate institutions in very similar terms, but with a particular attention to the production and transmission of values and norms of action (including political norms and actions) in a pluralistic environment comprised of various functional spheres and multiple kinds of normativity. They observe that two extreme and opposing reactions take place in the context of modern pluralism. The first involves an attempt to close the gaps that open up in the “subjective schemes for interpreting life” (Berger & Luckmann 1995: 59) by strengthening the defensive barrier of old and new forms of fundamentalism that strive to lead the whole society back to ancient values and traditions or, more often, by resorting to the more moderate form of “ghettoization of the ‘own’ group within society as a whole” (*ibid.*: 60). The second involves embracing relativist attitudes that “abandon the attempt to assert any kind of common values and stocks of meaning” (*ibid.*). The consequence is that a consistent relativist “will not be capable of coherent action for which he or she can assume responsibility” (*ibid.*).

37 According to Berger and Luckmann, between the impossibility of the “relativist” reaction to modernity and the frightening possibilities of the “fundamentalism,” there is a third position, which they consider one of the few realistic possibilities:

In modern societies there are, however, also partial structures, above all the “intermediary institutions” that prevent these crises of meaning flaring up into crises of the entire society. They are more or less successful depending on their quality and quantity in modern societies. Given similar basic structural conditions the failure of counter-acting forces to develop or their decisive weakening can lead to the spread of crises of meaning, whereas strengthening these forces can help to dam the crisis. (*Ibid.*: 62)

38 These

intermediary institutions should be supported where they do not embody fundamentalist attitudes [that is, if they do not close in on themselves in an exclusive way], where they support the “little life worlds” [...] of communities of meaning and faith and where they develop their members as carriers of a pluralistic “civil society.” In the “little life worlds” the various meanings offered by agencies for communicating meaning are not simply “consumed”; rather they are appropriated communicatively and selectively processed into elements of the community of meaning and life. (*Ibid.*: 63)

39 Opposition to post-truth culture must begin by reinforcing these realities through supportive laws and subsidies and by pushing them to educate their members to a rich, relational realism, a deep media literacy and the pursuit of truth understood as an ideal and not as violent imposition.

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NOTES

1. Web 2.0 (2004) is the term used to define the second generation of internet technology, which empowered users to collaborate and share information. With the web 3.0, users are able to analyze, retrieve, and share the information they gain through personal research, and can therefore be referred to as the internet of personalized research. The web 4.0 is the internet of things, focused on the interaction between users and machines. The problematic issues presented by these versions of internet technology are deftly illuminated in the docufilm *The Social Dilemma*, available on Netflix.
2. We tackled the whole story of this change in chapter 3 of our book, *The History and Theory of Post-Truth Communication* (Maddalena & Gili 2020). It is worth recalling the realist approaches of Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet 1948, Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee 1954, Katz & Lazarsfeld 1955, Horkheimer & Adorno 1947, around the mid-point of the last century. This approach did not disappear completely, as witnessed by the works of Gerbner *et al.* 1986 and Noelle-Neumann 1984. However, it was no longer the implicit basis of communication studies.
3. The relationship between analytic philosophy and scientific method has been made clear in every history of this philosophical current. It is worth noticing, though, within the same approach to this relationship, the increasing interest in the cognitive sciences in the last twenty years (Laugier & Plaud 2011: 13) and a widespread return to various sorts of realism, whether metaphysical, scientific, empirical, or progressive, according to the various names given to them in analytic studies (cf. Chakravartty 2007; Beebe & Dellsen 2020).
4. See as an example of understanding critical thinking as a fight against “prejudices” and “fears,” Canale *et al.* 2021.
5. The story of contemporary critical thinking is usually tied to the influential book *How We Think* by J. Dewey (1910). A classic reference point is the 1962 article, “A Concept of Critical Thinking: A Proposed Basis of Research in the Teaching and Evaluation of Critical Thinking,” written by

R. H. Ennis for the *Harvard Educational Review*. In the last twenty years of the past century, authors like H. Siegel (1997), R. Paul (1992), and P. Facione (2000) stressed the pedagogical relevance of critical thinking. More recently, S. Bailin & M. Battersby (2010) have pointed out the “virtues” related to this way of thinking.

6. For a good account and discussion of this interpretation, see Legg 2014.

ABSTRACTS

The problematic issues connected to post-truth communication emerged in all their social relevance after the victory of Brexit and Donald Trump in 2016. Fake news, echo chambers, filter bubbles, and a crisis of experts are some of the phenomena of this epoch of digital revolution that everyone is forced to deal with on daily basis. Public media echoed the plea for a return to a connection between reality, truth, and communication that has been advocated for by philosophy and communication studies since the beginning of the century. However, the strategy for effecting this return is not clear. The paper presents two of the most common strategies employed by practitioners of communication in the newsrooms: reliance on a new form of positivism and the necessity of inculcating critical media literacy into the general population. Concluding that both proposals are inadequate, the paper proposes a rich, relational realism stemming from Peirce’s semiotic and metaphysical studies.

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What We Talk About When We Talk About *This* Being Blue

C. I. Lewis and R. W. Sellars on the Object of Perception

Matthias Neuber

“The world we live in is the world of sense data;
but the world we talk about is the world of
physical objects.”
(Wittgenstein 2016: 82)

1. Introduction

- 1 Clarence Irving Lewis (1883-1964) and Roy Wood Sellars (1880-1973) are important figures of twentieth-century American philosophy. Lewis, the founder of axiomatic modal logic (and teacher of Willard Van Orman Quine), stood for a – partially Kantian inspired – “conceptualistic” pragmatism. Sellars, on the other hand, was the leading representative of “critical” realism (and father of Wilfrid S. Sellars). Both partook of what W. H. Werkmeister called “the naturalistic trend in American philosophy” (Werkmeister 1949: 577). However, Lewis’s pragmatist and Sellars’s realist approach were divided over several issues, the most prominent being Sellars’s rejection of analytic philosophy. In Sellars’s view, “so-called analytic philosophy [...] did not seem to me very creative in either epistemology or ontology. American addiction to it and disregard of its own momentum struck me as a form of neo-colonialism” (Sellars 1969: 5; emphases omitted). Lewis would surely not have agreed with this assessment. Moreover, Lewis and Sellars defended divergent accounts regarding the issue of perception. Whereas Lewis located the very object of perception in the realm of sensorily given data, Sellars held that a *thing* is that which is perceived. This is very roughly stated, but it ultimately hits the nail on the head.
- 2 The aim of the present paper is to comparatively reconstruct Lewis’s and Sellars’s respective conceptions of the object of perception. In systematic terms, an answer should be delivered as to the question what we talk about when we talk about *this*, for example, being blue. As a result, it will turn out that Sellars’s view has more to

recommend it because it provides a more compelling framework for a comprehensive explanation of perception.

- 3 I will proceed as follows. In section 2, Lewis's conceptualistic pragmatism and its implications regarding the object of perception is going to be outlined. Section 3 is devoted to Sellars's critique of Lewis's approach. In section 4, Sellars's positive account of the issue will be discussed at some length. Section 5 discusses exegetic and interpretative problems regarding Lewis's theory of the given and the latter's debatable status as a "myth." Section 6 concludes the paper with a few comments on broader philosophical consequences.

2. Lewis on "the Given" and "the Pragmatic a priori"

- 4 In his seminal *Mind and the World Order*, published in 1929, Lewis advocates a "conceptualistic pragmatism" (Lewis 1929: xi). According to this view, perceptual knowledge consists of two components: (a) the sensorily given and (b) its conceptual interpretation. For Lewis, "[e]xperience does not categorize itself. The criteria of interpretation are of the mind; they are imposed upon the given by our active attitude." (*Ibid.*: 14). Moreover, Lewis sees himself in opposition to any form of speculative – transcendent – metaphysics. He points out: "Metaphysical issues which supposedly concern what is transcendent in experience altogether, must inevitably turn out to be issues wrongly taken. [...] Why not a world of sensa with nothing behind them?" (*Ibid.*: 31) It is important to note that, for Lewis, this distinctive anti-metaphysical stance is not at all at odds with a certain form of apriorism. In his view, interpretative concepts are independent of experiences and objects. In fact, they are *instruments* of "dealing with what is given to the mind" (*ibid.*). Already in his earlier "A Pragmatic Conception of the A Priori" (1923), Lewis had argued along these lines (see Baldwin 2007). In *Mind and the World Order*, Lewis accounts for the pragmatic element by stressing that the very *meaning* of interpretative concepts lies in "the empirical consequences of the active attitude" (Lewis 1929: 31). If they would not have such "practical consequences, the mind would never use them" (*ibid.*).¹
- 5 In order to better understand Lewis's conceptualistic pragmatism, it is mandatory to clarify two points: first, what exactly is meant by "the given"; and second, how does the pragmatic a priori apply to it?
- 6 Let us begin with Lewis's account of the given. The given is, according to him, characterized by three features: it is (a) ineffable, (b) foundational regarding objects, and (c) essentially veridical. The first of these three features implies that what is immediately presented by the senses "remains untouched and unaltered, however it is construed in thought" (*ibid.*: 53). Thus the given forms the unshakeable ground of all our perceptual knowledge. It is for this reason that Lewis, referring to a paper by J. Loewenberg (see Loewenberg 1927), speaks of "preanalytic data" (Lewis 1929: 54) in this very context. Accordingly, the given element in perception figures as "an ultimate epistemological category" (*ibid.*). However, what exactly should be considered as the given element in perception? This question brings us to the second feature: On Lewis's account, the given lies at the very bottom of objecthood. More precisely speaking, objects are seen by him as being constructed out of sensory elements. Therefore, the given not only has epistemological but also ontological impact and thus pertains to what Lewis defines as the "problem of metaphysics," namely "the problem of the

categories” (*ibid.*: 10). In a similar vein as did Bertrand Russell in his *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914), Lewis assumes that sensorily given elements, such as particular patches of color or particular tastes, provide the foundation for a subsequent interpretative process. He points out: “An object such as an apple is never given; between the real apple in all its complexity and this fragmentary presentation [that it tastes sweet], lies that interval which only interpretation can bridge.” (Lewis 1929: 120). On the other hand, and this pertains to feature number three, the given element in perception is essentially free from error, i.e. it guarantees *certainty*. For Lewis, “the given itself is never misrepresentative; always it is true of the real, however partial” (*ibid.*: 179). If perceptual errors occur, then they are due to the interpretative (judgemental) part of cognition which, in turn, is always merely *probable* and thus fallible (see *ibid.*, ch. X).

- 7 Which brings us to Lewis’s conception of the pragmatic a priori. Here, too, three features are worth mentioning: the pragmatic a priori is (a) the source of conceptual order, (b) historically dynamic, (c) essentially connected to practical needs. Feature number one brings in the Kantian element of Lewis’s approach. Though not at all identical with Kant’s original contribution (see Boyer 1958), conceptualistic pragmatism proceeds from a similar central idea. Lewis writes:

In experience, mind is confronted with the chaos of the given. In the interest of adaptation and control, it seeks to discover within or impose upon this chaos some kind of stable order, through which distinguishable items may become the signs of future possibilities. Those patterns of distinction and relationship [...] are our concepts. These must be determined in advance of the particular experience to which they apply in order that what is given may have meaning. (Lewis 1929: 230)

- 8 That concepts must be determined “in advance” implies their apriority. However, in contrast to the historical Kant, Lewis fundamentally relativizes the a priori. In his view, the a priori, since “made by the mind” (*ibid.*: 233), is also alterable. Thus it can change through development of knowledge, experience, and in particular science (for a similar approach, see already Reichenbach 1920). This is the second of the three features listed above. To make it more explicit: Lewis holds that “[t]here will be no assurance that what is a priori will remain fixed and absolute throughout the history of the race or for the developing individual” (Lewis 1929: 233).² Given this supposition, the question pops up how the relativization of the a priori *gets restricted*. Lewis’s answer to that question, which pertains to feature number three, is through and through pragmatistic. Already in the introduction to *Mind and the World Order*, he makes it clear that “[o]ur categories are guides to action. Those attitudes which survive the test of practice will reflect not only the nature of the active creature but the general experience he confronts” (Lewis 1929: 21). And in the chapter devoted to the “nature” of the a priori he states that “while the a priori is dictated neither by what is presented in experience nor by any transcendental and eternal factor of human nature, it still answers to criteria of the general type which may be termed pragmatic” (*ibid.*: 239). In short, the relativized a priori gets restricted by practical needs of adaptation to the experienced environment.

3

- 9 It should be noted that the position so far outlined significantly diverges from the “classical” pragmatist approach. To be sure, Lewis’s reliance on practical needs of adaptation clearly stands in the tradition of Peirce, James, and Dewey. But it must be seen that Lewis’s is a *conceptualistic* pragmatism. In sharp contrast especially to James and Dewey, Lewis focuses on questions from traditional epistemology, dating back at

least to Kant. His *Mind and the World Order* is subtitled “Outline of a Theory of Knowledge”; and the interpretative function of concepts regarding the given plays the crucial role in his account (see *ibid.*: ix). Classical pragmatism, in his view, is too trustful in “the validity of rather superficial and capricious attitudes” (*ibid.*: 267), such as personal motives and desires. For Lewis, the actual epistemic situation must be clarified in the first place. He therefore declares: “We must all be pragmatists, but pragmatists in the end, not in the beginning.” (*ibid.*: 267).

- 10 Coming back to the relationship between the given and the pragmatic a priori, it can be summarized that according to Lewis perceptual knowledge consists in the interplay of unalterable, ontologically foundational and essentially veridical sensorily given elements, on the one hand, and interpretatively ordering, historically relative and at the same a priori concepts, on the other. The crux of the matter is, for Lewis, that perceptual knowledge pertains to “objects” as conceptual constructions. Again, as with Russell, he is convinced that “[t]he world of experience is not given in experience: it is constructed by thought from the data of sense” (*ibid.*: 29). Accordingly, it is these data of sense which form the *actual* object of perception. We will come back to this point in a moment. For the time being, however, another aspect of Lewis’s approach should be briefly mentioned: According to him, the overarching aim of knowledge is a predictive one. In his view, “[t]o ascribe an objective quality to a thing means implicitly the prediction that if I act in certain ways, specifiable experience will eventuate: if I should bite this, it would taste sweet; if I should pinch it, it would feel moderately soft [etc.]” (*ibid.*: 140). From examples like this, Lewis comes to the conclusion that “[t]he whole content of our knowledge of reality is the truth of such ‘if-then’ propositions [...]” (*ibid.*: 142). Consequently, things (or objects) as constructions fulfill their practical role by helping us predict future sensory experiences.⁴
- 11 So much for Lewis’s conceptualistic pragmatism. It should have become clear that, according to Lewis, perception is a complex interpretative and at the same time practice-oriented process. Furthermore, it has turned out that the given element in perceptual knowledge is essential for Lewis’s whole approach. It still remains to be determined, though, how the status of the given is to be assessed. The following section should prove instructive in this regard.

3. Sellars’s Critique of Lewis’s Approach

- 12 Sellars’s critique of Lewis’s approach is very interesting because the two thinkers shared several common concerns. Sellars himself was no doubt aware of that fact. Thus, for example, in his paper “Critical Realism and the Independence of the Object,” published in 1937, he frankly states:
- Perhaps I can not better express my sense of the logical keenness of Lewis’s analysis than by saying that, if a fatal weakness in my analysis of the categorical distinctions of cognition could be shown, I would regard his position as the most tenable alternative. It strikes me as much superior to the common versions of positivism, logical or otherwise. (Sellars 1937: 548)
- 13 Already in his seminal *The Philosophy of Physical Realism* from 1932, Sellars had made a similar, albeit more polemic, statement in that direction. There, he writes: “In many ways his [Lewis’s] approach is similar to mine; but there remains a theoretic subjectivism which is obscured by language and yet reveals itself in passage after

passage.” (Sellars 1932: 186). How is this to be understood? A first step in answering that question is provided by Sellars’s claim that Lewis’s approach is “an attempted blending of Berkeley and Kant in the setting furnished by pragmatism” (Sellars 1937: 545). Sellars himself was neither a Berkeleyan, nor a Kantian, nor a pragmatist. All of these currents were for him expressions of “subjectivism.” Accordingly, it might be expected that his critique turns out to be quite fundamental. Let us see if this is really the case.

- 14 Confining ourselves to the exposition in *The Philosophy of Physical Realism* (the work in which Sellars expresses his critique most clearly) three principal objections against Lewis’s approach can be identified. The first of these objections, let us call it the *representationalist* objection, says that the roles of both sensory presentations and active attitudes are overrated by Lewis. In Sellars’s words:

The Berkeleian note [in Lewis’s approach] is dominant. Experience is the ultimate term. The logical problem is to conceptualize presentations properly. Don’t bother with questions of what lies beyond presentations, for they are essentially meaningless. In the terms of Carnap these are *Scheinprobleme*. To all this, I reply that it is independent and enduring things which we suppose ourselves to perceive, and not presentations. [...] When I ordinarily assert that I am biting into a peach, I do not mean that I am biting into a presentation, a sensory datum. [...] In knowing we are spectators and not primarily agents. (Sellars 1932: 146-7; emphasis in original)

- 15 What Sellars is implying here is that, while sensory data are presented, things are re-presented; hence the label “representationalist objection.” However, his insinuation that for Lewis we are “primarily agents,” is exaggerated. We have already seen that Lewis’s pragmatism is conceptualistic in the first place and thus not to be confused with classical pragmatism. Accordingly, Lewis can (at least partially) be defended against Sellars in this connection.
- 16 So what about the second objection? Here the central claim is that the place of sensorily given elements in perception is falsely located by Lewis. Let us call this the *anti-positivist* objection. In Sellars’s words, it reads as follows:

The independence of reality – its independence of the knowing mind – means [for Lewis] the *givenness* of the given, the truth of “If-then” propositions, and the accrual of something in the future which cannot now be determined. In short, the rejection of co-existential transcendence is complete. [...] In opposition to this positivism, the critical realist argues that knowing is, in intention, the interpretation of physical things as these in common measure appear, or are manifested, in sensory presentation and that, in critical knowledge, we achieve a complex content which is regarded as revealing the independent, physical thing. (*ibid.*: 152; emphasis in original)

- 17 Thus, just as with the advocates of positivism, Lewis, according to Sellars, dispenses with mind-independent physical things and consequently puts the given in their place. Things as constructions are for Sellars not things at all. What is more, in Sellars’s view, Lewis has no other option than to identify the object of perception with the given. And this, he thinks, is fatal since when we talk about *this*, for example being blue, we talk about concrete things, such as a ball, a pen, or what have you. This is not to say that Sellars sees no use for sensational elements in perception. But he locates them differently than Lewis. In fact, Sellars sees their role in *guiding us* in perceiving physical things. More on that will be said in the following section. For the moment, suffice it to remark that the anti-positivist objection is instantaneously convincing because it

accords with our common sense intuitions. Lewis's understanding of objects as constructions appears rather artificial in comparison to our everyday understanding of perceptual processes.⁵

- 18 Sellars's third objection, which might be called the *semantic* objection, is tightly connected with this point. In a nutshell, it says that in Lewis's account the generation of *stable meanings* is fundamentally obscured. Or as Sellars puts it himself:

[P]erceiving is always thicker than the awareness of sense-data. Sense-data are enveloped in a directed complex of meaning in the perceptual experience; and this fact is not hard to understand when we realize that perceiving involves organic response. As I see it, Lewis realized this supplementation; but his empiricism led him to make the sense-data the objects of interpretation rather than the guides of an interpretation of affirmed external things with properties. And this stand made it impossible for him to make a physical organism the basis of repeated meanings. (Sellars 1932: 202)

- 19 To better understand Sellars's point, let us come back to the example of *this* being blue. To be sure, Lewis would not deny that it is, for instance, a ball of which we actually say it is blue (see, for example, Lewis 1929: 57-9). However, as Sellars correctly observes, by making sense-data the objects of conceptual interpretation Lewis becomes confronted with the problem of how to specify the range of application of such a term as "blue." If, in our example, the ball itself is the object of perception, then a stable meaning can be established to the effect that it can repeatedly be said of the same ball that it is blue. If, on the other hand, sense-data are conceived of as the object of perception, then we have no sameness anymore. Sense-data are always in flux and thus not stabilizable. The predicate "blue" would apply to as many different objects as there were different sense-data whenever we see the ball. Consequently, we would stand in need of a "private language," since each individual person has its own sensational data. I dare say that Lewis's account ultimately breaks down at this very point.
- 20 To summarize, Sellars's critique of Lewis's approach is indeed fundamental and in more than one respect convincing. Regarding the object of perception, the two thinkers stood in radical opposition to each other. For Lewis, the sensorily given is the object of interpretation and, thus, of perception. For Sellars, in contrast, it is affirmed external things that are interpreted and thus perceived. Sense-data, according to Sellars, merely serve as *guides* of interpretation. They are by no means foundational (or terminal). Accordingly, the question of what we talk about when we talk about *this*, for example, being blue is answered in two completely different ways. What needs to be done next is to figure out whether Sellars's *positive* account has more to offer than Lewis's one.

4. Sellars's Positive Account

- 21 To begin with, Sellars defended the critical realist point of view already as early as 1908 (see Sellars 1908). In 1916, he published a book explicitly titled *Critical Realism*. In that book he still held that "we perceive percepts [...] and not physical things" (Sellars 1916: viii). Four years later, Sellars co-published the *Essays in Critical Realism* (see Drake *et al.* 1920). In his own contribution to that volume, "Knowledge and Its Categories," he made it clear that he now thought that "[w]e mean independent objects and we interpret these objects in terms of ideas" (Sellars 1920: 194). The principal implication of this change of view becomes particularly clear from the following statement in Sellars's 1929 "A Re-Examination of Critical Realism": "[D]irectness and mediation are not

contradictory in the theory of knowledge.” (Sellars 1929: 440). Accordingly, perceptual knowledge is now conceived of as being both direct and mediated. As with the representatives of American “neo-realism” (Perry, Holt, and others), Sellars assumes that the perceiving individual is directed to mind-independent things from the very first. On the other hand, in contrast to the neo-realists, Sellars’s realism is *critical* insofar as it reflects upon the *conceptual presuppositions* of the perceptual situation. In his view, concepts and categories serve to disclose the characters of “the actual physical things to which we are reacting and adjusting ourselves” (Sellars 1920: 191). Just as for Lewis, concepts and categories are for Sellars *means of interpretation*. However, unlike Lewis, Sellars assumes that it is physical things (and not sensory presentations) that get conceptually interpreted. At any rate, concepts for Sellars have a representational role to play: they are the essentially mind-dependent vehicles through which the perceptual process is mediated.

- 22 In order to adequately understand Sellars’s positive (mature) account, it is necessary to consider his rejection of the idea of a cognitive *relation*. In his article “Is there a Cognitive Relation?,” published in 1912, Sellars claims that “[t]he subject-object relation is a dogma which has been an article of faith” (Sellars 1912: 229). And in his contribution to the *Essays in Critical Realism* he emphatically states: “*The critical realist holds that knowledge is a function of the knower rather than a peculiar, real relation between the knower and the known.*” (Sellars 1920: 206; emphasis in original). Let us call this “the functional idea.” The gist of Sellars’s advocacy of that idea is the attempt to bring together two apparently divergent approaches in the philosophy of perception: his already mentioned representationalism and what nowadays is called *enactivism* (see, for example, Noë 2004). The enactivist aspect is provided by the insight that perception is an intention-based activity of an organism in its environment. Therefore, perceptual knowledge does not have the status of an abstract, static relation. Rather, it should be conceived of as the organism’s inter-action with its experienced environment. This is where Sellars, again, agrees with Lewis. However, as already outlined, the sensorily given element in perception is, for Sellars, not the very object of perception, but rather that which guides us in affirming and conceptually interpreting the actual physical thing. Accordingly, “the critical realist regards perceiving as a non-inferential selection and interpretation of a thing as an object. This selection is a *guided intent*, guided, in point of fact, by sense-presentations.” (Sellars 1937: 546; emphasis in original).
- 23 It is important to note that Sellars’s functional idea is a more or less immediate reaction to both traditional (Lockean) representationalism and contemporary (American and British) neo-realism. Regarding the first, Sellars employs the enactivist aspect of his account in order to prevent the “Berkeleyan impasse.” It is commonly known that Berkeley had objected against Locke that by relying on mediating ideas, a direct knowledge of external things is made impossible (see, for example, Berkeley 1710, §20). Sellars agrees with this critique, but he also sees an alternative to Berkeley’s resulting plea for idealism (or “subjectivism”). As a matter of fact, Sellars attempts to account for the directness (and thus non-inferentiality) of perceptual knowledge by *dynamizing* the representational relation. Thus, he points out:

[T]he critical realist would not speak of a relation between external fact and the idea mediating knowledge of it. Rather would he regard the act of knowing as a descriptive interpretation of an external state of affairs now made the object of a cognitive intent. In such a situation, representation is a use made of an idea which is

presumably such that it corresponds to the object of the intent. (Sellars 1932: 128; emphasis in original)

- 24 Again, as with Lewis, Sellars focuses on the active attitude of the perceiving organism. In doing so, he is in a position to argue (implicitly against Locke) that we do not *infer* how things are, but that in actively encountering the way they appear to us, we *directly* get in touch with them. This dynamic interaction might include such activities as attending to an object, manipulating it, or estimating its spatial distance from us. Yet, unlike Lewis, Sellars connects the active (intentional) attitude in perception to an *externalist objectivity condition*. Following a recent proposal by Tyler Burge, “perceptual objectivity” might be defined as “veridical representation of a mind-independent reality” (Burge 2009: 285). This condition is externalist insofar, as it implies that perceptual representations are constitutively dependent on relations to an environment of physical things, and not of sensations or other mental states (Burge himself speaks in this connection of “anti-individualism”; see Burge 2009: 292 and Burge 2010, ch. 3). Accordingly, the mere availability (and manipulability) of perceivable objects is not enough for Sellars. In his view, perceptual representations can be accurate or inaccurate, so that it becomes an important task for the epistemologist to explain how perceptual representations refer to or are descriptive of experienced physical things. To put it more strikingly: According to Sellars, getting something right cannot be reduced to getting something done. Both aspects must be taken into account. More specifically, Sellars appeals to epistemic *normativity*, that is, to the question of justification, and thus to issues such as reliability, fallibility, and probability of empirical knowledge. Just like Lewis, Sellars thus constrains the pragmatic (enactivist) component by essentially epistemic criteria.⁶
- 25 Moreover, Sellars rejects the neo-realists’ assumption that perception be characterized as the literal presence in experience of the objects perceived. In Sellars’s view, this variant of “pan-objectivism” (Sellars 1920: 188) is doomed to fail (not at least because it is unable to explain perceptual errors). His alternative to it amounts to a *sophisticated form* of representationalism, or what he himself calls “epistemological dualism” (*ibid.*). According to epistemological dualism, “knowledge of objects is mediated by ideas which are *in some sense* distinct from the objects of knowledge” (*ibid.*: 190; emphasis in original). What exactly does this mean? It is the notion of *content*, which is decisive in this regard. For Sellars, objects are perceived directly. However, the process of perceiving is mediated by cognitive elements that – by being effected by the active mental being – constitute the content. Thus, in an article from 1918, Sellars explains:
- [T]he very gist of the difference between neo-realism and critical realism is that the knowledge-content, or object of awareness, is [...] numerically distinct from the existent or object of knowledge. The only justification of the phrase epistemological dualism resides in this fact. The existent acknowledged, but not given, is the object of knowledge, while the mental content given is the material and content of knowledge, but not the object. (Sellars 1918: 507)
- 26 In his 1927 essay on “Current Realism in Great Britain and United States,” Sellars specifies this point as follows: “We make things objects, we mean, select, affirm them in a specific and definite way; and yet these objects do not literally enter our consciousness. Rather are they interpreted in terms of meanings and characters which stand out in our perception and in our thought of them.” (Sellars 1927: 507). In short, in perception objects do not become part of the brain, but are rather deciphered on the basis of representational contents.

- 27 To sum it up: Sellars's functional idea is focused on the active attitudes of an organism in its environment. Since the organism forms part of this environment, its being directed to "external" things is, in fact, an ingredient of the perceptual situation from the start. It is in the *process* of perceiving that representational contents turn out to be means of "making" things objects. *Sensations* play a functional role insofar as they serve as indicators of something non-sensational, namely physical things. Though not the very objects of perception, sensations help us "in our pressing need to adapt ourselves to our environment" (Sellars 1920: 191). They, in other words, guide us in generating perceptual contents which, in turn, serve to disclose the characters of physical things that are the subject of conceptual interpretation. The things themselves remain unaltered by this whole process. Our direct knowledge of them is an "achievement" (Sellars 1932: 79) being documented by our successfully referring to them. Nevertheless, it is the functionally interpreted contents that pave the way to this achievement.
- 28 On the whole, then, perception according to Sellars is a form of "triangulation," so that we have
- a. the thing existing independent of the mind;
 - b. the sensation which guides perception;
 - c. the perceptual content which furnishes the basis for the conceptual interpretation of the perceived object.

It should be stressed again that this account of perception stands in sharp contrast to Lewis's. Whereas, for Sellars, sensations count as registration of information and perceptions serve as means of generating representational content, Lewis explicitly rejects the representationalist approach. In passing he notes "the total impossibility of this representationalist position" (Lewis 1929: 166) and ironises "the subtleties of the critical realists" (*ibid.*: 155).⁷

5. Exegetic and Interpretative Problems Regarding Lewis's Theory of the Given

- 29 In light of the previous two sections, one might ask: Did Sellars's critical realism "win out over" Lewis's conceptualistic pragmatism after all? In historical terms, it is highly interesting to see that Roy Wood Sellars's son Wilfrid, in his critique of the "myth of the given" (see W. Sellars 1956), argued along exactly the same lines as his father. The account of Lewis was one of Wilfrid's main targets too (see O'Shea 2021). Already in a paper from 1954, he had put the issue thus:
- [W]hen Jones sees a chair, although his perceptual experience is *founded on, guided,* and *controlled* by his sensations, there is nothing in the nature of aboutness or reference which requires us to say that his experience is *primarily* about the sensations, and only about the chair in some complicated or derived sense of "about." His perception is "mediated by" the sensations, but his perception is not *about* the sensations. (W. Sellars 1954: 20; emphases in original)
- 30 This is nothing but Roy Wood's point of view, so that it can be claimed that the latter was the precursor of the critique of the myth of the given (see, in this connection, also Gironi 2017).
- 31 However, the criticism of Lewis as a proponent of the myth of the given has not remained uncontested. For example, Peter Olen asserts that "R. W. Sellars radically

misinterpreted conceptual pragmatism” (Olen 2015: 157). In a similar vein, Cheryl Misak categorically states: “One of the gravest injustices in the history of modern philosophy is the relegation of Lewis to the dustbin of foundationalism and what Sellars later called the Myth of the Given.” (Misak 2014: 334). And Tomasz Zarębski holds that “Lewis’s conception of the given is immune to Sellarsian criticism of the ‘myth of the given’” (Zarębski 2017: 200). Assessments such as these are surely motivated by passages like the following from Lewis’s *Mind and the World Order*:

It is indeed the thick experience of the world of things, not the thin given of immediacy, which constitutes the datum for philosophic reflection. We do not see patches of color, but trees and houses; we hear, not indescribable sound, but voices and violins. [...] The given, as here conceived, is certainly an abstraction. (Lewis 1929: 54)

- 32 To be sure, this very passage provides some exegetical support against seeing Lewis as an advocate (or “victim”) of the myth of the given. However, in systematic terms, there still remains a fundamental *discrepancy* in Lewis’s account: How could it be that “a world of sensa with *nothing* behind them” (Lewis 1929: 31; see above, sect. 2) turns out to be “the world of things?” Of course, there are “things” in Lewis’s ontology. But their status is that of constructions. And here the trouble begins. Take again our example of the blue ball: According to Lewis, our talk of its being blue would rely to particular sense-data, and their interpretation by concepts would imply a constructive maneuver. This is plainly at odds with the actual mechanism of perception (as well as with respective insights from *Gestalt* psychology). In (both Roy Wood and Wilfrid) Sellars’s view, on the other hand, conceptual interpretation amounts to the sensorily guided and perceptually grounded representation of particular states of affairs. It is *things* about which we talk when we talk about *this*, for example, being blue.
- 33 But even with all that said, there still remain certain interpretative “rescue measures” regarding Lewis’s theory of the given. Thus, for example, Henri Wagner (2021a: 5) suggests to categorically distinguish between two different readings of the given in Lewis’s account: a Cartesian, epistemic one, and a Kantian, existential one. While the former interprets the given as the *ultimate justifying reason* for empirical belief, the latter interprets the given as the *ultimate cause* responsible for such belief. Wagner is drawing here on an influential paper by Eric Dayton (1995). According to Dayton, “Lewis uses a conception of the given which serves a very different purpose than to found knowledge inferentially upon certainties” (*ibid.*: 255). The latter would be the Cartesian interpretation (in Wagner’s terminology), which, Dayton maintains, can only be found in Lewis’s later *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* from 1946. By contrast, in *Mind and the World Order*, Lewis, according to Dayton, uses the concept of the given “in a Kantian sense to refer to the element which is ‘given’ to the mind by the world and is thus independent of the mind’s constructive activities” (*ibid.*).⁸ The point of this segregation of readings is to shield Lewis’s approach against the accusation of epistemological *foundationalism*. By “epistemological foundationalism,” Dayton (1995: 256-7) means the complex assumption that certain privileged beliefs are (a) self-justified, (b) basic regarding justified beliefs that aren’t self-justified, (c) certain, and (d) sensuous. As Dayton takes it, the given only in its Cartesian reading amounts to foundationalism thus conceived.⁹ By contrast, the Kantian reading amounts to some form of *coherentism* and thus to a conception of empirical knowledge in which the given plays no epistemologically justificatory role at all. In Dayton’s words: “All knowledge is conceptual; the given, having no conceptual structure of its own, is not even a possible

object of knowledge. Foundationalism of the empiricist sort is thus directly precluded.” (1995: 267).¹⁰

- 34 There can be no doubt that the non-foundationalist reading advocated by Dayton is standard today. The assessments by Olen, Misak, and Zarębski quoted above are to be seen against this background.¹¹ However, the predominance of non-foundationalist readings does not automatically mean that they are adequate. For one thing, all of these readings are selective in a dubious sense: they tend to pick out only the overtly defensible parts of Lewis’s often incoherent doctrines, while downplaying or even ignoring the undeniable weaknesses and shortcomings of these doctrines. What is more, in doing so the non-foundationalist readings run risk of being rejected quite easily. For example, Lewis speaks explicitly of “the immediate certainty of the given data” (Lewis 1929: 337). How should this square with the Kantian interpretation of the given, according to which, in Dayton’s words, the given is “not even a possible object of knowledge?” It is clearly a confirmation of the Cartesian interpretation! However, Dayton (1995: 256) categorically declares that none of the four features of foundationalism listed above are implied by Lewis’s 1929 epistemology and that “throughout his life Lewis held a realist account of the objects of knowledge” (*ibid.*: 278). Whatever “realist” might mean in this connection... Similarly, Misak boldly claims that Lewis “explicitly denies the foundationalist thought” (2013: 182). Again, textual evidence at least part points in a completely different direction – for example, when Lewis writes:

[T]here is an absolute certainty of the empirical which has been recognized – the immediate apprehension of the given. Such direct awareness is not indubitable knowledge of an *object*, but the content of it is an absolutely given fact. This immediate presentation is our confrontation with reality and is requisite to the distinction of particular empirical truths from falsehood. Immediate qualia constitute the ultimate denotation in experience of our concepts, and the specific character of the given plays its indispensable part in any verification. (Lewis 1929: 310)

- 35 In view of passages like this I cannot help but to conclude that Lewis was a foundationalist after all.¹² To be sure, there seems to be a last resort for the defenders of the non-foundationalist (“Kantian”) reading: they could retort that Lewis advocates foundationalism only in the later chapters of *Mind and the World Order*, but not in the early chapters of that book, where foundationalism is (allegedly) opposed.¹³ But how then does one bring the two parts of the book together? If this is not done – and I am not aware of any attempt to do so –, then it would only confirm that Lewis was ultimately incoherent. Perhaps this was why he eventually lamented in his intellectual biography that the question of the given is “the most difficult – the most nearly impossible – enterprise to which epistemology is committed” (1968: 18).¹⁴

6. Some Broader Philosophical Consequences

- 36 So what are the resulting consequences of our examination? I think two points are salient. First, compared to critical realism, conceptualistic pragmatism is the less convincing view. Both Sellars’s critique of Lewis’s inherently unstable position and the critical discussion in the foregoing section confirm this claim quite neatly.¹⁵ However, *critical* realism is by no means the only option within the realist ballpark. In Sellars’s own time, for instance, so-called neo-realism proved to be a serious rivaling stance. As

is well known, the neo-realists rejected the notion of representation and argued in terms of a “direct” relation between perceiver and perceived (for details, see Werkmeister 1949, ch. 17). Although the neo-realists themselves eventually conceded that they had lost the inner-realist struggle with the critical realist movement,¹⁶ it is highly interesting to observe that their rather short-lived tradition is currently experiencing a renaissance (see, for example, the contributions in Wilson & Locatelli 2017). Therefore, the question of what kind of perceptual realism is the appropriate one is still a hot topic. Secondly, as indicated at the very beginning of this paper, Sellars explicitly rejected analytic philosophy and, as should be added, logical empiricism as well.¹⁷ By contrast, Lewis might be considered “a key figure in the rise of analytic philosophy in the United States” (Hunter 2021, Introduction) and thus less “retrograde” than Sellars. A critical comparison between Lewis and Sellars in terms of their respective methodological orientations and styles of argumentation is therefore undoubtedly a desideratum.

- 37 Regarding these and other controversial issues of the Lewis-Sellars connection, it might be concluded that further exploration is worth pursuing. On a larger scale, the relationship between American pragmatism and American critical realism needs to be reconsidered. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, the two currents shared many aspects; but, as we have seen, there were also significant differences. Hopefully, the present paper will contribute to extended research on this revealing episode in the history of American philosophy.

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NOTES

1. Though being inspired by Kant, Lewis's version of apriorism is not transcendental (nor transcendent), but rather reflective. Understood as a non-speculative ("immanentist") contribution to metaphysics, this "reflective method" is characterized by Lewis as follows: "It will seek to determine the nature of the real, as ethics seeks to determine the good, and logic, the valid, purely by critical consideration of what does not transcend ordinary experience." (Lewis 1929: 10).

2. According to Misak, "[t]his fallibilism about the a priori is Lewis's pragmatic twist on Kant. [...] We investigate, revise, and perhaps even re-invent our framework" (Misak 2013: 193). Quite similarly, James O'Shea speaks of "Lewis's pragmatic relativization of the a priori" (O'Shea 2018: 203) and diagnoses a "robust conceptual framework-relativized pragmatic conception of a priori knowledge" (*ibid.*: 211). One of the reviewers of this paper objects that there is no relativized a priori in Lewis's views, but rather the pragmatic conception of the a priori in combination with a 'Platonist' view of concepts. Apart from the fact that Lewis devotes a whole chapter of *Mind and the World Order* (among other things) to the "Relativity of Knowledge" (Lewis 1929: 154) and

“conceptual relativity” (*ibid.*: 171) in particular, it needs to be retorted that conceptual Platonism is entirely alien to Lewis’s, as it were, enactivist approach to concepts. Thus, already in the introduction to *Mind and the World Order* he emphasizes that “even what is a priori may not be an exclusive product of ‘reason,’ or made in Plato’s heaven in utter independence of the world we live in” (*ibid.*: 21) And he continues: “Indeed our categories are almost as much a social product as is language, and in something like the same sense.” (*Ibid.*). Admittedly, at one place Lewis *in fact* goes as far as to claim: “Categories and precise concepts are logical structures, Platonic ideas; the implications of them are eternal and the empirical truth about anything given, expressed in terms of them, is likewise through all time unalterable.” (*Ibid.*: 269) As is so often the case, however, Lewis’s argumentation in this regard is simply not coherent: how can it be that “there will be no assurance that what is a priori will remain fixed and absolute throughout the history of the race” and at the same time remain “through all time unalterable?” He cannot have it both ways, and a sympathetic reading should disregard his unbridled Platonist excursion at this one place.

3. Tough Lewis’s conceptualistic pragmatism does not *reduce* to an adaptationist conception, it is significantly informed by adaptationist insights. Thus, for example, in chapter XI of *Mind and the World Order*, Lewis reflects more generally on this issue, pointing out that “[t]he instant mental reaction to experience, the manner in which we approach it and the way in which we abstract from it the representation of objects, reflect millennia of nature’s work to the end that we may grasp whatever in experience is clue to some uniformity of the sort which intelligibility requires” (*ibid.*: 358).

4. More specifically, the predictive element in Lewis’s account of objects significantly *reinforces* their status as constructions. Thus, according to Lewis, statements about “real” objects involve a whole series of counterfactuals about what sensory experiences we *would* have if confronted with performing future tests on the basis of certain sensory cues. Consequently, objects are not only constructed *from* certain sensory qualities, but also constructed *in anticipation of* such sensory qualities. For the details of this counterfactual conception of objecthood, see Wagner (2021a: 6-9) and Wagner (2021b: 146-7).

5. Interestingly, Tyler Burge, in his *Origins of Objectivity*, arrives at a very similar diagnosis as Sellars. Burge points out: “Lewis stands firmly in the tradition that takes representation of sense data to be prior to representation of physical bodies. More specifically, perceptual belief about environmental objects derives both content and justification from hypothetical, broadly probabilistic predictive forms of verification that ultimately lead back to sensory experiences. Such experiences are not experiences of objective, physical objects or properties in the environment.” (Burge 2010: 127). For Burge, as for Sellars, it is physical things (*viz.* environmental objects) and not sensorily given data that are perceived. See esp. Burge (*ibid.*, ch. 9), where a principled distinction between perception and sensation is drawn and systematically cashed out.

6. It would clearly transcend the scope of this paper to elaborate on Sellars’s relation to more recent accounts of externalism in the philosophy of perception. Nevertheless, it should at least be noted that the biologically inspired framework of Sellars’s comprehensive naturalism – a perceiving organism in its environment – *entails* externalism in the form of what Sellars calls “transcendent reference” (Sellars 1932: 33). See in this regard Warren in Sellars (1970: 62). See further Slurink 1996, where a historical line to modern connectionism (Paul Churchland and others) is drawn. My own reference to Burge’s approach continues this line in a sense, although it is not more than a hint. (Just as an aside: though there are numerous similarities between Sellars’s and Burge’s account, there are also significant differences, the most striking being Burge’s downgrading of the role of *concepts* in the perceptual process. From Burge’s viewpoint, Sellars would be a representative of what he calls “second-family versions of Individual

Representationalism” (Sellars 2010: 16) and thus someone who suffers from the syndrome of “hyper-intellectualizing” (*ibid.*: 13) constitutive requirements on perception.)

7. For more extended discussions of Sellars’s critical realism, see Chisholm 1954, Wright 1994, Hatfield 2015, Neuber 2020.

8. For a similar assessment, see Misak (2013: 181 and 184); further Sachs (2014, ch. 2).

9. As already said, Dayton does not deny that a Cartesian reading of the given can be found in the later Lewis’s writings. For example, in *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, Lewis distinguishes between what he calls “objective language,” on the one hand, and “expressive language,” on the other (see Lewis 1946: 179-80). While the former pertains to the realm of probability, the latter pertains to the realm of certainty. Lewis’s claim is that, in order to prevent an infinite regress of probabilities, there must be some sort of reductive basis in the expressive language. He points out: “The data which eventually support a genuine probability, must be certainties. We do have such absolute certainties, in the sense data initiating belief and in those passages of experience which later may confirm it.” (*Ibid.*: 186). It is interesting to note that the logical empiricist Moritz Schlick arrives at a very similar conception of empirical knowledge in his 1934 paper “Über das Fundament der Erkenntnis” (for the details of Schlick’s account, see Uebel 2007: 308-9). In 1936, Schlick’s article “Meaning and Verification” appeared posthumously. In that article, Schlick discussed Lewis’s 1929 conception quite extensively (and favorably), arguing for the “absolute certainty” of the “immediately given” from the viewpoint of a “Consistent Empiricism” (see Schlick 1936: 346). Schlick’s article, by the way, was prompted by Lewis’s 1934 contribution “Experience and Meaning,” a paper in which logical empiricism, and the doctrines of the Vienna Circle in particular, are critically discussed. For further details, see Ferrari 2019.

10. Misak puts the same point thus: “What is given to us in experience does not *justify* beliefs. Something that is not a belief cannot stand in a justificatory relationship to a belief.” (Misak 2013: 181).

11. It should be noted that Dayton’s interpretation was anticipated to some extent by Gowans 1984. Further, more recent, interpretations in this vein would be by Hookway 2008 and Westphal 2017.

12. Here I am in good company with Griffin Klemick (2020) who in a recent paper has convincingly argued for a “unified foundational interpretation,” that is, an interpretation according to which Lewis was a foundationalist, not only in *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, but already in *Mind and the World Order*.

13. This is the strategy originally adopted in Gowans 1989.

14. That Schlick had to fight a similar struggle with his foundationalist theory of *Konstatierungen* (‘affirmations’) is documented in Neuber (2018: 33-59).

15. For reasons of fairness it should be noted that Lewis, in his *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, responded to the criticism brought forward by Sellars in *The Philosophy of Physical Realism*. Yet, this rejoinder was limited to the rejection of equaling conceptualistic pragmatism with Berkeley’s idealistic metaphysics (see Lewis 1946: 200-2). Accordingly, it has no further argumentative use with regard to the positive aspects of Lewis’s position.

16. For example, William Pepperell Montague, himself a neo-realist, in his 1937 retrospective “The Story of American Realism” reports that the neo-realists were unable to adequately cope with the problems of perceptual error and illusory perceptions and consequently states that “the failure of New Realism to meet them was the cause and the justification for the coming of Critical Realism” (1937: 152).

17. For example, in his *Reflections on American Philosophy from Within*, he retrospectively states: “I have always been skeptical of men like Wittgenstein and Carnap who brushed [the problem of perception] aside and tried to work out a framework largely based on logic and semantics.” (1969: 3). This, by the way, is another common ground with Burge, according to whom the role of language in “mainstream twentieth-century philosophy” (2010: 115) – beginning with Frege and

Russell and continued by the logical empiricists, Strawson, Quine, and others – is largely exaggerated, particularly when it comes to accounting for non-human animal perception.

ABSTRACTS

The relationship between American pragmatism and American critical realism needs to be reconsidered. The two currents shared many aspects, but there were also significant differences. One of these differences pertains to the object of perception or, more precisely, to the question of what we talk about when we talk about *this*, for example, being blue. By re-addressing that question, some light can be shed on the historical development of analytic philosophy in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. My case in point is the respective positions of C. I. Lewis and R. W. Sellars. I shall point out that Sellars's view has more to recommend it because it provides a more compelling framework for a comprehensive explanation of perception.

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Simposio. Il pragmatismo nella tradizione filosofica italiana del secondo dopoguerra

Il pragmatismo nella tradizione filosofica italiana del secondo dopoguerra: introduzione al simposio

Guido Baggio e Maria Regina Brioschi

- 1 L'Italia rappresenta un luogo del tutto peculiare per gli sviluppi del pragmatismo, fin dai suoi albori. A partire dalla fondazione del *Leonardo* nel 1903, Giovanni Papini, Giuseppe Prezzolini, Giovanni Vailati, Mario Calderoni (e molti altri) contribuirono a riprendere e a diffondere in Europa le principali istanze dei pragmatisti d'oltreoceano. Come è noto, questi filosofi non si limitarono ad essere vivaci interpreti del pensiero di Charles Sanders Peirce e William James, ma elaborarono anche una propria versione del pragmatismo, che può essere a buon diritto definita come “pragmatismo italiano,” nonostante le interne divisioni, ampiamente documentate dagli studi di settore. Pur considerando il contrasto tra pragmatismo magico e pragmatismo logico, nonché la breve durata del *Leonardo*, la forza e l'originalità dell'esperimento pragmatista italiano fu riconosciuta, prima che dalla critica, dalle coeve attestazioni di stima degli stessi Peirce e James (cfr. Santucci 1963; Dal Pra 1984; Maddalena & Tuzet 2007; Maddalena & Luisi 2015; Maddalena & Bella 2017), ma anche di Bergson, Sorel e Croce (cfr. Roni & Zarlenga 2020).
- 2 Nel segno della polifonia di voci, da sempre caratteristica del pragmatismo inteso come metodo e non dottrina, tra gli anni '30 e '80 in Italia sono sorti nuovi grandi interpreti e divulgatori della corrente americana. Il loro contributo, sia nei confronti del pensiero pragmatista che della storia della filosofia italiana, risulta ad oggi ancora poco indagato e molto resta da approfondire. Come si è diffuso il pragmatismo in Italia nella seconda metà del Novecento? In che modo le sue idee hanno contaminato la storia della filosofia italiana e quali nuove interpretazioni hanno a loro volta arricchito la galassia del pensiero pragmatista? Il presente simposio – il primo in italiano della sezione multilingue dell'*European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* – intende offrire una prima risposta a tali domande, presentando e ricostruendo alcuni passaggi

della ricezione del pensiero pragmatista in Italia a partire dal secondo dopoguerra, da un punto di vista storico e teoretico.

- 3 I saggi che seguono indagano il pensiero e le opere di alcune tra le figure più emblematiche del panorama filosofico italiano del Novecento nel loro rapporto con gli esponenti del pragmatismo classico e del neopragmatismo: in ordine cronologico, Giulio Preti (1911-1972), Aldo Visalberghi (1919-2007), Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921-1985), Antonio Santucci (1926-2006), Nynfa Bosco (1929-2013), Aldo Gargani (1933-2009). Tra i vari autori che si sarebbero potuti aggiungere a questo simposio, che solo per ragioni di spazio sono rimasti esclusi, vi sono Eugenio Garin, che tra i primi contribuì a un'opera di comprensione del fenomeno del pragmatismo italiano (vedi Bella 2013; Ciliberto 2010); Mario Quaranta, "vero custode del pragmatismo italiano" (Maddalena & Tuzet 2007: 10), Mario Dal Pra, fondatore della *Rivista di Storia della filosofia* e attento studioso di Vailati, di cui fece editare l'epistolario (Vailati 1971), e di John Dewey, a cui dedicò numerosi saggi; Enzo Paci, anch'egli interprete originale di Dewey; Umberto Eco, a cui è stato dedicato un simposio monografico in questa rivista nel 2018. Per quanto riguarda Carlo Sini, oltre ad essere presente con un proprio saggio su Preti in questo simposio, vedrà pubblicata prossimamente una propria intervista in questa rivista. Sempre per ragioni di spazio si è inoltre deciso di non approfondire l'interesse che il pensiero di Dewey ha suscitato in ambito pedagogico in Italia a partire dal secondo dopoguerra (per una ricostruzione cfr. Cambi 2016).
- 4 Il simposio si apre con l'articolo di Eugenio Lecaldano, che ricostruisce l'importanza del pensiero di John Dewey nelle riflessioni del neoilluminismo italiano, mostrando sotto questo aspetto il contributo specifico di Aldo Visalberghi e Antonio Santucci. Per comprendere l'originalità delle letture di Dewey da parte di Visalberghi e Santucci, l'articolo si sofferma dapprima sull'influsso di Dewey sul pensiero di Nicola Abbagnano e Giulio Preti. Il primo interpretò Dewey in continuità con il suo esistenzialismo positivo. Giulio Preti inserì la riflessione metodologica deweyana in un quadro biologista e riprese il tema dell'unione di teoria e prassi, proprio del concetto di esperienza pragmatista, enfatizzandone le implicazioni etiche e politiche. Il concetto di esperienza di Dewey risulta fondamentale anche per Visalberghi e Santucci. L'esperienza rappresenta infatti il cardine dell'elaborazione del naturalismo umanistico di Visalberghi ed è la via che egli persegue per la ricostruzione dei valori in un'ottica naturalistica. In modo diverso, anche Santucci si rifà al concetto di esperienza di Dewey, integrandolo con l'empirismo classico di Hume, per criticare l'epistemologia rappresentazionalista.
- 5 Il secondo saggio, di Carlo Sini, approfondisce un aspetto particolare della filosofia di Giulio Preti: il discorso. L'autore mostra come Preti ripensi la logica e il linguaggio a partire dal mondo della vita, in cui sono da sempre inscritti, ma anche come il concetto di realtà e soggetto-oggetto vadano ricompresi alla luce dell'"evidenza pragmatica del senso comune." Se il debito di Preti nei confronti del pragmatismo, ma anche del neopositivismo, marxismo e trascendentalismo kantiano, è manifesto, l'articolo ripropone l'originalità e la forza teoretica degli argomenti avanzati da Preti. Dalla trattazione emerge inoltre come Preti riprenda e sviluppi ulteriormente molti dei temi cari al pragmatismo: dall'atteggiamento anti-dogmatico in filosofia al senso comune e alla ricomprensione del significato (e del discorso) alla luce delle pratiche.
- 6 Il terzo saggio di Giovanni Maddalena si concentra su Nynfa Bosco (1929-2013) e lo studio di Peirce. Come osserva Maddalena, è di Bosco la prima monografia dedicata a

Peirce in Italia (nel 1957), a cui seguì vent'anni più tardi la traduzione di alcuni importanti saggi del filosofo americano non compresi nella prima raccolta italiana dei suoi scritti, curata da Nicola Abbagnano (*Caso, amore, logica*, 1956). L'articolo ricostruisce quale è "il Peirce" che Bosco presenta al pubblico italiano: sono indicati nel dettaglio i testi a cui Bosco aveva accesso e viene analizzata la sua originale interpretazione, evidenziandone in modo critico pregi e difetti. Ne emerge un quadro sfaccettato: da un lato la ricostruzione, ad opera di Bosco, della vita e del pragmatismo di Peirce risente di alcune imprecisioni storiche e di una limitata considerazione delle ricerche logiche, matematiche e fenomenologiche del filosofo americano, nonché di certe letture stereotipate del pragmatismo (diffuse allora come ora anche a livello internazionale); dall'altro, la filosofa enfatizza nel pensiero di Peirce un progetto unitario connotandolo in senso morale, metafisico e anche teologico. Il pragmatismo di Peirce costituirebbe in quest'ottica – per la sua apertura alle questioni metafisiche e religiose – un'alternativa tanto alla filosofia analitica quanto alle derive postmoderne dell'ermeneutica.

- 7 Il quarto saggio, di Susan Petrilli e Augusto Ponzio, è dedicato a Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921-1985) e presenta la sua semiotica dell'interpretazione, nel nesso con il pensiero di Peirce, Morris e Vailati. Di quest'ultimo Rossi-Landi ha curato e presentato, nel 1959, il volume *Il metodo della filosofia*, costituito da undici importanti articoli. Da Vailati, inoltre, Rossi-Landi riprende molte delle riflessioni sul linguaggio e sulla teoria della conoscenza, attribuendogli non solo una corretta interpretazione del pragmatismo come metodo ma anche l'anticipazione di certe soluzioni filosofiche sostenute in seguito da Dewey, Wittgenstein, Morris e molti altri. La prima parte del saggio si incentra sull'analisi della metodica del "parlare comune" di Rossi-Landi, che risente degli influssi sia di Cassirer che della semiotica di Peirce e Morris. In linea con le riflessioni pragmatiste, egli infatti considera il linguaggio e le sue strutture come intrinsecamente connesse alle dimensioni sociali, comunicative e dialogiche delle pratiche di significazione, in un'ottica radicalmente opposta a quella chomskiana. Vengono poi esaminati gli sviluppi più tardi della produzione di Rossi-Landi, in cui egli giunge a concepire il linguaggio, in un'impostazione di chiaro stampo marxiano, come *lavoro* (di cui le lingue sono un prodotto) rivolto alla soddisfazione di bisogni sociali.
- 8 Il simposio si chiude con il contributo di Luigi Perissinotto, che mette in luce alcuni punti di sintonia tra la proposta teoretica di Rorty di abbandonare la filosofia sistematica e fondante a favore di una "post-Filosofia" e l'idea di Gargani di un sapere senza fondamenti. In particolare, Perissinotto assimila l'interpretazione di Gargani del pensiero rortiano alla sua critica alla razionalità universale e astorica. Tre sono gli aspetti della filosofia fondativa su cui Gargani, in sintonia con Rorty, insiste criticamente: il modello di razionalità oggettiva e astorica, l'idea di una epistemologia di matrice rappresentazionale che si basa sull'assunto che sia possibile guardare la realtà da una posizione privilegiata e oggettivante, e l'idea che la filosofia debba fare da giudice delle altre aree della cultura sulla base della sua speciale conoscenza dei loro "fondamenti." A questa Filosofia (con la maiuscola), Gargani e Rorty oppongono una antropologia naturalizzata che si esprime in una prassi che, per quanto priva di fondamenti, non è espressione di irrazionalità.

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La molteplice presenza di Dewey nel neoilluminismo italiano

Il contributo di Aldo Visalberghi e Antonio Santucci

Eugenio Lecaldano

1. Dewey e il neoilluminismo

- 1 La ricerca sulla diffusione e l'incidenza delle idee di John Dewey nella cultura italiana investe una molteplicità di questioni rilevanti sia di natura storica che teorica. In questo scritto proverò a saggiare un punto specifico, ovvero come la diffusione della riflessione di Dewey, successivamente alla fine della seconda guerra mondiale, si intreccia con l'impegno a rinnovare il quadro della filosofia italiana e più specificamente con il tentativo di rendere presente nella nostra cultura l'eredità dell'Illuminismo. Proprio l'attenzione al modo in cui viene interpretato Dewey permette di diversificare una molteplicità di paradigmi all'interno dei quali l'eredità illuministica viene elaborata nel movimento neoilluministico che più esplicitamente si riconosce in questo progetto innovativo. È una acquisizione scontata per la storiografia filosofica¹ che l'eredità illuministica si sviluppi in una molteplicità di forme nella cultura italiana successiva alla fine della seconda guerra mondiale e si insiste qui di seguito che questa eredità non si chiude con la fine del movimento neoilluministico strettamente inteso.² In realtà proprio seguendo la pista dell'influenza di Dewey nella nostra cultura si possono delineare una serie di ulteriori filoni di rinnovamento della filosofia italiana che si spingono fino ad oggi.
- 2 Per ricostruire adeguatamente le vicende del confronto della cultura filosofica italiana con le idee di Dewey bisogna ovviamente spingersi ben al di là del movimento illuminista strettamente inteso. Un movimento che nacque formalmente con il documento firmato il 3 e 4 giugno 1953 da una molteplicità di personalità della cultura filosofica italiana e che in quanto tale si ritiene si sia sciolto tra la fine degli anni Sessanta e l'inizio degli anni Settanta.³ Non ci si può limitare agli anni Cinquanta – Settanta non solo perché – come è del tutto acquisito storiograficamente⁴ – la presenza di Dewey fece parte di quella penetrazione del pragmatismo americano in Italia che ha

coinvolto anche i primi decenni del secolo XX. Ma anche perché l'attività di alcune delle personalità maggiormente impegnate a riprendere in Italia le sue riflessioni si sviluppò fino all'inizio del XXI. In questo articolo mettiamo a fuoco l'incontro con Dewey di Aldo Visalberghi e di Antonio Santucci.⁵ Risulteranno così riconoscibili una molteplicità di impostazioni spesso anche divergenti che si intrecciarono nel modo di intendere la ripresa e lo sviluppo della filosofia illuministica.⁶

2. L'incontro con Dewey di Nicola Abbagnano e Giulio Preti

- 3 Per rendere chiare le peculiarità delle letture di Dewey sviluppate da Visalberghi e Santucci bisogna ovviamente paragonarle con quelle fornite da altri esponenti del neoilluminismo. In questo senso consideriamo (brevemente in quanto nel presente simposio ci sono altri contributi dedicati a questi pensatori) quanto Abbagnano e Preti hanno trovato in Dewey. Già uno dei fondatori del neo-illuminismo Nicola Abbagnano prestava una notevole attenzione a Dewey fin da fine degli anni quaranta.⁷ E come è noto Giulio Preti faceva ruotare nel 1957 il suo *Praxis ed empirismo* intorno alla proposta di unificare l'eredità di Dewey con quella del giovane Marx.⁸ Entrambi questi pensatori leggevano Dewey come un riferimento per l'apertura democratica alla base del neoilluminismo. Nel loro caso, inoltre, la lettura di Dewey si inserisce all'interno di un contesto di riflessione filosofica già chiaramente caratterizzato e dunque i temi e le impostazioni del pensatore americano danno vita a qualche sorta di eclettismo metodologico. Non bisogna perdere di vista come Dewey sia letto per essere ricondotto all'interno di un contesto che mescola diversi filoni di indagine filosofica.
- 4 Nel caso di Abbagnano, Dewey viene declinato in continuità con il suo esistenzialismo positivo già del tutto elaborato nel corso degli anni Quaranta. Per cui Abbagnano considera Dewey in quanto teorico di una filosofia naturalista capace di tenere insieme anche la consapevolezza della fragilità e finitezza della esistenza umana. Per Abbagnano, Dewey ha il merito di avere elaborato una concezione dell'esperienza che esclude la pretesa di raggiungere esiti definitivi e dunque correttamente inclusiva anche delle dimensioni negative e problematiche dell'esistenza umana. Il pregio, dunque, della filosofia di Dewey secondo Abbagnano è di avere riconosciuto "la radicale instabilità dell'esistenza umana e del mondo in cui l'uomo vive" (Abbagnano 2001: 399). E ancora il merito di Dewey è quello di avere elaborato un nuovo empirismo alternativo all'empirismo classico:

L'esperienza di cui parla l'empirismo classico pretende bensì di essere l'intero mondo, ma in realtà è un mondo semplificato e depurato di tutti gli elementi di disordine, di turbamento e di errore. È un'esperienza ridotta a stati di coscienza cartesianamente concepiti come chiari e distinti. L'esperienza di cui parla Dewey è invece l'esperienza primitiva, indiscriminata e grezza, che include entro di sé tutti i fattori di turbamento, di rischio, di perversità e di errore che affettano la vita umana. Inoltre, tale esperienza non vale per Dewey come il deposito o la riserva dei "dati ultimi e irriducibili" coi quali debba poi costruirsi l'intero mondo della conoscenza umana: non esistono infatti per Dewey dati di questo genere giacché [...] ogni ricerca muove da una situazione determinata. L'esperienza è per Dewey, soltanto un metodo di ricerca e un memento per il filosofo [...]. Che permette di condannare senz'altro ogni sistema che pretenda di considerare come reali gli aspetti ritenuti positivi, e ridurre all'apparenza tutti gli altri. (*Ibid.*: 400-1)

- 5 Una lettura che finisce con il ricondurre Dewey ad un più ampio filone filosofico che include al suo interno – in modo piuttosto indistinto – non solo il pragmatismo, l'empirismo e il positivismo logico ma anche l'esistenzialismo e perfino Kant. Interpretazione possibile solo in quanto la nozione centrale si è tacitamente trasformata e non è più quella di “esperienza,” ma piuttosto quella di “ragione.” Lo si capisce quando si legge che Abbagnano prende le distanze dalla centralità dell'esperienza riconosciuta da Dewey mettendo al centro del pensiero piuttosto la riflessione sulla categoria del possibile:

Rispetto al concetto di esperienza qual è inteso da Dewey, il possibile ha il vantaggio di costituire non già un richiamo o un memento esterno alla filosofia, al quale la filosofia debba riferirsi continuamente come a termine di confronto estrinseco, ma piuttosto una categoria intrinseca alla filosofia stessa, una categoria che può prestarle gli strumenti concettuali indispensabili alle sue indagini. (*Ibid.*: 404)

- 6 Il contesto in cui Preti inserisce la sua utilizzazione di Dewey è ben diverso da quello di Abbagnano. Sicuramente Preti – come del resto Abbagnano – ha preso molto seriamente il suo “mestiere di filosofo” e ha messo a punto una proposta teorica tra le più articolate e fertili della filosofia italiana della seconda metà del secolo XX.⁹ Il contesto in cui si muove Preti è quello del razionalismo critico di Antonio Banfi.¹⁰ Una scuola filosofica molto attiva nella Milano del secondo dopoguerra che spinse il suo impegno pubblico fino ad una adesione ad alcune iniziative del PCI: impegno ben diverso da quello di Abbagnano che si legò alla fine dalla sua vita alla destra liberale. In effetti tra i primi documenti dell'interesse di Preti per Dewey ci sono alcuni articoli sulla rivista “Il Politecnico” diretta da Elio Vittorini e che uscì tra il settembre 1945 e il dicembre 1947.¹¹ Preti amplia il riconoscimento della fertilità della riflessione di Dewey oltre quello che abbiamo visto presente in Abbagnano e in questi primi scritti sottolinea in particolare l'impegno per una scienza sociale che vede l'individuo immerso nel suo ambiente naturale a cui però reagisce “con atti e azioni,” modificandolo con un pensiero che è strumento del miglioramento delle condizioni di vita per tutti. A Dewey si deve un naturalismo umanistico ovvero un “umanesimo moderno” che egli sviluppa in varie direzioni e in particolare proponendo un nuovo “sistema moderno di educazione tecnico- umanistica.”¹² La lettura di Preti è chiaramente segnata dalla considerazione di Dewey come una risorsa per una elaborazione teorica centrata sul riconoscimento della radice biologica del pensiero umano e da un deciso superamento delle dicotomie tra teoria e pratica e dunque tra scienza e valori. Una impostazione che permette a Preti di mostrare le diversità tra Dewey e il neopositivismo, ovvero tra un vecchio e nuovo empirismo spingendosi ben oltre il riconoscimento della non definitività dell'esperienza in quanto aperta alle situazioni negative. Così per Preti, Dewey può divenire una delle fonti più dirette di alcune sue significative elaborazioni costruttive sull'etica e la democrazia politica sviluppate tra gli anni Cinquanta e la sua morte prematura nel 1972. Per cogliere la specificità della lettura di Preti può essere utile guardare ad un importante saggio del 1955 su *Dewey e la filosofia della scienza*, oltre che, naturalmente, al suo libro *Praxis ed empirismo*. Va però ricordato che nelle analisi di Preti è presente una prospettiva critica che si collega alla continua riproposizione del trascendentale kantiano come uno spazio non salvaguardato dal pensatore americano.¹³
- 7 Tra i punti più salienti dell'interpretazione di Dewey sviluppata da Preti va sottolineato l'inserimento della metodologia pragmatista in un quadro biologistico:

Il pragmatismo restaura la filosofia della scienza e il suo proprio piano, ricollegandosi alle sue più pure tradizioni humeane e baconiane. Il pensiero scientifico viene ricongiunto alla vita e al dinamismo psicobiologico del quale è un episodio, la scienza viene ricongiunta ai processi tecnici dai quali è indissolubile, la “verità scientifica,” le sue strutture formali, i suoi metodi di indagine, prova, generalizzazione vengono intesi nel loro proprio dinamismo e non più alla luce di una metafisica di “verità” speculativa. (Preti 1976: 80)

- 8 Non meno rilevante è l’attenzione molto maggiore che Preti presta al peculiare modo in cui Dewey declina la stretta connessione tra teoria e prassi riconoscendo come “[l]a scienza è *in primis et ante omnia* l’atteggiamento della mente che usa l’intelligenza per risolvere i problemi umani” (*ibid.*: 81). E inoltre in Preti vi è una più compiuta consapevolezza del modo in cui Dewey connette una filosofia scientifica con la democrazia:

Anche la democrazia deweyana si connette con questi punti di vista fondamentali. L’avvento della democrazia coincide con l’avvento della scienza: l’individuo democratico è identicamente uguale all’individuo che è stato protagonista della nuova scienza, e i destini della democrazia sono strettamente legati a quelli della scienza. Per Dewey la democrazia non consiste tanto nei sistemi del suffragio universale e dell’urna elettorale (meri accorgimenti pratici storicamente contingenti): consiste nel metodo dell’intelligenza applicata alle cose umane, con tutto ciò che esso porta con sé: la discussione anziché il dogma, la consultazione anziché l’imposizione, la persuasione anziché la violenza. (*Ibid.*: 83)¹⁴

- 9 Preti coglieva anche con nettezza le implicazioni etiche – o, per meglio dire “metaetiche” – della impostazione di Dewey che superava la “vecchia mentalità speculativa che opponeva verità e praticità.”¹⁵ Infine Preti trova in Dewey una chiara riformulazione della nozione di esperienza che lo porta a contrapporre al vecchio empirismo un nuovo empirismo proprio per una sostanziale trasformazione di questo concetto:

L’esperienza, dunque, è un rapporto attivo con il dato: non è costituita dalla mera recettività o passività della mente: come nella dottrina dell’empirismo moderno raccolta anche da Kant. (Questo, tra parentesi elimina il problema del “fondamento”). Ogni cosa è resa quello che è dal fatto di essere implicata in un processo di esperienza. (*Ibid.*: 89)¹⁶

3. Aldo Visalberghi e Dewey: il naturalismo umanistico e la ricostruzione dei valori

- 10 Al centro del contributo di Visalberghi nella interpretazione di Dewey troviamo la proposta da lui stesso sottoscritta di una filosofia che superando la separazione tra teoria e prassi sappia indicare, a partire dall’esperienza, vie per una ricostruzione dei valori. Con Visalberghi, ma anche con Santucci, ci troviamo di fronte a studiosi la cui familiarità con l’opera di Dewey è anche sul piano storiografico più sicura, completa e continuativa di quella riconoscibile in altre personalità del neoilluminismo. Visalberghi insiste molto sulla concezione attivistica della conoscenza riconoscibile in Dewey e sulla ripresa di temi e impostazioni viste da lui come il volano di una serie di proposte per la scuola e l’educazione da estendere anche alla società italiana.¹⁷ Visalberghi poi è uno degli esponenti del neoilluminismo che hanno maggiormente contribuito a far valere nella cultura italiana una teoria etica naturalistica non rinunciataria e impegnata in positivo nella individuazione di valori per le vite di esseri umani liberati dalle tradizionali concezioni religiose e spiritualistiche.¹⁸ In questo senso Visalberghi

procede in parallelo con la linea di Preti¹⁹ spingendosi al di là delle analisi meta-etiche che considerano i giudizi morali come espressioni irrazionali e non discutibili di emozioni: concezioni meta-etiche frutto dell'influenza delle tesi di A.J. Ayer e dei neopositivisti, che sono preponderanti tra i neo-illuministi e ad esempio sottoscritte nelle pagine di N. Bobbio, U. Scarpelli, e altri.²⁰

- 11 Visalberghi proprio facendo tesoro delle analisi e argomentazioni di Dewey procede sulla strada di una concezione naturalistica dell'etica niente affatto riduzionistica, anzi contestando la riduzione dei valori ai fatti e delle valutazioni ad asserzioni. L'elaborazione specifica sull'etica di Visalberghi deve per altro molto al suo modo di interpretare la stessa filosofia della scienza e dunque la metodologia in uso da parte di Dewey. Visalberghi non si limita a superare l'epistemologia neopositivista per il modo di tracciare una radicale diversità tra teoria e pratica, ma mostra anche l'inaccettabilità di una concezione della scienza come sapere del tutto neutrale sul piano morale. Visalberghi riprendendo Dewey rifiuta, poi, l'assimilazione del "campo etico" a una arbitraria "questione di gusto." Si tratta in primo luogo di non considerare semplicisticamente l'applicazione del metodo scientifico al campo morale come quella che fornisce "un certo numero di sparsi *risultati* scientifici (della psicologia, della sociologia, dell'antropologia ecc.) che permetteranno la fondazione di un'etica positiva" (Visalberghi 1958: 111). Si dovrà essere piuttosto consapevoli che "il metodo scientifico non si identifica con un certo numero, anche ingente, di risultati specifici, ma che non si identifica neppure fuor dai ristretti ambiti tecnici, con particolari procedure" (*ibid.*). Proprio perciò il naturalismo umanistico che si sviluppa attraverso il progresso del metodo scientifico si accompagna ad una ben precisa etica tenuto conto – come precisa Visalberghi – della "insistita qualificazione deweyana del metodo scientifico in generale come essenzialmente atteggiamento antidogmatico, comunicativo tollerante e aperto."²¹
- 12 I valori dell'etica umanistica non sono, dunque, più fondati nei dati acquisiti delle scienze, ma creati dallo stabilizzarsi di una condotta sociale che ruota intorno alla accettazione del metodo della scienza: una società nella quale la forma di giustificazione di qualsiasi prodotto per così dire linguistico e culturale degli esseri umani richiede che esso sia sottoposto alla critica pubblica. E questa critica in qualsiasi caso può essere corroborata solo ricorrendo a qualche esperibilità garantita: questo vale sia per le parti del sapere scientifico sia per le proposte di determinate opzioni valutative in quanto risolutive di determinate situazioni problematiche. È sempre con il ricorso all'esperienza che possiamo giustificare le nostre prese di posizione. In questo quadro si può comprendere che a proposito della critica filosofica ai valori Visalberghi concluda: "al filosofo compete ora soltanto il compito dell'argomentazione morale fondata sui fatti accertati e sulla loro analisi scientifica; ad altri politici e predicatori e romanzieri spetta di tentare di convertire con diverse suggestioni i fanatici insensibili alla voce della ragione." (*Ibid.*: 467-70).
- 13 Il naturalismo di Visalberghi sui valori si accompagna ad una serie di strumenti analitici – reperibili anche questi nelle opere di Dewey – sulla comprensione del comportamento umano in modo tale da escludere qualsiasi spazio per il valore in sé stesso o intrinseco.²² Così Visalberghi riprende attentamente Dewey nel mostrare la completa continuità tra mezzi e fini e dunque l'inaccettabilità di una valutazione sui fini considerati come indipendenti dai mezzi con cui si riesce a realizzarli. Nella nostra cultura sembra invece molto radicata non solo la tesi che esistano dei fini in sé, ma che

addirittura i fini hanno un valore prioritario rispetto ai mezzi, tesi che si spinge fino al principio attribuito a Machiavelli (con la solita approssimazione delle opinioni correnti) che “il fine giustifica i mezzi.” La continuità tra mezzi e fini si inserisce in una considerazione della condotta e attività umana che non perde di vista come gli stessi fini si trasformino in mezzi: una impostazione che rappresenta la via di entrata nella delineazione dei valori del continuo ricorso all’esperienza per valutare l’appropriatezza delle soluzioni privilegiate.²³

4. Antonio Santucci: il pragmatismo di Dewey e la sua fortuna

¹⁴ Anche negli scritti di Antonio Santucci troviamo una interpretazione delle idee di Dewey che è chiaramente distinguibile da quella più diffusa tra gli esponenti del neoilluminismo italiano nella sua fase iniziale.²⁴ Santucci tra l’altro si è occupato non solo della produzione filosofica di Dewey direttamente, ma ha anche seguito la fortuna di Dewey all’interno del recente sviluppo del pragmatismo americano in particolare occupandosi delle idee di Hilary Putnam e Richard Rorty.²⁵ Un altro esempio di personalità che formatasi negli anni quaranta e cinquanta in collegamento con il cosiddetto movimento neoilluministico continua, come del resto Visalberghi, fino agli inizi del XXI secolo a rielaborare le sue posizioni, aggiornandole e precisandole: si tratta dunque di concrete personalità di studiosi che mostrano quanto sia fallace la diagnosi di fine della fortuna illuministica in Italia con la cosiddetta “morte del neoilluminismo” agli inizi degli anni Settanta. Né è facile sostenere, anche guardando alle biografie di Visalberghi e Santucci, che il filone filosofico attento alla ricezione dell’eredità illuministica nella cultura italiana ha perso le capacità di confrontarsi con altre impostazioni per una qualche “egemonia” agli inizi degli anni Settanta. Forse si deve prendere atto che alcune personalità del neoilluminismo avevano una visione limitata e parzialmente errata dell’eredità da potere utilizzare nell’Italia del dopoguerra e che dunque eventualmente fu la loro capacità di influire sulla cultura filosofica italiana ad avere una caduta o a dovere ricorrere a impostazioni non illuministiche per continuare ad incidere. Questa morte e resurrezione dell’eredità illuministica in Italia si lega a molti fattori e ipotizziamo che uno di questi sia fortemente legato proprio con le vicende di una continua rivisitazione delle opere di Dewey mettendo al centro di una rifondazione filosofica alcuni temi e impostazioni del pensatore americano precedentemente sottovalutati o parzialmente compresi. Per quello che riguarda Santucci, attraverso le riviste, i convegni, l’attività editoriale e gli interventi pubblici anche sui giornali, ha continuato a sviluppare questa eredità fino ai primi anni 2000.

¹⁵ Al di là di questo uno dei principali contributi di Santucci, come ha spiegato Eva Picardi, è stato quello di fare emergere l’ingenuità con cui molte delle personalità del neoilluminismo avevano creduto di potere “essere tranquillamente (cioè acriticamente) pragmatisti, empiristi naturalizzati, empiristi viennesi, filosofi analitici, semantici formali. Poi all’improvviso si scopre che non si sa più esattamente che cosa significa oggi rientrare effettivamente in una di queste categorie.” (Picardi 2008: 153). Santucci invece declina la sua ricostruzione di Dewey in una elaborata storia delle varie fasi della presenza pragmatista in Italia. Una ricostruzione che si integra anche con quella analoga fatta da Santucci sulle fortune dell’empirismo da Hume ai neopositivisti nella

cultura italiana. Su questo sfondo Santucci è in grado di presentare una caratterizzazione della metodologia di Dewey in generale, e della sua nozione di esperienza in particolare, ben più approfondita della versione generica che era condivisa dall'insieme delle correnti neoilluministiche.²⁶ La prevalente attenzione storica di Santucci lo rende più attento alle diversità fra impostazioni teoriche: non solo tra diversi illuminismi, ma anche tra diversi empirismi e di certo tra il pragmatismo di Dewey e l'empirismo classico o il neo-positivismo. Come è stato sottolineato,²⁷ la prevalente attenzione di Santucci per Hume gli permette di fare emergere un'eredità illuministica dell'empirismo settecentesco largamente sottodimensionata negli altri pensatori italiani. Mancava, talvolta, in questi pensatori una conoscenza benché minima della filosofia di Hume e dunque ad esempio la possibilità di prendere una chiara distanza dalla antropologia di Hobbes oltre che dalla metafisica di Kant. Inoltre, Santucci ben consapevole della natura della filosofia di Hume e del contributo che questa aveva dato al superamento del rappresentazionalismo e di una concezione macchiattistica della fede nel progresso umano come quella al suo tempo attribuita ai *philosophes*, poteva mettere in risalto la continuità del pensiero di Dewey con questo specifico contributo. Santucci si muoveva in un contesto storico e teorico che sapeva dare il giusto rilievo all'elaborazione filosofica fatta nell'Illuminismo Scozzese, mostrando come da essa poteva farsi originare una forma di naturalismo umanistico in grado di legare un "moderato" scetticismo con una ricerca non rinunciataria delle linee di progresso in una cultura umana capace di mettere da parte il mito della Ragione e di fare emergere il rilevante contributo offerto dal lato sentimentale e passionale degli esseri umani.²⁸

- 16 Muovendo da qui, Santucci più degli altri interpreti coglie che in Dewey vi è una netta opposizione ad una concezione epistemologica di natura rappresentazionalista. Il pragmatismo di Dewey risulta nella ricostruzione che ne fa Santucci in opposizione con la teoria della verità come corrispondenza, ma anche con la distinzione cara alla filosofia kantiana tra apparenza e realtà. Ma poi Dewey è confrontato da Santucci con "un atteggiamento empiristico" che non è certo riconducibile al vecchio empirismo che il filosofo americano si proponeva di superare. Secondo la ricostruzione che Santucci faceva dell'empirismo, avendo presente in particolare le riflessioni di Hume bene interpretate contro la vulgata che lo vedeva come uno scettico radicale, si trattava piuttosto di "considerare l'esigenza metodologica dell'empirismo in termini di scelta." E dunque il tratto distintivo di "questo empirismo sta proprio nella esigenza di libertà; nella diffidenza di ogni forma di classificazione e incasellamento delle attività" e tutto questo rinvia a "una opzione pragmatista."²⁹ Santucci tuttavia non si limitava a rivendicare una interpretazione corretta dell'empirismo di Hume contro le inesattezze storiografiche di Dewey, ma trovava nella centralità riconosciuta da Hume alla "credenza" una impostazione che influenzava il pragmatismo, principalmente nella versione di James.³⁰ E poi ricostruendo la fortuna di Hume Santucci rivendicava una eredità scettica del naturalismo di Hume. In contrasto con le impostazioni biologistiche di Dewey quando si opponeva alla rilevanza data al *custom* e all'abitudine dallo Scozzese, Santucci si chiedeva:

[e]d è poi sicuro che il modello biologico a cui Dewey riferiva il continuo dell'esperienza lo avvantaggi sullo Scozzese? Se Hume non aveva confutato le premesse dell'atomismo psicologico, nemmeno le aveva difese come assolute ed escludeva la credenza nell'identità personale o in un mondo esterno. Nessuna operazione della natura umana era da considerare una finzione e il compito dello

scettico consisteva nell'impedire che una avesse a prevalere sull'altra. (Santucci, 1971: 183)

- 17 Sul piano epistemologico Santucci mostra che nel contesto humaneo viene superata complessivamente la tendenza a considerare la scienza come la raccolta di osservazioni neutrali e dunque a contrapporre ad essa la filosofia, in quanto unica elaborazione in grado di fare valere il punto di vista umano. Si tratta chiaramente di una anticipazione del naturalismo umanistico di Dewey in cui le componenti, ontologicamente separate dalla tradizione empiristica lockiana e sensista, sono unificate e il processo conoscitivo non è una registrazione di sensazioni passive, ma un'elaborazione di credenze che hanno la natura di una sensibilità attiva. Come è stato fatto rilevare, Santucci nel recuperare questo aspetto della svolta epistemologica del *Trattato* di Hume, talvolta propendeva a privilegiare la versione pragmatista di William James, ma per altro non si spingeva certo a contrapporre su questo aspetto Dewey e James.³¹
- 18 Va poi sottolineato che l'attenzione che Santucci rivolgeva a Dewey si caricava anche delle sue ricerche relative allo sviluppo del pragmatismo tra XX e XXI secolo. Il quadro di contestualizzazione del contributo filosofico di Dewey si squaderna nella ricostruzione di Santucci in quanto confrontato non solo con i precedenti Peirce e James, ma anche con i successori fossero essi Davidson, Rorty o Putnam. Così Santucci riusciva a mostrare con chiarezza i modi precisi in cui Dewey aveva formulato: “le tesi fondamentali e non negoziabili del pragmatismo [...] l'opposizione allo scetticismo, il fallibilismo, la negazione della distinzione fatti/valori, l'insistenza sul carattere sociale del significato, la fiducia non cieca, ma ragionata, nella scienza quale strumento di democrazia e progresso.” (Picardi 2008: 155). E così nel suo neoilluminismo, o meglio nella sua versione del recupero di una eredità illuministica, Santucci poteva integrare il contributo empirista e pragmatista, mostrando come esso non passa affatto attraverso concetti unitari di conoscenza, verità, progresso, democrazia ecc. Una delle eredità illuministiche da riprendere è proprio l'aver messo a punto a proposito di queste fondamentali nozioni una molteplicità di concezioni in continuo confronto tra loro, restando ferma l'appartenenza di famiglia al naturalismo umanistico. Un confronto che, come Dewey aveva sottolineato, non è certo governato dalle migliori capacità di elaborare astrattamente le teorie ma piuttosto dalla fertilità delle proposte che ne derivano per cercare di risolvere i problemi di tutti.

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NOTE

1. A documentare questa pluralità di linee nella cultura filosofica italiana risulta indispensabile il documentatissimo volume di M. Ferrari, *Mezzo secolo di filosofia italiana. Dal secondo dopoguerra al nuovo millennio* (Ferrari 2016). Molto utile è anche la successiva elaborazione di Ferrari nell'intervista a N. Parise, *A proposito di 'Mezzo secolo di filosofia italiana' di Massimo Ferrari* (Parise 2020).
2. Sulla ricostruzione di una eredità dell'Illuminismo nella cultura filosofica italiana che passa anche attraverso diverse fasi del neoilluminismo italiano che si spingono ben oltre il 1973 si veda Lecaldano 2020a.
3. La dichiarazione e i firmatari del progetto neoilluminista avviato nel giugno 1953 si possono leggere in Pasini & Rolando (1991: 11-3) che ricostruisce in modo impeccabile la vicenda dei vari convegni promossi dai firmatari del documento. La tesi "ricevuta" della fine del neo-illuminismo

con gli inizi degli anni Settanta fu ratificata da vari interventi ad un convegno ad Anacapri i cui atti si leggono in AA.VV. 1982. Furono in realtà i filosofi per così dire “laici” a fare valere questa posizione: certamente un merito di questa corrente filosofica in grado di impostare una valutazione storica delle sue vicende mentre i sostenitori italiani delle filosofie metafisiche, spiritualiste e religiose rivendicano spesso una improbabile eterna ed assoluta verità fuori del tempo e dello spazio.

4. A questo proposito si vedano ad esempio le ricostruzioni complessive del pragmatismo fornite da Santucci 1963, 1970, e da Sini 1972. Per quanto riguarda specificamente Dewey si vedano: Alcaro 1972, 1997; Calcaterra 2011; Granese 1966, 1973. Per una messa a punto recente si veda Marchetti 2021, che tra l’altro discute il volume a cura di Roni e Zarlenga 2020.

5. Per A. Visalberghi (1919-2007) si veda in particolare AA.VV. 2002; per A. Santucci (1926-2006) si veda in particolare Tega & Turco 2008.

6. Una interpretazione analoga è già delineata da Santucci 1995, in particolare nel saggio *Filosofia italiana e filosofia statunitense: il pragmatismo e il naturalismo*, e specificamente nelle p. 113-22 su *Dewey e il nuovo illuminismo*.

7. Abbagnano 2001, e in particolare lo scritto del 1948, *Verso un nuovo illuminismo John Dewey* (p. 99-101) e quello del 1951, *Dewey: esperienza e possibilità* (p. 393-407).

8. Preti 1957, ma si veda la nuova edizione con prefazione di S. Veca e postfazione di F. Minazzi, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 2007. Di Preti su Dewey si veda anche lo scritto del 1955 *Dewey e la filosofia della scienza*, in Preti (1976: 79-103).

9. In questo senso si legga Lecaldano 2020b.

10. In questo stesso contesto si colloca la riflessione anche di Mario Dal Pra, che in più occasioni si occupò esplicitamente di Dewey in particolare con la sua ampia *Presentazione* (Dal Pra 1974: VII-XXIII) all’opera di John Dewey e Arthur Bentley, *Conoscenza e transazione*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1974, trad. di E. Mistretta di *Knowing and the Known*, e in altri scritti poi confluiti nel suo volume *Studi sul pragmatismo italiano* (Dal Pra 1984).

11. Si veda “*Il Politecnico*” (Forti & Pautasso 1975). Tra gli interventi di Preti da ricordare: *La crisi della scienza* (p. 160-4), *Il pragmatismo che cos’è* (p. 269-76) e *Scuola umanistica o scuola tecnica?* (p. 401-4).

12. G. Preti, *Il pragmatismo che cos’è* (in Forti & Pautasso 1975: 273-4).

13. Ma come suggerisce Parrini (2004: 105), l’incontro di Preti con Dewey si connette anche alla sua “chiarificazione e [...] riformulazione in termini trascendentalistici e fenomenologi husserliani di dottrine empiristiche fondamentali,” superando l’istanza scettica e realizzando il “connubio filosofico- ideologico tra neo-empirismo e filosofie della praxis (pragmatismo e marxismo). Un connubio tutto teso, tra le altre cose, ad agganciare le astratte logico – metodologiche dei neopositivisti alla discussione dei deweyani *problems of men* e all’instaurazione di una cultura democratica ispirata ai valori di chiarezza, rigore, controllabilità, intersoggettività ecc. caratteristici della cultura scientifica rispetto a quella retorica e spiritualistica.”

14. Questo aspetto democratico e dialogico è al centro della introduzione di G. Calogero (1959: VII-XXXII) alla traduzione italiana del libro di Dewey, *Una fede comune*. Calogero procede con la solita chiarezza e acume filosofico ma poi insistendo ripetutamente sull’analogia tra il suo principio del dialogo e la fede comune di Dewey finisce con lo svuotare questa fede della sua concretezza riducendola all’adesione ad un principio meramente formale.

15. Un tema che Preti trovava sviluppato in particolare in *Problemi di tutti* di Dewey del quale forniva una lunga citazione in nota in Preti (1976: 83).

16. In questo contesto andrebbe anche inserita l’utilizzazione fatta in Italia dell’operazionismo di P. W. Bridgman (1882-1961) le cui opere furono tradotte nel secondo dopoguerra e di cui si occupò particolarmente V. Somenzi (1918-2003), ad esempio in *L’operazionismo in fisica* (Somenzi 1958); su Somenzi si vedano AA.VV. 2005.

17. Si veda Costa 2002. Le idee di Visalberghi sulle connessioni tra logica deweyana e applicazione con la formulazione di una didattica attivistica sono formulate in particolare nel capitolo *I fondamenti filosofici dell'attivismo pedagogico* del citato libro *John Dewey* del 1951 (Visalberghi 1951: 10-41).
18. Si veda Lecaldano (2002: 183-8).
19. È da rilevare che Preti e Visalberghi collaborarono come traduttori di *Natura e condotta dell'uomo. Introduzione alla psicologia sociale* (Dewey 1958) (l'edizione originale è del 1922), mentre la nota introduttiva al libro è del pedagogista Lamberto Borghi.
20. Un tentativo nella direzione di un riduzionismo etico razionalista aperto al sapere scientifico è stato fatto in Italia da un'importante personalità, partecipe tra l'altro del movimento neoilluministico, Ludovico Geymonat che proprio il 25 aprile 1945 pubblicava il libro *Studi per un nuovo razionalismo*, con un capitolo dedicato a *Stati sentimentali e valutazioni etiche* (Geymonat 1945: 267-98). Geymonat proponeva un'analisi empirista dei giudizi morali che finiva in un deciso relativismo, spingendo ad “abbandonare anche il postulato della eguaglianza metafisica di tutti gli uomini,” prendendo atto che “il modo di agire verso gli altri dipende dalla coscienza di colui che agisce, non di coloro ai quali è diretta l'azione” (*ibid.*: 297).
21. Visalberghi nello stesso libro fa propria “l'ulteriore precisazione di Dewey e Bentley, che identificano la più aggiornata consapevolezza teoretica che del metodo scientifico può aversi con il cosiddetto ‘criterio transazionale.’” Si veda in particolare il I capitolo di *Esperienza e valutazione* dedicato a “*Interazione*” e *Transazione* Visalberghi (1958: 5-36).
22. Proprio a questo tema è dedicata l'introduzione di A. Visalberghi alla traduzione italiana di *Teoria della valutazione*, (Dewey 1960). Il testo dell'introduzione del 1960 *La concezione deweyana del valore* riprende una conferenza tenuta da Dewey a Princeton il 10 febbraio 1953 e pubblicata sul “*Journal of Philosophy*” nel 1953 e che ricompare, poi, rielaborata come capitolo IV di *Esperienza e valutazione* con il titolo *Fini e mezzi* (Dewey 1960: 143-65).
23. Un tentativo di contestare l'adeguatezza delle analisi di Dewey per superare la nozione di valore intrinseco e il ricorso a qualche riconoscimento di un fine ultimo è stato fatto da G. Pontara 1974, si vedano in particolare le p. 43-92 dedicate a Dewey nelle quali viene chiamato in causa anche Visalberghi (p. 80).
24. Dei numerosi lavori di Santucci ricordiamo: *Il pragmatismo in Italia* (Santucci 1963); *Il pragmatismo* (Santucci 1970), con scritti di C.S. Peirce, W. James, J. Dewey, G.H. Mead, C.W. Morris, F.C.S. Schiller, E. Le Roy, G. Vailati; *Storia del pragmatismo* (Santucci 1992); *Empirismo, pragmatismo, filosofia italiana* (Santucci 1995).
25. Si veda in particolare Santucci 1989.
26. Tra i molti lavori di Santucci che documentano la sua ricerca rivolta ad approfondire i vari filoni dell'empirismo e la loro confluenza con il pragmatismo sono da vedere i saggi raccolti in *Empirismo, pragmatismo, filosofia italiana*, (Santucci 1995), in particolare *Sull'empirismo come atteggiamento filosofico*, p. 19-50 (originariamente del 1980) e *Empiristi e filosofi italiani (1945-1980)*, p. 51-80, oltre il già citato saggio su *Filosofia italiana e filosofia statunitense: il pragmatismo e il naturalismo*.
27. Ad esempio, nel citato articolo di Eva Picardi 2008.
28. Per uno sviluppo di questo si veda Lecaldano 2008.
29. Santucci presenta questa sua accezione dell'empirismo in piena fase neo-illuminista nella saggio *Sull'empirismo come atteggiamento filosofico*, pubblicato nel 1960 sulla “*Rivista di Filosofia*” e poi ripreso in *Empirismo, pragmatismo, filosofia italiana*, (Santucci 1995: 19-50).
30. Si veda a questo proposito di Santucci, *Credenza e sentimento della razionalità: David Hume e William James*, in Santucci (1995: 81-194), uno scritto originariamente del 1982.
31. Su questi aspetti è da vedere come Santucci elabori una serie di dubbi spesso lasciati aperti nell'articolo “*Conseguenze delle Consequences of Pragmatism* di Richard Rorty” (Santucci 1989).

RIASSUNTI

The article surveys the interpretation of Dewey in Italian new-enlightenment and in particular the contributions of Aldo Visalberghi and Antonio Santucci. Visalberghi develops a number of Deweyan insights on the connexions between the methodology of the sciences and the process for the justifications of evaluations. Santucci shows the analogies between Dewey's pragmatism and Hume's sceptical empiricism. Both thinkers enrich the attempt by 20th century Italian philosophy of a recover of the Enlightenment's heritage with the help of Dewey's ideas.

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Giulio Preti e la verità del discorso

Carlo Sini

- 1 In un passo dei *Saggi filosofici* (1976) Giulio Preti avanza una significativa profezia. Forse, dice (aggiungendo “e io ne sono fortemente convinto”), la filosofia “sta appena uscendo, faticosamente, dalla sua preistoria, e la sua storia comincia solo, e proprio, ora.” Con queste immagini di sapore marxiano Preti continua: “L’unica cosa che va perduta è la millenaria dimensione religiosa – la pretesa di cogliere degli assoluti *in sé*. Le nostre ontologie regionali, i nostri quadri del mondo culturale, si muoveranno entro i limiti di una cultura storicamente data, di linguaggi effettivamente usati o concretamente proponibili. Si muoveranno, cioè, nella sfera del *relativo*.” (Preti: 473-4).¹ Il che significa, a mio avviso, della relazione, *non* del relativismo scettico o debolistico.
- 2 Per parte sua Fabio Minazzi efficacemente ricorda il rapporto di queste tesi di Preti con la lezione del trascendentalismo kantiano, e poi dello Hume e del neopositivismo: una lezione che ha per sempre determinato la morte della conoscenza metafisica, della sua pretesa di verità assoluta. Scrive Minazzi (1990: 111-2): “La filosofia va insomma intesa come meta-riflessione critica sulle ‘forme’ e le ‘condizioni di una civiltà’ in modo che ne siano analizzate e rilevate le strutture essenziali.” Una sorta di “metariflessione sui contenuti della cultura entro i limiti di una cultura data.”
- 3 Metariflessione che da un lato respinge ogni preteso ontologismo pre e postcritico, quindi ogni naturalismo dogmatico, ignaro della necessaria *epoché* nei confronti della indebita ontologicizzazione di rapporti e strutture (cfr. *ibid.*: 112); dall’altro pone l’attenzione sulla natura storica di ogni cultura, inclusa, come abbiamo visto, la stessa auspicata metariflessione critica.
- 4 Su questo punto (la natura “storica” di ogni cultura) ha particolarmente insistito Luigi Zanzi,² ricordando anzitutto le posizioni di Preti nei confronti degli astratti principi più tecnicamente logici; posizioni “che sorreggono la critica delle pretese metafisiche di una conoscenza realista, antepredicativa, assolutizzante, antistoricistica: così ad esempio il riconoscimento che anche l’attività logica parte sempre dal mondo della vita, quindi da una realtà discorsiva complessa, onde non esistono principi logici che fungono da presupposti immediati del conoscere, né elementi che siano originari e

semplici e che risultino dati in una pretesa esperienza antepredicativa, alla quale si presume di alludere con discorsi ‘rivelatori’.” Continua Zanzi (1990: 229-39):

L'uso costitutivo e sistematico delle categorie è dinamico e si sviluppa su più livelli logici: esse “portano” non solo sull'esperienza ma anche sui simboli di livello inferiore in funzione meta-simbolica. Una delle acquisizioni logico-epistemologiche che risultano “cruciali” nella concezione di Preti è il riconoscimento della “storicità” di tali categorie, e quindi della loro variabilità, della loro pluralità e relatività: esse vengono intese non più quindi come “costellazioni di stelle fisse del pensiero” ma come “parametri” storicamente mutevoli, la cui mutazione costituisce l'elemento principale della discontinuità nella storia della filosofia. In tale quadro trova fondamentale rilievo, a giudizio di Preti, la considerazione logica della trasformazione storica degli universi di discorso entro i quali le proposizioni teoriche ricevono e mutano significato.

- 5 Questo “storicismo delle forme logiche” va naturalmente bene inteso; non si tratta del riferimento a un dato culturale esso stesso databile e datato, per esempio come il tratto proprio di una cultura europea moderna, dall'Illuminismo allo Storicismo, appunto. Si tratta piuttosto di una figurazione “empirica” relativa a pratiche e a forme di vita determinate e mutevoli nella loro costitutiva “materialità” e transitorietà. La “strategia empirista” del pensiero di Giulio Preti, scrive Zanzi,

riesce così a conciliare esplicitamente “formalismo” e “storicismo”: beninteso non si tratta di un storicismo consistente in una dogmatica metafisica delle “leggi” della storia, considerata in una “dialettica senza tempo,” tutta risolta in una “contemporaneità astratta” (ché, in tal caso, sarebbe da rivendicare in linea di principio un “anti-storicismo”): si tratta di uno storicismo “nuovo,” articolato all'interno della storia delle scienze, aperto e flessibile a seguire gli svolgimenti sempre imprevisi e innovativi della storicità delle forme logiche. Questo aspetto “storicistico” viene, con il contributo efficacissimo dell'opera di Preti, a caratterizzare in maniera singolare una delle più feconde interpretazioni che dell'empirismo logico (e soprattutto dei suoi tratti neo-positivisti) si sono costruite in Italia in quegli anni. (*Ibid.*: 232)³

- 6 Natura storica di ogni cultura; riconoscimento della storicità delle categorie logico-simboliche; storicismo delle forme logiche; anche l'attività logica, infatti, parte dal mondo della vita; quindi da una realtà discorsiva complessa; donde la trasformazione storica degli universi di discorso entro i quali le proposizioni teoriche ricevono e mutano significato; pratiche e forme di vita determinate e mutevoli nella loro costitutiva materialità e transitorietà – con il bagaglio di questo elenco delle tesi sin qui in particolare proposte alla attenzione tentiamo ora una analisi più ravvicinata del IV capitolo di *Praxis ed empirismo* (1976 [1957]).⁴ Il suo titolo è: “Linguaggio comune e linguaggi ideali.”
- 7 La logica, dice anzitutto Preti, concerne un linguaggio ideale, che ha l'intento di proporsi come modello rigoroso per i linguaggi scientifici; in questo senso esso è paradigmatico. La sua idealità e la sua paradigmaticità ne segnano la differenza rispetto alle “lingue della conversazione corrente (linguaggio ‘convenzionale’ o ‘comune’) e a tutte le forme del discorso conoscitivo.” Caso a sé potrebbe farsi per il “discorso valutativo,” di cui tuttavia in questa sede non ci occupiamo. In quanto ideale e paradigmatico, il linguaggio della logica, dice Preti, è “impratico”:

sarebbe ben difficile mettersi a parlare in quel linguaggio, anzi impossibile, essendo esso un linguaggio meramente formale – non contiene discorsi ma *forme*, disegni e schemi di discorsi. Esso fa uso soltanto di *costanti logiche*, indicate da segni appositi e prive di significato: tutto ciò che le distingue sono il simbolo stesso e le regole

operative (o assiomi strutturali) che determinano, per così dire, gli effetti logici della loro presenza in una formula. (PE: 68-9)

- 8 In altri termini, potremmo dire che i segni “logici” *non* sono segni linguistici; con essi non si possono fare “discorsi comuni,” discorsi “quotidiani.” Vorrei però aggiungere subito un’ulteriore osservazione, ed è che l’instaurazione e la pratica di segni logici e di operazioni logiche è assolutamente impensabile, inconcepibile e impossibile senza il concorso continuativo e fondante del discorso comune. La logica formale, *ogni* logica formale, almeno a partire da Aristotele, presuppone il lavoro articolato e creativo del discorso comune, ovvero di discorsi comuni materialmente, storicamente, culturalmente definiti (quello di Aristotele non è quello di Boole o di Peirce). Nessuno può parlare di logica con la logica, nessuno può scriverne senza il ricorso costante e indispensabile al dire quotidiano e al linguaggio “parlato”; parlato proprio in quel tempo determinato, cioè al linguaggio, come si dice, “corrente,” con tutto ciò che questo fatto comporta (ma anche solitamente trascurato, dimenticato o non visto per il significato stesso della logica, i cui segni, ha detto Preti, *non* hanno significato).
- 9 Nelle scienze, osserva Preti, bisogna parlare:
 la conoscenza ha bisogno di un linguaggio in cui si possa parlare. A stretto rigore il linguaggio ideale non è il linguaggio della scienza – di nessuna scienza, neppure della scienza della Logica. A che pro dunque un linguaggio ideale? Abbiamo detto, esso è un *modello*, uno schema. Quando il linguaggio ideale subisce un’interpretazione, esso diviene un definito linguaggio in cui si può parlare. È questa la funzione di quella parte della (*scienza della*) Logica che si chiama *semantica*. [...] Le definizioni di uso stabiliranno le corrispondenze tra i segni del linguaggio ideale e il linguaggio concreto. E così avremo un nuovo linguaggio, *conforme* al linguaggio ideale, ma discorso possibile per una data serie di conoscenze: le formule saranno divenute proposizioni. (PE: 69-70)
- 10 Per analoghi motivi, potremmo dire, l’intelligenza artificiale è idonea a tradurre formule ideali in altre formule ideali, *mai* a interpretarle, cioè a tradurle in un discorso: dire che lo faccia è semplicemente una bestialità.
- 11 In certi casi è una ricaduta nella “metafisica.” “Nella filosofia contemporanea, scrive Preti, l’esempio più cospicuo (e l’unico quasi completo) di linguaggio ideale è quello contenuto nei *Principia Mathematica*.” Disgraziatamente il Russell vi ha collegato certe sue determinate vedute metafisiche (il cosiddetto “atomismo logico” e prima ancora il suo caratteristico platonismo matematico) (PE: 72): cosa che, per esempio, Whitehead non fece, tenendo espressamente altra via. Sarebbe come legare la tavola pitagorica alla metafisica pitagorica, o la fisica galileiana al platonismo di Galilei, o la fisica newtoniana al contingentismo teologico di Newton (PE: 75-6). In altri termini, la metafisica, comunque la si giudichi, è un discorso e un’interpretazione.
- 12 Questa riduzione al discorso e, come abbiamo visto (ma sinora *non* considerato), alla sua “storicità,” corre forse il rischio di una “totale disontologizzazione del sapere”? In tal caso “la scienza diventerà un labirinto di ricerche tecniche particolari senza un possibile filo di Arianna.” Anche i propositi dei “fiscalisti” (ridurre tutti i linguaggi scientifici al linguaggio della Fisica) non sfuggirà però, scrive Preti, “al tipico paradosso della Logica: e cioè che questo linguaggio dei linguaggi, questo discorso sui discorsi, a sua volta però non è che un linguaggio particolare”; in altre parole, sarà un discorso comune, mancante di rigore, oppure sarà l’interpretazione di un linguaggio che lo precede, e, come dicemmo sopra, che costitutivamente sempre lo accompagna (PE: 77).⁵ Resta il fatto che il linguaggio ideale

non è in grado di sostituire il linguaggio comune. Cioè di fornirne un'analisi. [...] Il linguaggio ideale non è e non vuole essere una specie di esperanto, una lingua destinata a sostituire le lingue storiche in cui gli uomini scrivono e conversano. [...] Il linguaggio quotidiano ha una sua immediatezza pragmatica per la quale è insostituibile. Non solo: ma il suo scopo non è unicamente quello di trasmettere o fissare conoscenze – anzi, la sua stessa immediatezza pragmatica porta con sé la fusione e confusione dei vari scopi, i quali, entro quella immediatezza, non sono neppure distinguibili [...] secondo ciò che è implicato dalla natura stessa dei loro scopi. [...] Quello che deve fare i conti con il linguaggio pragmatico comune è, se mai, il linguaggio tecnico – non già il linguaggio ideale, il quale costruisce dei modelli per i linguaggi tecnici. (PE: 78-9)

13 Quindi:

Lo scopo che si propone il linguaggio ideale (o i linguaggi ideali, perché per ora non possiamo escludere che siano più d'uno) è quello di fornire modelli per i discorsi tecnici, modelli che rendano questi ultimi, se vi si conformano, più adatti ad adempiere quegli scopi che si assegnano loro, e ad avere quelle qualità che una plurisecolare esperienza di attività scientifiche ha selezionato come essenziali (o peculiari). In primo luogo e dal punto di vista negativo si tratta di evitare alcuni mali del linguaggio conversazionale, quali l'equivocità e l'indeterminatezza, che già i logici greci, per esempio con i noti sofismi megarici, avevano messo in evidenza e che già l'Accademia e Aristotele si erano sforzati di eliminare appunto mediante la fissazione di regole linguistiche volte a questo scopo. Non che sempre, ed in ogni occasione, questa equivocità e indeterminatezza siano un male: per esempio, uno studioso di poesia contemporanea consiglierebbe tanto poco di eliminarle dal linguaggio poetico, che anzi fa consistere questo linguaggio in un abile e "profondo" sfruttamento di tale carattere del linguaggio comune, nel quale la parola spesso più che descrittiva è allusiva, crea un'atmosfera più che un significato o un paradigma. La stessa filosofia, per esempio in Hume o in Dewey, ha spesso sfruttato le potenzialità allusive del linguaggio comune allo scopo di introdurre quasi-concetti che non si potevano o non si volevano delimitare. (PE: 80-1)

14 Vorrei ancora segnalare un ulteriore passaggio, tratto da questo capitolo quarto ricco e complesso, sempre relativamente al linguaggio comune o quotidiano. Il linguaggio comune, scrive Preti,

è il livello linguistico zero: esso porta su *fatti* extralinguistici. Si dirà che spostando il problema non si è guadagnato nulla: che ora, a questo livello, si ripresentano i *puzzles* filosofici che si volevano evitare al livello precedente. Ma questo forse non è del tutto vero, se si considera che il linguaggio comune non ha, dal punto di vista logico, né una sintassi né una semantica vera e propria, ma soltanto una pragmatica: ha verità ed implicazioni, e quindi significati, soltanto pragmatici. "Piove" non significa certe cose o sensazioni: significa soltanto quel fatto immediato, quell'esperienza globale, che tutti chiamiamo "piove." La Psicologia scientifica, e magari la Fisica, la Chimica, potranno, ognuna da un punto di vista suo proprio, analizzare e descrivere questo fatto: ma tutte muoveranno da esso, come da quel fatto di senso comune che è assunto immediatamente. (PE: 90-1)

15 E il senso comune, ha detto Zanzi, ha in sé la fluidità della vita e della storia.

16 Il percorso di *Praxis ed empirismo* prosegue affrontando, coerentemente, i due grandi temi della "realtà" e della "natura sociale e pragmatica della relazione conoscitiva soggetto-oggetto." Del primo ho già avuto occasione di occuparmi e qui ne riprendo solo qualche tratto essenziale.⁶

17 In generale, dice Preti, "realtà" o "esistenza" sono categorie pseudo-cosali nelle quali è in gioco la verità formale e metalinguistica di una proposizione o di un insieme di proposizioni. La questione essenziale è però che "realtà," "esistenza," "verità" non

sono termini univoci. Sono implicati in essi diversi universi di discorso e differenti criteri di verifica. Anche la chimera o gli abitanti della luna possono avere esistenza, essere simboli denotanti in certi universi di discorso (PE: 98). Naturalmente questi universi non bisogna confonderli. Il “numero 3,” per esempio, rinvia a una esistenza o realtà “matematica” con le sue specifiche potenzialità operativo-sintattiche; il “mio cane” invece, dice Preti, rinvia a un’esistenza “fattuale” e a verità e a riconoscimenti di natura pratica.

- 18 Tuttavia è possibile anche considerare gradi di maggiore e di minore realtà. Per esempio le spiegazioni scientifiche dei fenomeni naturali rispetto alle credenze e convinzioni del senso comune. L’universo di discorso che si esprime nelle prime è più completo e soprattutto operativamente più vero, cioè più efficace, rispetto alle seconde. È qui evidente in Giulio Preti una certa influenza della lezione del pragmatismo di James, e soprattutto di Peirce e di Dewey: vero o più vero è l’abito di condotta che seleziona, alla lunga, un accordo comune e pubblico su ciò che conviene credere e tenere per vero, o come più vero (PE: 100-1).
- 19 In generale (e qui emerge anche un certo Husserl), è dunque risalendo ogni volta alle concrete operazioni che è possibile stabilire la peculiare realtà degli “oggetti” della conoscenza e dell’esperienza (per esempio gli enti o gli oggetti della fisica, della biologia o della chimica): non si tratta di enti in sé più “reali” di quelli del senso comune, ma di pseudo-oggetti o indici di operazioni appartenenti a correlativi universi di discorso, dotati nel loro campo di applicazione di particolare efficacia.
- 20 Resta il fatto però che “ciò che veramente è primo è l’evidenza pragmatica del senso comune”:
 è ad essa che si riducono sempre, quando possibili, le operazioni di verifica e di controllo fattuale, in tutte quante le forme conoscitive della natura. [...] *Anche storicamente*, alle origini di ogni linguaggio tecnico e di ogni scienza (e questo vale per le Matematiche come per ogni altra disciplina) ci sono, insieme a procedimenti tecnici (originariamente descritti nel linguaggio comune) evidenze pragmatiche del senso comune. (PE: 127)
- 21 Questa profonda revisione e ristrutturazione delle nozioni di realtà e di verità sembrano, a questo punto, del tutto conformi rispetto a quel convincimento dal quale siamo partiti all’inizio: nel nostro tempo, diceva Preti, la filosofia sta faticosamente uscendo dalla sua preistoria, la sua storia comincia solo ora. Fine delle illusioni della metafisica, degli assoluti immaginari e fantastici, siano essi il mondo delle idee o il mondo dei pretesi fatti materiali, assunti illusoriamente in sé. La comprensione della provvisoria storicità di tutte le credenze, e degli abiti relativi, accoglie consapevolmente il cammino metamorfico della verità e la costruzione pubblica di universi di senso che articolano diversamente la realtà della esperienza comune e pubblica, accolta appunto in tutte le sue gradazioni pragmatiche, immaginative e tecniche. Sì, siamo a quanto pare a un passo dall’aprirsi di questo suggestivo spettacolo e nondimeno siamo ancora per molte ragioni, io credo, lontani dall’attingerlo veramente. Tutto si gioca infatti relativamente alla questione del “discorso.”
- 22 Essa trova uno sviluppo decisivo nel capitolo VI (“Individuo e società”), più che nei successivi. Qui Preti affronta la tradizionale questione del rapporto soggetto-oggetto, denunciandone subito la natura problematica, cioè “la reale impossibilità di determinare uno dei due termini fuori del rapporto medesimo entro cui essi sono costituiti nella ‘sintesi’ conoscitiva” (PE: 129). Ma il rapporto stesso, poi, è un

andirivieni tra Scilla e Cariddi, indeterminabile di per sé e in sé. Questa osservazione critica colpisce infine la nozione stessa di “soggetto trascendentale”; essa “resta una *façon de parler* per indicare un insieme [...] di strutture logiche, sintattiche o semantiche, colto mediante l’analisi, e storicamente determinate e condizionate. Il soggetto trascendentale non costituisce quindi un *fondamento*, né da parte sua richiede alcuna fondazione.” Il soggetto trascendentale “diviene storicamente concreto – determinato ed efficiente – per e ne l’attività di un soggetto, o di soggetti, empirici – che, comunque, sono gli uomini. Ora, propriamente, in che senso sono ‘gli uomini’ gli autori, i portatori attuali ed attivi, delle strutture del ‘soggetto trascendentale,’ mediante cui viene costruito il mondo dell’uomo?” (PE: 131-2).

- 23 “Il soggetto attuale del conoscere è l’individuo umano. È sempre questo o quell’individuo che introduce, che riconosce, le forme trascendentali del conoscere; è sempre questo o quell’individuo che le mette in atto.” (PE: 134). È da questi atti concreti che nascono assiomi, definizioni, regole, principi di verifica: cose che hanno, dice Preti, una storia e un’efficacia; cose, proposte e formulazioni che possono venire accettate e acquisire così una validità intersoggettiva, costituente il patrimonio tradizionale, ma sempre anche mobile, della cultura. Ma che significa “individuo umano”? Che cosa veramente è “un individuo”? La risposta apre una originalissima proposta, si potrebbe dire genealogico-fenomenologica, che così cerchiamo di sintetizzare.
- 24 Un individuo è un “signor Tali dei Tali” (PE: 134), *quisque de populo*, direbbe un giurista, che nondimeno è nato in una certa e ben definita famiglia, dalla quale verrà educato a comportarsi in certi determinati modi, a nutrirsi, a vestirsi, a parlare, e poi a leggere e a scrivere secondo abiti interamente determinati dalla cultura materiale e spirituale del luogo in cui gli è capitato di venire al mondo. Modi che certamente il soggetto potrà, e anzi dovrà, anche mutare nel corso della vita; soprattutto nell’allargarsi delle sue relazioni pratiche e affettive con altri esseri umani del suo tempo. Il soggetto individuale, infatti, è sempre e anzitutto un soggetto sociale, il cui strumento formativo fondamentale è il linguaggio: di qui parte l’intero cammino della conoscenza, che, come sappiamo, è sempre storicamente determinato. Non è però dalla “società,” da questa nozione astrattamente presa in sé, che è giusto partire; essa è in realtà il risultato “dell’intera storia di ogni singolo individuo: e se di questa non si vuol fare un mito o un’entità astratta, positivamente egli e la sua storia coincidono” (PE: 142).
- 25 In conclusione: “È questo soggetto sociale che è il depositario delle forme, categorie, significati, attraverso e mediante cui viene selezionata e interpretata l’esperienza, e portata a costituirsi, entro le forme ammesse per la ‘verità,’ in ‘mondo reale.’ È la società che determina le regole della Grammatica e della Logica, dell’Etica e della Semantica – e quindi predispone le *forme* del vero e del falso, del bene e del male, della sanità e della malattia, della normalità e della pazzia. Non solo: ma la stessa ‘esperienza’ è qualcosa di eminentemente sociale,” sia perché ogni individuo vivente ingloba in sé la storia delle sue provenienze, sia perché nello sperimentare in atto le sue esperienze ogni individuo “determina come si deve *vedere, udire, ecc.*, secondo le norme di una determinata vita sociale” (PE: 147-8).
- 26 Fondamentale per la determinazione di queste norme, abbiamo detto, è il linguaggio o, più concretamente, il discorso: “la situazione problematica stessa che muove la ricerca [ogni ricerca] è data [...] entro un determinato universo di discorso. Ciò che *qui ed ora* è un dato, in altra epoca è stato costruito, in altro universo di discorso è un costruito.

Quindi la conoscenza risulta, sì, dalla azione del soggetto sul dato: ma nessuno dei due termini può venire ipostatizzato – l'uno e l'altro designano concetti formali, cioè delle variabili.” (PE: 142).

- 27 Preti rivendica per questa posizione di pensiero il termine di “realismo,” ravvisabile, in ultima analisi, “anche nel positivismo, nel pragmatismo, nel marxianesimo – per lo meno nel Marx giovane). Un realismo non metafisico bensì strettamente pragmatico, quello implicito nei rapporti degli uomini, nelle loro azioni quotidiane, conglobate nel linguaggio comune – il realismo del senso comune, che nessun uomo può negare senza contraddirsi.” (PE: 151).
- 28 L'ammirevole sforzo di concretezza, del suo “realismo” teorico, compiuto da Giulio Preti, con analisi, osservazioni, intuizioni tutt'altro che scontate ancora oggi, quindi con l'efficacia tuttora attuale di questo sforzo nei confronti di allegre e infondate “ontologie” e “sociologie” di vario genere e più in generale nei confronti del “naturalismo” ingenuo, dogmatico e superstizioso coltivato dalla mentalità riduzionistica di molti scienziati, lascia nondimeno spazio a ulteriori questioni. Anzitutto proprio a quella del “discorso,” punto zero (abbiamo visto) di ogni cammino di conoscenza e di verità. Credo si debba riconoscere che tutto l'apprezzabile sforzo di Preti di darsi appunto ragione della conoscenza, dei suoi fatti, delle sue oggettività e della sua realtà non pervenga infine a una “buona” ragione, sebbene questa fine, questo esito finale, non escluda affatto, anzi il contrario, le buone ragioni del suo inizio, che qui abbiamo ampiamente documentato.
- 29 Provo a rianimare parte di queste buone ragioni con alcune delle affermazioni più recentemente proposte alla lettura. Il soggetto attuale (“reale”?) del conoscere, dice Preti, è l'individuo umano, l'individuo della esperienza empirica del senso comune; senso comune che ha la fluidità della vita e della storia. Ogni individuo umano coincide infatti con la sua storia, ne è in certo modo la ricapitolazione attiva e metamorfica *hic et nunc*. Ogni dato attuale della sua esperienza in atto è pertanto il risultato di una precedente costruzione, svoltasi in altra epoca e in altro universo di discorso; analogamente, ciò che l'individuo storico-sociale, o gli individui storico-sociali, costruiscono ora, sulla base delle condizioni materiali, strumentali e spirituali della loro esperienza intersoggettiva, costituirà un dato per ogni esperienza futura. Infatti la situazione di partenza per ogni soggetto, per ogni individuo storico-sociale, è sempre data *entro un determinato universo di discorso e la sua storia*.
- 30 Ora la questione che solleviamo può manifestarsi forse con una sua un po' brutale semplicità, ma anche con una diretta efficacia, se la formuliamo in base alla domanda: quel che abbiamo letto nel precedente capoverso è o non è espresso e costruito in un *determinato universo di discorso*? Se, come diceva lo stesso Preti, non si può negare che lo sia senza contraddirsi, allora, come è evidente, la sua figura di verità si complica parecchio. Essa tacitamente avanza la pretesa di stabilire quale sia la verità di tutte le costruzioni del senso comune e di tutti gli universi di discorso storicamente determinati: essi sono appunto, o si svolgono appunto, come qui si è detto, *ma come se non lo avessimo detto, cioè entro e a partire da un universo di discorso ben definito e storico: il nostro!* La sua ingombrante, ma anche indispensabile, presenza viene cancellata dal conto, accompagnata com'è dall'abbaglio per noi di ogni parola: segno verbale che si fa valere, non come segno, ma senz'altro come la “cosa stessa” del detto, come sua “realtà” extra-verbale “significata.” Che questo “abbaglio irresistibile del locutore” che noi siamo in particolare accada per gli effetti “onticizzanti” delle parole rese e apprese

da secoli grazie alla pratica della trascrizione alfabetica è cosa che ho ampiamente studiato in passato e che qui resta in silenzio.

- 31 Utilizziamo invece, ai nostri fini, la suggestiva esemplificazione immaginata da Preti: ogni individuo umano diventa umano a partire da una sua culla genitoriale, definita dai suoi strumenti storico-sociali e dal suo “medio” socialmente più efficace: il discorso, anch’esso ovviamente definito in una sua modalità storica. L’esempio dice quindi due cose: che quello che descrive è vero per *ogni* essere umano passato, presente e futuro; però mostra anche che chi lo dice muove da un determinato modo di essere umani, secondo un discorso particolare, storicamente e socialmente definito, e in questo senso “autobiografico”: immagina di dire dell’altro semplicemente dicendo di sé. A parlare infatti siamo “noi,” in base ai *nostri* discorsi e ai nostri saperi, cioè alla esperienza nata a partire dalle nostre culle storiche e dai nostri dialoghi intersoggettivi, dalle nostre esperienze e dalle nostre formazioni culturali: come dobbiamo atteggiarci di fronte a questa innegabile evidenza? Essa insegnerebbe che quello che diciamo in generale della esperienza umana e dei suoi discorsi storicamente determinati è *non vero*? Quindi in certo modo sarebbe falso o ingannevole? No, non è questo il punto. La questione che qui emerge è piuttosto la strutturale differenza tra “conoscenza” e “realtà”; differenza segnata dalla costitutiva sovrabbondanza del “reale” (alluso e perduto già nella parola “reale,” cioè nel “detto,” nel suo detto).
- 32 La conoscenza, infatti, non ha la realtà come sua dirimpettaia (visto che ne è parte, ne deriva e la frequenta), ma come Atlantide sommersa, come persistente abisso di ogni provenienza conoscitiva e di ogni suo destino. Questo modo di vedere propone di tenere presente la differenza tra vita e sapere, conoscenza e realtà: differenza che, come si vede, è detta appunto in un sapere, cioè in un discorso storicamente determinato con le sue provenienze e i suoi destini. La vita di questa realtà proviene da un infinito universo di esperienze e di discorsi, tradotti nelle mappe verbali e concettuali delle quali disponiamo o ci troviamo forniti in ogni tempo reale.
- 33 Quindi: il Tal dei Tali è situato (diciamo noi) nella sua società storica, dotata dei suoi saperi e dei suoi discorsi. Lui però non dice, non ha detto, non può assolutamente dire *questo*; mostra invece di credere, per esempio e per quel che ne sappiamo, di essere messo al mondo da un creatore dell’universo e della vita fatti così e così, come infatti lui mostra di dire e di credere in base ai documenti che ce ne sono rimasti. Lui e il suo dire sono la vivente incarnazione di questo sapere, di cui ci perviene notizia. Naturalmente questo sapere nessuno di noi può riviverlo a sua volta, nessuno oggi può reincarnarsi in esso; possiamo solo “immaginare” di essere, per esempio, un italiano del Trecento, come Dante Alighieri, in base alle conoscenze di cui disponiamo di quel mondo. Ma l’esistenza effettiva *in* quel mondo appartiene a tutt’altro abisso di vivente realtà, caratterizzata appunto dalle *proprie* credenze e conoscenze di allora e dal proprio modo di vivere il sapere che si sa. Il fatto che ora ne parliamo, mostra come il Tal dei Tali di oggi (il qui presente) traduce, trascrive, interpreta il Tal dei Tali di allora, delineandolo come una figura del *proprio* vivente sapere: come oggi possiamo sapere che significava essere un Tal dei Tali del Trecento, in base ai segni che ce ne sono pervenuti e alla nostra progressiva maniera (per esempio “storiografica”) di interpretarli: il che ovviamente dice della *nostra* “verità” in relazione col passato e del passato “per noi.”
- 34 Possiamo capire, comprendere, sapere come accada di ritenere e di spiegarsi il mondo in maniera aristotelica; questa maniera, però, non possiamo riviverla, noi copernicani;

ma questa vivente certezza copernicana e l'intero della sua esperienza "reale" che quotidianamente, in modi diretti o indiretti, ne facciamo, appartiene a sua volta a un cammino in atto che trascorre e precipita entro il corpo infinito e irriducibile in cui si radicano tutti i nostri attuali discorsi. Si tratta infine di ravvisare l'abisso in cui è iscritto ogni discorso, condizione e presupposto della sua figura di verità.

- 35 Per queste figure non si tratta, a mio avviso, del loro storico o "metafisico" *fallimento*; pensare in questo modo significa ricadere nella superstiziosa convinzione che il reale sia una cosa da dire, alla quale il detto non riuscirebbe però a conformarsi. Penso invece che l'esperienza quotidiana del trascorrere dei nostri discorsi, *nella* loro inarrestabile metamorfosi e *per* la loro inarrestabile metamorfosi, sia il medesimo realizzarsi del cammino stesso della verità, della "vita" della verità, diceva Enzo Paci, cui la condizione del sapere umano è consegnata. Potrei anche dire: cammino pragmatico (pragmaticistico) delle figure della verità e del loro transitare e venir meno costitutivo, come manifestazione sapienziale del significato della inesauribile condizione "destinale" umana nel "cosmo." Ecco il provvisorio detto vivente, e concretamente vissuto, da parte del Tal dei Tali che, qui scrivendo, vi parla.

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NOTE

1. Citato in Minazzi (1990: 111).
2. Cfr. Zanzi (1990: 221 sgg.).
3. Nella nota Zanzi ricorda, tra gli altri, il razionalismo critico e il trascendentalismo della prassi di Mario Dal Pra.
4. D'ora innanzi PE direttamente nel testo con la pagina.

5. Si tratterebbe allora del problema, molto attuale, non della interdisciplinarietà, ma della transdisciplinarietà: cfr. AA.VV. 2021.

6. Cfr. Sini (2013: 111-6).

RIASSUNTI

The paper focuses on Giulio Preti's idea of discourse. According to Preti, everyday speech is the basis for scientific and logical research. The logical signs are not linguistic signs, are not a language, are not able to substitute the human language. Common speech contains historical presuppositions and fleeting figures of truth.

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Nynfa Bosco e lo studio di Peirce

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- 1 Nynfa Bosco (1929-2013) è stata un personaggio interessante, importante ed eccentrico negli studi italiani della filosofia del secondo dopoguerra. Una delle prime donne a percorrere con successo la carriera universitaria, capace di padroneggiare più lingue quando in Italia pochi ne sapevano decentemente una, dotata di una scrittura agile e avvincente, Nynfa Bosco incarnava e anticipava l'importanza di alcune caratteristiche che nel mondo accademico sarebbero risultate essenziali solo alcuni anni più tardi e condivideva con altri studiosi come Umberto Eco o Gianni Vattimo quel ruolo di mediazione tra la tradizione e le istanze emerse nel '68 che, nel bene e nel male, hanno determinato la cultura della fine del Novecento e gli esiti attuali. Componente della medesima area del cattolicesimo ermeneutico pareysoniano, a differenza di Eco e Vattimo, Bosco non abbandonò il cattolicesimo ma ne diede una lettura nuova, che andasse intuitivamente al cuore della religiosità sfrondando tutto ciò che veniva avvertito come poco spontaneo o rigido. Per questa operazione, però, non si rivolse all'esperienza filosofica marxista, molto di moda in quegli anni, né all'elaborazione dell'ermeneutica tedesca legata al successo dell'opera di Gadamer. Si rivolse invece alla cultura di fine Ottocento e inizio Novecento russa e americana, trovando in entrambe le tradizioni quegli autori che avrebbero potuto garantire la trasformazione della tradizione più che la sua soppressione.
- 2 Inizialmente spinta dall'interesse scoutistico del suo maestro Augusto Guzzo, Bosco studiò già negli anni '50 l'opera di Charles S. Peirce, mentre un altro allievo di Guzzo, il suo collega e amico Giuseppe Riconda, si dedicava all'opera di William James. È del 1959 la prima monografia su Peirce, che è anche la prima monografia italiana dedicata al pensiero del fondatore del pragmatismo americano,¹ mentre nel 1977 Bosco darà alle stampe una nuova monografia, che riassume e chiarisce la prima nell'ottica della filosofia della religione che aveva cominciato a insegnare presso l'Università di Torino. In allegato a questa seconda monografia, Bosco pubblicava un volume di traduzione di alcuni articoli di Peirce, molti dei quali non tradotti nella precedente raccolta *Caso, Amore e Logica* a cura di Nicola Abbagnano (1956), unica traduzione degli scritti di Peirce allora disponibile (Peirce 1923). In mezzo, come noto, erano usciti *Peirce e il problema dell'interpretazione* di Niccolò Salanitro (1969) e *Il pragmatismo americano* di Carlo Sini

(1971), che aggiornavano in molti punti la conoscenza di Peirce in Italia. Bosco tornerà poi su Peirce nel convegno tenuto a Napoli nel 1990 i cui atti saranno pubblicati con il titolo *Peirce in Italia*, nel 1993, a cura di Massimo Bonfantini e Arturo Martone.

- 3 Qual è il Peirce che Bosco conosce? Si tratta di una lettura originale? È una lettura accurata? Le risposte a queste domande non sono univoche. Cominciamo dalla conoscenza di Peirce. Bosco si appoggia interamente ai *Collected Papers*, usciti negli anni '30 e completati poi dai due volumi degli anni '50 (Peirce 1931-35; 1958). Non ha bisogno di traduzioni e conosce molto bene il retroterra religioso e culturale della cultura americana dell'Ottocento. Si tratta quindi di una lettura attenta e di prima mano, anche se nelle due monografie rimane del tutto ignoto il tema dei manoscritti e, di conseguenza, la necessità di una ricostruzione cronologica che si affermerà negli Stati Uniti a partire dalla fine degli anni '60 con il lavoro del team composto da Max Fisch e che porterà alla catalogazione di Richard Robin (1967) e, successivamente, al tentativo dell'edizione critica con il Peirce Edition Project.² Solo nell'intervento del 1990 Bosco darà conto della nascita dell'edizione cronologica e capirà l'importanza di una lettura di Peirce in cui "i suoi primi scritti siano intesi a partire dagli ultimi e non gli ultimi dai primi" (Bosco 1993: 142). Purtroppo, nei suoi lavori dedicati al filosofo americano, Bosco non è accurata nella stesura dell'apparato critico e la scarsità di note e riferimenti indebolisce la sua lettura, che risulta in alcuni dati biografici e storici alquanto lacunosa e imprecisa. Tuttavia, la consapevolezza della storia della filosofia e la conoscenza linguistica le permettono, come vedremo, una lettura profonda e originale dei testi presentati nei *Collected Papers*; una lettura che rimane interessante anche oggi, ma che è estremamente significativa per l'epoca in cui è stata scritta.
- 4 Quale Peirce viene presentato da Nynfa Bosco? Dal punto di vista biografico, Bosco sposa una lettura di Peirce simile a quella poi presentata da Joseph Brent nella sua biografia: un dandy ottocentesco che univa genio di studioso e sregolatezza in una vita destinata progressivamente alla rovina (Brent 1993). Ci sono alcuni particolari sbagliati – Bosco per esempio considera Peirce un cattolico, un assiduo bevitore e un marito infedele (Bosco 1977: 5), pensa che abbia pubblicato molto poco e fraintende la storia dei manoscritti – ma, al di là dei singoli particolari, è l'immagine generale che non corrisponde a quella degli studi degli ultimi cinquant'anni. Sebbene di certo persona difficile e poco scaltra nell'uso del denaro, Peirce non rientra affatto nello stereotipo del bohémien. Era uno scienziato scrupoloso e un perfezionista dell'analisi, anche se era certamente consapevole della sua cultura e del suo genio e si lasciava alle volte andare a commenti duri sugli altri studiosi o eccessivamente compiacenti verso sé stesso. In gioventù aveva speso molto nei suoi viaggi, quasi sempre per curiosità di conoscenza, e ciò forse contribuì a darne un'immagine equivoca di scialacquatore, ma si adattò anche alle condizioni di povertà degli ultimi anni senza perdere serenità e senza diminuire il suo spasmodico interesse per lo studio della matematica e della logica. La sua storia affettiva fu scandalosa per i suoi tempi e per la società puritana che aveva forgiato il mondo accademico statunitense, ma non è una storia di leggerezza morale: fallito il primo matrimonio, nel quale Peirce non trovò una vera armonia, egli rimase fedele alla seconda moglie Juliette per il resto della sua vita, con reciproca cura negli ultimi anni della vita comune. Rimane una storia complicata di fallimento accademico e di parziale mancato riconoscimento pubblico, ma non è tanto la storia del genio e della sregolatezza quanto quella di una continua curiosità scientifica e culturale totalizzante non ben equilibrata con altri aspetti della vita.

- 5 Anche dal punto di vista filosofico, Bosco accetta lo stereotipo sulla filosofia americana già in voga dagli albori del pragmatismo italiano:³ ci sono due vie al pragmatismo, quella di Peirce e quella di James, e sono alternative fra di loro. Quella di Peirce è seria e oscura, nasce dalla matematica e dalla logica ed è una precorritrice degli studi di logica e matematica anglosassoni della prima metà del Novecento. Quella di James è intuitiva, facilmente leggibile ma talvolta equivoca, con la tendenza a trasformare la massima pragmatica in un gioco utilitarista o, peggio, irrazionalista, precorrendo le mode postmoderne della seconda metà del Ventesimo secolo. È una lettura celebre, che ancora ricorre anche nella letteratura internazionale, anche se, sempre di più, si sentono le voci discordanti di chi ha incominciato a leggere filosoficamente il problema della continuità matematica che riunisce tutti i pragmatisti classici, il loro profondo anti-dualismo che non rifugge da problematiche metafisiche, la loro tendenza a trovare un ragionamento sintetico diverso da quello definito e descritto da Kant (Calcaterra, Maddalena & Marchetti 2015: 13-8). Una lettura attenta di tante opere, a cominciare dal carteggio tra Peirce e James (Peirce & James 2011), mette in luce quanto il pragmatismo fosse un progetto comune, al di là delle poche battute arcinote e perennemente citate che sanciscono le differenze. Sono differenze di famiglia, differenze che si trovano tra simili, frutto della stessa storia e dell'impegno con le medesime direzioni di soluzione dei problemi filosofici.
- 6 Se la presentazione della biografia di Peirce e del pragmatismo sono un po' stereotipate, più originale e interessante è la presentazione del lavoro filosofico di Peirce. Pur senza seguire il criterio cronologico degli studi sul filosofo americano, che l'avrebbe aiutata nel confermare le sue intuizioni, come ella stessa afferma nel giudizio autocritico del convegno napoletano (Bosco 1993: 140), Bosco individua la centralità di un progetto unitario a dimensione morale, metafisica e, addirittura, teologica. Sebbene non segua adeguatamente, e alle volte persino correttamente, lo sviluppo tecnico del pensiero peirceano attraverso la matematica, la logica relazionale, la semiotica, la fenomenologia, e senza conoscerne le motivazioni esistenziali, Bosco collega una lettura etica e metodologica della massima pragmatica degli anni '70 con gli scritti cosmologici dei primi anni '90 e, soprattutto, con quelli sistematici degli anni 1903-1908. Il pragmatismo della massima non può essere letto se non in quest'ottica più generale per cui il dire che un'idea si chiarisce attraverso i suoi effetti concepibili significa soprattutto dar un taglio netto alle cattive forme di epistemologia, etica, estetica, metafisica e teologia in nome delle forme buone delle medesime discipline. Le forme buone sono quelle che evitano apriorismi e dogmatismi, che si mantengono fedeli a una verifica esperienziale non riduttivista e, allo stesso tempo, che continuano a pretendere una rigorosità assoluta del ragionamento. L'esito di questa impostazione, così come lo rileva Bosco, è la nozione della verità come idea regolativa a cui ci si avvicina sempre approssimativamente e progressivamente, l'inevitabile fallibilismo connesso a questa nozione, la convinzione profonda dell'unità delle esperienze umane e della possibilità di una conoscenza scientifica di esse, la coincidenza del sommo bene con la ragionevolezza dei comportamenti deliberati in armonia con l'evoluzione cosmica, la salvaguardia della decisività del senso comune in tutte le sue dimensioni, che includono anche l'aspetto religioso.
- 7 Sono tutti temi che fanno giungere Bosco alla corretta conclusione che il sistema peirceano sia una particolare formulazione di un idealismo oggettivo nel quale "l'intelligenza scientifica deve correggere il soggettivismo di Hegel col realismo di

Platone, e l'essenzialismo di Platone col relazionismo dinamico di Hegel" (Bosco 1977: 124). In altre parole, l'esperienza è l'incarnazione progressiva delle idee che può essere colta scientificamente e sperimentalmente per portare a una comprensione universale dei significati. Sottolineandone il carattere libero e non necessario, nell'articolo riassuntivo del 1993, Bosco farà rientrare questo studio della metafisica in una più generale impostazione ermeneutica (Bosco 1993: 144-5). La lettura è originale, tanto più per i tempi in cui è stata scritta. Si ritrova ora nelle interpretazioni più acute dell'opera di Peirce, come quelle di De Tienne 1996, di Colapietro 2020, di Zalamea 2012. Tuttavia, Bosco non approfondisce e talvolta non conosce la tecnica scientifica che permette a Peirce tali formulazioni. Come si diceva, manca l'intera questione della matematica e della logica relazionale fino ai grafi esistenziali, mentre risultano lacunose e spesso erronee le indicazioni di fenomenologia e semiotica. Dal punto di vista tecnico Bosco approfondisce invece *abduzione* e *musement*. Sulla prima capisce bene la derivazione dal sillogismo in seconda figura e l'approdo alla formulazione standard del 1903, mentre le rimane oscuro il legame con l'estetica e l'etica nella formulazione del condizionale e lo sviluppo ordinato della metodologia della ricerca scientifica nella sequenza *abduzione*, *deduzione*, *induzione*. È davvero profonda, però, la comprensione dell'ipotesi come il passaggio congetturale a un ordine più generale di quello dell'esperienza pregressa. "A differenza dell'induzione, che si sposta su una linea di fatti omogenei, l'abduzione salta dall'ordine dei fatti a quello delle loro ragioni [...] La metafisica potrebbe benissimo definirsi come la scienza che fa il massimo uso dell'abduzione." (Bosco 1977: 52-3). Anche sul *musement* e sull'argomento trascurato per l'esistenza di Dio, articolo del 1908 che non si trova spesso al centro degli studi peirceani, Bosco ben intuisce la "quasi" prova ontologica che in esso si cela: se si medita sui mondi dell'esperienza, viene spontaneo il credere in Dio, ma se viene spontaneo il credere in Dio vuol dire che Dio è reale. Non avendo colto la distinzione tra realtà ed esistenza dal punto di vista fenomenologico, Bosco non può vedere quanto ampliativa sia questa nozione di Dio, ma ne intuisce la potenza argomentativa e la fa sua (cfr. *ibid.*: 174-94).

- 8 Altrettanto interessante è la collocazione che Bosco dà all'opera di Peirce all'interno della storia della filosofia. Bosco intuisce infatti che la via di Peirce avrebbe potuto essere particolarmente fruttuosa perché inaugurava una terza opzione tra quella della filosofia analitica e quella della deriva postmoderna dell'ermeneutica. Appassionata lettrice di Florenskij e studiosa di Perelman, Bosco intravedeva la possibilità di una filosofia che fondasse l'interpretazione sulla rigosità logica, senza ridurre quest'ultima ai percorsi deduttivi del logicismo della fine dell'Ottocento e dell'inizio del Novecento. Giustamente, in questo senso le interessava il realismo peirceano attento al riferimento nell'oggetto, aperto all'interpretazione e sicuro di un raggiungimento della verità e della realtà alla fine dell'indagine.

Non per questo la metafisica ha motivo di pretendersi "filosofia prima"; al contrario essa è piuttosto filosofia ultima e dell'ultimo. [...] Tutto ciò che può fare è arrischiarsi nel gioco affascinante delle ipotesi estreme, su un terreno che è instabile non tanto a causa della nostra ignoranza, perché questa è in certa misura vinta da quel "lume naturale," da quella profferta di senso che è la realtà stessa in cui ci muoviamo e siamo; ma a causa appunto della mobilità, del progressivo costituirsi suo e nostro come processo solidale di significazione-interpretazione illimitata, o solo idealmente limitata dalla presenza inquietante (sogno, miraggio, visione, ma anche destino) dell'interpretante completo e finale, là dove all'ultimo orizzonte del pensabile realtà e verità fanno uno. (Bosco 1993: 148)

- 9 Un realismo nuovo, a posteriori, e aperto alla collaborazione della costruzione umana senza per questo credere presuntuosamente che con la costruzione umana la realtà dovesse coincidere. Il riverbero di questa impostazione ontologica è una concezione ampia della ragione, che include ogni tipo di capacità argomentativa, senza rinunciare alla precisione e al rispetto dei pensieri scientifici e tecnici.
- 10 In questo senso, negli scritti di Bosco l'approccio morale è prevalente, laddove per morale si intende l'atteggiamento giusto nella ricerca umana. L'interesse per Peirce è proprio per questa visione aperta alla scoperta e curiosa di ogni campo, inclusi quelli metafisico e religioso, sicura della verità che si svelerà ma sospettosa del suo possesso attuale, ben radicata nella difesa del senso comune contro ogni snobismo razionalista. Il miglior pregio, anche in questo caso, confina con il peggior difetto. Infatti, tanto è interessante la lettura di Peirce in chiave di etica della ricerca, che anticipa alcune posizioni contemporanee,⁴ e di autore post-razionalista quanto è insufficiente l'approfondimento tecnico, che Bosco considera spesso un retaggio di quel razionalismo che Peirce avrebbe voluto e dovuto superare. Nel caso di Peirce, invece, è proprio la tecnica a condurre l'indagine verso quei termini etici, estetici, metafisici, religiosi che Bosco considera come più interessanti. Certamente, la lettura dei soli *Collected Papers* rendeva difficile capire quanto la matematica del continuo fosse per Peirce la chiave di volta della metafisica, i grafi esistenziali fossero una prova del pragmatismo proprio per quell'incarnazione delle idee che Bosco riconosceva e auspicava, le classificazioni semiotiche fossero necessarie per una comprensione dei dinamismi logici che aprivano alla sintesi logica e al realismo a posteriori che convinceva la studiosa torinese. Come Florenskij, Peirce poggiava la sua visione proprio su questa possibilità di apertura normativa e metafisica dal di dentro dell'approfondimento analitico degli studi matematici, fenomenologici e semiotici. Per questo motivo era convinto che effettivamente si potesse dare una metafisica "scientifica" e una difesa razionale di molte credenze del senso comune, incluse quelle religiose.
- 11 Alla religione vale la pena dedicare ancora qualche riga. Gli studi di filosofia della religione come settore accademico indipendente cominciano in Italia negli anni '70. Sono studi che si affrancano dalla mera ripetizione della dottrina cattolica e che spesso confinano con la sociologia o l'antropologia. Bosco introduce una via diversa, che sarà anche la stella polare della rivista *Filosofia e teologia*, che la studiosa torinese dirigerà per anni: il fenomeno religioso è trattato indipendentemente da ogni dottrina ma è indagato attraverso un'ermeneutica di ispirazione cristiana, che vuole raccogliere al di là della dottrina la corrispondenza della credenza religiosa con l'espressione più intima e profonda delle esigenze umane. Intesa in questo modo, la filosofia della religione serviva a scrostare la dottrina e le dottrine da apriorismi e dogmatismi e aprire la strada a una considerazione della religione come attività profondamente umana, imparentata e allo stesso tempo indipendente dall'attività logica, che ha un posto paritario tra le attività essenziali dell'esistenza umana. In quest'ottica, gli studi di Bosco non potevano non incontrare il pragmatismo, così come l'opera post-pragmatista di George Santayana (Bosco 1987), che aveva fatto di questa lettura esperienziale del fenomeno religioso una delle sue marche di riconoscimento. Inoltre, l'idea di Peirce di considerarne anche la relazione con la logica e con la scienza, senza per questo tornare ai razionalismi antichi o moderni, non poteva che corrispondere all'intento di Bosco, che per lo stesso motivo valorizzava le opere di autori ortodossi come Solov'ëv o

Berdjaev o protestanti come Bonhoeffer e Tillich o, addirittura, gnostici come Jonas. Era lei stessa, come il Peirce che le piaceva, a essere interessata a questo pluralismo religioso del quale intravedeva una comune radice esperienziale ed è la ricerca di questa autenticità spontanea a dar forma a tutti i suoi approfondimenti filosofici e, forse, a essere anche la sua marca più profonda dal punto di vista professionale e umano.

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NOTE

1. Per le vicende degli studi su Peirce in Italia si vedano Bonfantini & Martone 1993 e Maddalena 2014.
2. Per la storia dei manoscritti e del Peirce Edition Project e dei manoscritti si veda Maddalena (2015: 113-7). Sui recenti sviluppi del Peirce Edition Project si veda l'intervista ad André De Tienne, Maddalena, Bella & De Tienne 2016.
3. Sullo stereotipo dei due pragmatismi all'interno dei cosiddetti pragmatisti italiani di inizio Novecento si vedano Roni & Zarlenga 2020 e Maddalena & Tuzet 2020.
4. In quest'ottica si veda per esempio Stango 2015.

RIASSUNTI

Nynfa Bosco (1929-2013) was an interesting, important and eccentric character in Italian post-World War II philosophy studies. She was one of the first women to successfully pursue a university career, capable of mastering several languages when few in Italy could decently speak one, and gifted with an agile and compelling writing style. Nynfa Bosco published in 1959 the first Italian monograph on Peirce and in 1977 a translation of some important articles of the founder of pragmatism. Despite the technical approximation, mainly determined by the texts available at that time, Bosco understood the original ethical and metaphysical dimension of Peirce's logical writings, anticipating some readings that would emerge only many years later.

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Rossi-Landi e il pragmatismo

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1. Il pragmatismo nella teoria del parlare comune di Ferruccio Rossi-Landi

- 1 In *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune* (1998 [1961]), Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921-1985) sviluppa le sue idee del segno e del linguaggio verbale già espresse nei suoi scritti del 1950. Nel libro del 1961, conduce il lavoro di ricerca fuori dalla prospettiva saussuriana, libero dalla dicotomia di sistema linguistico (*langue*) e parlare individuale (*parole*). Sicché egli non limita il concetto di comunicazione allo scambio di messaggi tra individui considerati indipendenti l'uno dall'altro e preesistenti al processo stesso di comunicazione (Eco 1987; Petrilli 1987; Ponzio 2008, 2012a).
- 2 *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune* è fondamentalmente rivolto a mescolare tradizioni e concezioni diverse: quella italiana con le sue influenze dalla Germania e continentali, quella della filosofia analitica inglese e il pragmatismo americano. Più esattamente questo libro si avvale della linea di pensiero che va da Peirce a Morris, alla filosofia analitica oxoniense, alla filosofia del linguaggio di Wittgenstein, all'operazionismo di Hugo Dingler e allo storicismo continentale non idealistico (Morris 1932; Ryle 1949). La prima edizione di questo libro conteneva anche un'ampia appendice su Edmund Husserl, non riprodotta nella seconda edizione del 1980. Si avvale inoltre del contributo di Giovanni Vailati (1863-1909), uno tra i filosofi italiani particolarmente stimati da Rossi-Landi. Vailati fu tra i primi in Italia ad apprezzare la semiotica di Peirce come pure il suo pragmatismo e fu anche in rapporto di collaborazione con Victoria Welby (v. Petrilli 1989, 2009, 2011, 2015; Petrilli e Ponzio 2005; Ponzio 1976, 1989, 1990; Quaranta 1989).
- 3 Rossi-Landi introduce il concetto di "parlare comune" per la prima volta nel libro del 1961 per indicare le *operazioni* svolte attraverso il parlare. Si tratta delle operazioni essenziali per la realizzazione della comunicazione interumana nonostante le evidenti complicazioni che si presentano nella quotidianità. Il presupposto del suo approccio è

che esistono similarità biologiche e strutturali in tutte le comunità umane, che prevalgono su tutte le possibili differenze storiche e geografiche.

- 4 Dopo il 1961, Rossi-Landi andò rielaborando il concetto di “parlare comune” in termini di “lavoro linguistico” e di “lavoro segnico in generale.” Successivamente, per la prima volta nel 1972, in *Semiotica e ideologia*, introdusse la nozione di “riproduzione sociale.” Soltanto nel 1968 in *Linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato*, Rossi-Landi si riferisce specificamente a Saussure (nel libro del 1961 vi aveva fatto riferimento *en passant* in una nota, p.150, e indirettamente, riferendosi a G. Devoto), benché implicitamente con il concetto di “parlare comune” avesse già messo in discussione la prospettiva saussuriana. Altrettanto distante è il concetto di “parlare comune” da quello oxoniense di linguaggio ordinario e dalle costruzioni neopositiviste di linguaggi ideali. Come egli spiega:

Dentro a tutte le lingue reali o possibili si può individuare, come loro parte costitutiva necessaria e fondamentale, una specie di “parola collettiva” che io ho da tempo battezzata *parlare comune* (*common speech*) per distinguerla dalla *parole* individuale dei saussuriani, sia dalla lingua ordinaria o quotidiana o colloquiale degli oxoniensi, sia dalle lingue tecniche o speciali o ideali dei costruttori di modelli generici. In un certo senso si tratta di una sintesi delle tre concezioni singolarmente rifiutate. Il parlare comune è una specificazione del linguaggio, non di questa o di quella lingua soltanto; ed è una specificazione sociale, non individuale. Come specificazione che si raggiunge indagando, esso ritiene in parte il carattere di una lingua speciale. (Rossi-Landi 2003 [1968]: 70)

- 5 Come Rossi-Landi osserva nella voce “semiotica” del *Dizionario semiotico-ideologico* (*Ideologie*, 12, 1970: 39-44, ripubblicato in Rossi-Landi 2011 [1972]: 301-8; 1973a, 1973b), il modello saussuriano del segno ha il merito di aver evidenziato la connessione *signifiant-signifié*. Tuttavia, Rossi-Landi (ivi: 21 sgg.) propone i termini agostiniani *signans* e *signatum* ai fini di evitare l’ambiguità mentalistica del *signifié* di Saussure, osservando che il modello saussuriano corre il rischio di riferirsi alla totalità segnica, concepita come un’entità separata e autonoma (2011 [1916]). In contrasto con tale modello (e anche con quello della teoria della informazione di Shannon e Weaver), il modello di segno proposta da Peirce e ripreso da Morris assume la situazione-segno o semiosi come punto di partenza dell’analisi. Fattori quali veicolo-segnico, significato, referente, interprete e codice sono considerati come parti della totalità segnica; essi giustamente risultano quali differenti aspetti dello stesso articolato processo della semiosi (Morris 1938).
- 6 Rossi-Landi introduce quindi la nozione di parlare comune in opposizione al “linguaggio ordinario” della filosofia oxoniense. Uno dei limiti della filosofia analitica inglese, infatti, consisteva nello scambiare le caratteristiche di una determinata lingua naturale – l’inglese – per il linguaggio ordinario, colloquiale, in generale, malgrado le evidenti indicazioni contrarie. La confusione tra i livelli generali e astratti del linguaggio “ordinario” e le caratteristiche di una lingua determinata ad un dato momento del suo sviluppo storico accade spesso. È questo il caso della filosofia del linguaggio oxoniense, ma è anche, aggiungiamo noi, della teoria di Chomsky (si veda Chomsky 1969-1970), che scambia le specifiche caratteristiche di una lingua (l’inglese) per le strutture universali del linguaggio umano (v. Ponzio 1974, 1992, 2006 [1973], 2012b). Prova di tale confusione è che le frasi introdotte da Chomsky come esempi delle sue teorie non funzionano più come tali se tradotte in altre lingue, sicché nelle traduzioni delle sue opere devono essere lasciate in inglese.¹

- 7 La nozione di parlare comune non è in contraddizione con la realtà del plurilinguismo, cioè con la copresenza di molte lingue, ciascuna diversa dall'altra. Al contrario essa spiega il plurilinguismo *perché* considera le similarità in funzione dello svolgimento da parte delle diverse lingue del compito di soddisfare i bisogni espressivi e comunicativi. Il linguaggio comune spiega e giustifica la differenza, la varietà, e la molteplicità di espedienti, soluzioni e risorse offerte da ciascuna singola lingua. Questa varietà concerne le lingue così come si presentano, ma non è completa e definitiva, dato che ciascuna lingua va continuamente sviluppandosi e trasformandosi. In contrasto con quegli approcci ai problemi del linguaggio che considerano la molteplicità delle lingue a partire da una *Ursprache* o dalle strutture linguistiche originarie del *logos* o dalla natura umana, la nozione di parlare comune non sottovaluta ciò che Steiner (1975) chiama "l'enigma di Babele" alludendo alla diversità e molteplicità delle lingue.
- 8 Il linguaggio comune secondo Rossi-Landi non implica una sorta di unità mitica, qualche riferimento a una origine comune delle lingue. Neppure con tale nozione ci si richiama all'unità della specie umana e a qualche legge di evoluzione naturale. Ciò risulta chiaramente nel libro del 1961 e ancora più chiaramente nel libro del 1968, dove la nozione di parlare comune è sviluppata in termini di lavoro linguistico:
- La simiglianza delle funzioni svolte dalle diverse lingue proviene dal fatto che, nel processo dello sviluppo del linguaggio, sono necessariamente rappresentate le forme generali del costituirsi sociale, cioè i fondamentali rapporti di lavoro e di produzione che distinguono qualsiasi società umana da qualsiasi società pre-umana (soltanto animale). (Rossi-Landi 2003 [1968]: 71)
- 9 Nel libro del 1978, *Ideologia* (sezione 1.3.5) (1982 [1978]), e nel suo ultimo libro, del 1985, *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni* (2006 [1985]), Rossi-Landi continua a esaminare e nuovamente sviluppa la nozione di bisogni espressivi e comunicativi pur sempre considerati in stretta connessione con i processi e le strutture della organizzazione sociale.
- 10 Il concetto di parlare comune era formulato in contrasto con la concezione oxoniense del linguaggio; ciò non significa che la filosofia analitica inglese era considerata importante in Italia o negli altri paesi continentali al tempo in cui Rossi-Landi scriveva *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune*. Tutt'al contrario, la filosofia analitica non era presa in considerazione quando si affrontavano problemi filosofici di ordine teoretico. Conseguentemente la ricerca di Rossi-Landi era frantesa non solo in relazione ai problemi di cui si occupava, ma anche riguardo all'approccio a tali problemi, tanto era discordante rispetto alla concezione dominante della ricerca filosofica (v. l'introduzione del 1980 a Rossi-Landi 1998 [1961]; Rossi-Landi 1978; l'introduzione all'edizione americana di Rossi-Landi 2003 [1968]). Rossi-Landi scrisse il libro del 1961 in una situazione caratterizzata dal paradosso: si dedicava alla discussione di tematiche e posizioni teoriche che erano ignorate o considerate non degne di attenzione nello studio del linguaggio; Morris veniva preso per un filosofo analitico o un linguista e lo stesso libro di Rossi-Landi era considerato un contributo alla filosofia analitica (v. Bernard *et al.* 1994; Petrilli 1992, 2004).
- 11 Impegnandosi a *spiegare* l'uso linguistico, anziché descriverlo semplicemente, nel libro del 1961 Rossi-Landi lavorava già nella direzione del libro del 1968: alla critica della nozione di uso in Wittgenstein, e alla riflessione sulla *produzione linguistica*. Rossi-Landi svolgeva la critica della nozione di uso linguistico già nel 1961, e non solo – come avverrà nel libro del 1968 e poi in *Linguistics and Economics*, 1977 – tenendo conto della

critica marxiana del “feticismo” della merce. La critica della nozione di uso linguistico che si trova già nel libro del 1961 nasce ed è svolta avvalendosi di Peirce oltre che di Bradley. Come dirà nel libro del 1968, Wittgenstein procede nella sua analisi del linguaggio dall’oggetto linguistico solo in avanti e non anche indietro.

- 12 Nella prefazione all’edizione americana di *Linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* (2003 [1968], tr. inglese 1983: ix-xv), dichiara che molte delle idee di questo libro “erano già presenti, anche se in forma embrionale nel libro del 1961.” E tiene a indicarne alla base anche il suo interesse per Morris, a cui aveva dedicato una monografia nel 1953. Inoltre, facendo riferimento a Peirce, non manca di menzionare l’importanza di Vailati nell’avvio in Italia della riflessione sul pragmatismo.
- 13 Rossi-Landi stesso ci dà la chiave per una corretta lettura del libro del 1961 nell’introduzione alla riedizione del 1980. La nozione di parlare comune propone un *modello*, è una *costruzione teorica* e non una *diretta* descrizione di un reale processo, benché si riferisca a processi reali. In contrasto diretto con il concetto di linguaggio ordinario, oggetto della filosofia analitica, e implicitamente con le nozioni di competenza e di grammatica generativa della linguistica chomskiana, il “parlare comune” è un *modello con funzioni interpretative*, un’*ipotesi* applicabile a lingue differenti, capace di spiegare l’uso linguistico (Petrilli 2018; Ponzio 1986).
- 14 Anche a proposito del libro di Rossi-Landi del 1961, potremmo parlare, usando la terminologia di Šaumjan, della *consapevolezza di tenere distinti due livelli*, quello *fenotipico* riguardante l’oggetto reale da studiare, e quello *genotipico* che consiste nella costruzione di ipotesi di modelli con funzioni interpretative, estensibile a lingue diverse. Al livello genotipico appartiene la nozione di “parlare comune.”

2. La funzione metodica della nozione di parlare comune

- 15 La nozione di parlare comune ha la funzione di permettere di vedere come il linguaggio funzioni, in quanto indica le operazioni che non possiamo non compiere quando parliamo. Sotto questo riguardo, dice Rossi-Landi, l’indagine si muove in una direzione ispirata alla kantiana logica trascendentale, e al tempo stesso contribuendo in qualche modo ad un suo completamento, dato che lo studio del parlare comune insiste proprio su ciò che invece fu trascurato da Kant, vale a dire sulla portata metodica generale del linguaggio: un ritorno a Kant attraverso Cassirer (v. particolarmente 2018 [edizione originale 1945]; v. anche Ponzio 1971), attraverso il “kantiano Peirce” (Rossi-Landi 1998 [1961]: 255). Ugualmente collegata alla filosofia kantiana è infatti la semiotica di Peirce, la quale propone “A New List of Categories” (CP.1.545-59) e una reinterpretazione dell’a priori e del trascendentale in termini linguistici e semiotici. La semiotica di Peirce è implicitamente anti-cartesiana e respinge la dicotomia razionalismo-empirismo come sterile e astratta (v. del 1868, “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties of Man” e “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” in CP.5.215-63 e 5.264-317).
- 16 Su posizioni non diverse è la concezione di Rossi-Landi secondo cui il parlare comune può essere considerato come un *a priori* e ha una funzione metodica:
- Ci troviamo dunque di fronte a una ricerca di tipo anche empirico, come si usa dire, la quale è possibile proprio in quanto disponiamo di uno strumento concettuale *a priori*...Ed è questo il punto di partenza del moderno strutturalismo linguistico, come osserva anche Cassirer fin dal 1945. (Rossi-Landi 1998 [1961]: 168)

- 17 Rossi-Landi tiene a precisare che studiare l'a priori nel linguaggio “non significa adottare un metodo aprioristico deduttivo.” Si tratta infatti del “metodo ipotetico-deduttivo,” o più propriamente del metodo “abduittivo,” richiamando il concetto peirciano di “abduzione,” che consiste nello spiegare un dato evento sulla base di ipotesi ricercando le condizioni generali che lo rendono possibile.
- 18 Come si vede, la concezione del significato in *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune* risente fortemente dell'influenza della semiotica di Peirce e di Morris, della quale Rossi-Landi (1953a) evidenziava l'importanza della collocazione di ciò che chiamiamo “significato” e “significare” nella totalità dei processi della semiosi.
- 19 La metodica del parlare comune permette di non identificare l'a priori con i risultati linguistici espressi, ma di “studiarlo nella sua struttura interna e nascosta” (Rossi-Landi 1998 [1961]: 165). C'è qui evidentemente un implicito riferimento alla *innere Sprachform* che Cassirer mutua da Humboldt e che è collegata alla considerazione del linguaggio come *energeia* piuttosto che come *ergon*, prodotto. Si potrebbe parlare di una presa di posizione *ante-litteram* nei confronti della chomskiana “linguistica cartesiana” (a cui Chomsky nel saggio omonimo del 1966 cercherà di guadagnare anche Humboldt): la concezione chomskiana del linguaggio resta infatti legata alle alternative classiche di coscienza ed esperienza, razionalismo ed empirismo, e in questo senso è estranea al criticismo kantiano e alla sua istanza di superamento dell'astratto razionalismo e dell'astratto empirismo. La rossilandiana metodica del parlare comune si differenzia quindi dalla linguistica strutturale di tipo tassonomico, differenziandosi anche dalla teoria del linguaggio di Chomsky, la quale non vede altra alternativa rispetto al comportamentismo linguistico che richiamarsi alla filosofia razionalistica del XVII secolo sostenendo che l'unica posizione valida nello studio del linguaggio sia una concezione di tipo mentalistico e innatistico (Ponzio 1971, 2001).

3. Significati di partenza e significati aggiuntivi

- 20 Sulla base della metodica del parlare comune, Rossi-Landi propone l'importante distinzione tra *significati di partenza* e *significati aggiuntivi*. Ciò lo porterà ad affermare, nella riedizione del 1975 (p. 202) della monografia su Morris, che dire “segno,” “semiosi” o “significato” è dire quasi la stessa cosa. La differenza è data dal fatto che l'uso dell'uno di questi termini al posto dell'altro permette di accentuare questo o quest'altro aspetto della situazione segnica (Morris 1938).
- 21 La distinzione che sulla base della metodica del parlare comune viene proposta da Rossi-Landi fra *significati di partenza* e *significati aggiuntivi* va collocata in una complessa concezione del significato, che riprende quella del pragmatismo, secondo cui i significati non sono entità staccate dai reali processi della comunicazione e della interpretazione e quindi dai loro contesti né immediati né remoti.
- 22 Rossi-Landi chiama “significati di partenza” quelli che si danno di volta in volta in maniera diretta, immediata, letterale, consapevole. Questi significati espliciti sono soggetti a significati che sono di volta in volta indiretti, impliciti, metaforici, latenti, inconsapevoli. Su tutto ciò che diciamo esercita il suo influsso ciò che non diciamo. Rossi-Landi chiama “significati aggiuntivi” quelli che non sono immediatamente presenti, ma che sottostanno ai “significati di partenza” e sono decisivi tanto nell'espressione quanto nella comprensione.

- 23 Enunciati apparentemente semplici possono contenere sfere di significazione infinitamente complesse. Gli enunciati risultano così pluristratificati e questa pluristratificazione non è una prerogativa interna, ma riguarda il loro rapporto con l'esterno, con altri enunciati, con i contesti, con il resto dell'universo di discorso di cui essi fanno parte.
- 24 Questa distinzione non può essere accostata alla distinzione chomskiana fra "strutture superficiali" e "strutture profonde." In Chomsky il linguaggio verbale viene considerato separatamente dalla sua funzione comunicativa e dimensione sociale, intersoggettiva, dialogica. In Rossi-Landi, invece, i "significati aggiuntivi" consistono di presupposti che rinviano a esperienze pratiche, valori, saperi di un determinato ambiente, da quello ristretto di un gruppo familiare a quello più ampio di un intero universo di discorso e di un'intera cultura. I "significati aggiuntivi" dipendono dal carattere intersoggettivo e dialogico della pratica del significare, che presuppone un consapere, un orientamento verso punti di vista altrui e verso varie direzioni culturali. Significati di partenza e significati aggiuntivi si danno nel concreto processo della semiosi e nel rapporto tra segni e interpretanti, tra esigenze e capacità comunicative e capacità interpretative. Mostrando le stratificazioni molteplici e complicate dei significati di partenza apparentemente semplici, Rossi-Landi evidenzia la complessità delle operazioni implicite del parlare comune, l'accumulazione di esperienze, con-saperi, presupposti, ecc., che rendono possibile la comunicazione.
- 25 Di conseguenza non si può fare corrispondere la distinzione tra significati di partenza e significati aggiuntivi alla distinzione tra *langue* e *parole*, tra stabilità della *langue* e mutevolezza della *parole*. È invece accostabile alla distinzione stabilita da Peirce tra "interpretante immediato" e "interpretante dinamico." Un altro accostamento potrebbe essere fatto in riferimento a Valentin Vološinov, esponente del cosiddetto Circolo di Bachtin, il quale in *Marxismo e filosofia del linguaggio* (in Bachtin e il suo Circolo 2014) stabilisce una distinzione più o meno negli stessi termini tra "significato" e "tema." Sottolineiamo "accostabile," perché proprio i significati comuni e fissati dalla tradizione sono quelli che per lo più si reggono su qualcosa di implicito, indiretto, mediato, nascosto, remoto, secondario, inconsapevole.
- 26 Possiamo forse trovare una maggiore corrispondenza fra la nozione di "significato aggiuntivo" di Rossi-Landi e quella di "sottinteso" nel saggio di Vološinov del 1926, "La parola nella vita e nella poesia" (*ibid.*). Qui si mostra come ciò che può essere sottinteso non possa essere nulla di astrattamente individuale e privato. Tanto più può esserci sottinteso quanto più si ha a che fare con avvenimenti, esperienze, valori, programmi di comportamento, conoscenze e stereotipi che sono di dominio pubblico, socialmente determinati. Più ampio e complesso è il sottinteso, e più esso si basa su elementi della vita sociale stabili e costanti, su comportamenti e valutazioni essenziali e fondamentali.
- 27 Tuttavia usando un'espressione dello stesso Rossi-Landi, la distinzione tra significati di partenza e significati aggiuntivi "taglia di traverso" le distinzioni a cui l'abbiamo accostata, compresa quella di Peirce, dato che come egli stesso dice "già il significato di partenza," quello esplicito, "galleggia" su più strati di materiale significante (1998 [1961]: 31), comunica già, fin dalla sua formulazione, "significati aggiuntivi."
- 28 Nella seconda fase della sua ricerca, a partire dalla metà degli anni '60 (nel 1965 pubblica "Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato"), Rossi-Landi orienta la sua ricerca sul linguaggio comune in termini di *lavoro linguistico* attraverso il riferimento a

categorie dell'economia politica e nel quadro di una teoria generale della *produzione linguistica*.

4. Il metodo omologico

- 29 Nei lavori del 1960, Rossi-Landi sviluppa la sua concezione del “parlare comune” assumendo il linguaggio come *lavoro* e considerando le diverse lingue come suoi prodotti e quindi collegando lo studio del linguaggio con le categorie economiche. Egli offre un'alternativa agli approcci tradizionali al linguaggio come il mentalismo e il comportamentismo, la concezione del linguaggio come convenzione o come fatto naturale. Secondo Rossi-Landi,

dalla constatazione che le parole e i messaggi non esistono in natura, perché vengono prodotti dagli uomini, si ricava immediatamente che sono anch'essi prodotti di lavoro. È questo il senso in cui si può cominciare a parlare di lavoro umano linguistico. (Rossi-Landi 2003 [1968]: 62)

- 30 Secondo questa prospettiva, se risultano inaccettabili la teoria del linguaggio come passivo rispecchiamento della “realtà” e la psicolinguistica dello stimolo-risposta, inaccettabili risultano pure le spiegazioni di tipo chomskiano del comportamento linguistico, in cui si ricorre alla capacità creativa dell'intelligenza normale umana e si considera il linguaggio quale mera attività:

Parlo espressamente di *lavoro*, anziché di *attività* perché le parole e i messaggi, che sono dei prodotti, costituiscono la concreta realtà sociale da cui dobbiamo partire. Perderemmo contatto con tale realtà se considerassimo il linguaggio soltanto come un'attività, il cui fine stia nell'attività stessa anziché distinguersene. (ivi: 63)

- 31 Di “coerenza” e “appropriatezza” alla situazione, che Chomsky considera caratteristiche fondamentali dell'uso linguistico, si può parlare solo se si considera il linguaggio non come una semplice attività universale e innata, ma come lavoro rivolto alla soddisfazione dei bisogni sociali. “Mera attività è semmai,” scrive Rossi-Landi, “[...] lo spontaneo riprendere i prodotti del lavoro, così come li troviamo nella loro nuova immediatezza di oggetti pseudonaturali” (ivi: 64). Appare chiaro che il termine “spontaneo” è qui usato anch'esso, coerentemente all'impostazione di Rossi-Landi, in senso marxiano. Esso non sta ad indicare una situazione di libertà, responsabilità, autonomia del soggetto parlante, ma piuttosto di passività; si riferisce ad un comportamento effettuato per inerzia, del quale il soggetto non è responsabile, non può rispondere in prima persona (cfr. Korsch 1969 [1938]: 165-6).

- 32 In *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni* (2006 [1985]), ritroviamo sviluppata l'analisi del rapporto fra lavoro e attività nel capitolo I, “Dimensioni del lavoro,” che riprende il materiale di “voci” del *Dizionario teorico-ideologico* della rivista *Ideologie*, da lui diretta, particolarmente quelle del n°15, 1971 (p. 21-3 e 38-9). Delle considerazioni di Rossi-Landi, in questa sezione del suo ultimo libro pubblicato, vanno indicate quelle che riguardano tre ordini di problemi per le implicazioni sul concetto di segno e sul problema del rapporto lavoro/semiosi:

a) *Problema del rapporto fra attività e lavoro interpretativo che abbia come oggetto tale attività.* Tale problema investe quello della distinzione fra ciò che non è segno e ciò che invece lo è. Rossi-Landi fa notare come ciò che è risultato di attività possa trasformarsi in prodotto di lavoro in seguito all'intervento di lavoro interpretativo di ciò che quella attività lascia come tracce. Così le impronte lasciate sulla sabbia, che non sono prodotti

per chi le ha lasciate, a meno che non siano state lasciate intenzionalmente, divengono tali per un interprete sopraggiunto e quindi segni, come risultato di un lavoro interpretativo. Le tracce lasciate da un'attività divengono prodotti quando rientrano nella dimensione del lavoro. Ciò significa anche che ciò che non è originariamente segno, cioè prodotto di lavoro, può diventarlo in un secondo tempo attraverso il lavoro interpretativo. La distinzione fra segni e non-segni, come quella fra risultato di attività e prodotto di lavoro, è una distinzione sempre relativa ai contesti. Ciò ha particolare rilevanza sul modello di segno e sull'individuazione dei confini della semiotica.

b) *Problema del rapporto fra lavoro e consapevolezza.* Se la distinzione fra lavoro e attività sta nel fatto che il primo, a differenza della seconda, è pianificato, intenzionale, inserito in un programma, non si deve tuttavia credere che non ci possa essere lavoro senza consapevolezza, presa di coscienza dei fini e dei programmi. Il lavoro è esecuzione di programmi, e ciò lo differenzia dall'attività: ma questi programmi possono essere indifferentemente consci o inconsci. Ciò ha evidentemente implicazioni sulla nozione di "lavoro alienato" e stabilisce collegamenti con l'analisi marxiana del lavoro nella società capitalistica. Ma riguarda anche la possibilità di parlare, come faceva Freud, di "lavoro onirico." Per quanto concerne il riferimento all'analisi marxiana del lavoro, la distinzione fra lavoro e attività come distinzione fra programmato e non programmato non esclude il fatto che il lavoratore non conosca il programma per cui lavora e che tale programma, anziché essere quello di un soggetto individuale, sia quello dell'intero sistema sociale di produzione per cui il soggetto lavora (Petrilli 1992; Rossi-Landi 1970, 1992). Riguardo a Freud, che definiva lavoro la produzione dei sogni da parte dell'inconscio, va detto che lo stesso inconscio è un prodotto sociale, per cui risultato di lavoro sono i sogni, come risultato di lavoro, quello interpretativo, è la loro traduzione nel discorso che li narra e li analizza. La possibilità di un lavoro del cui programma non si sia consapevoli è "una zona di speciale contatto per l'uso marxiano di Freud o freudiano di Marx" (Rossi-Landi 2006 [1985]: 7).

c) *Problema del rapporto fra lavoro e prodotto fine a se stesso, fra lavoro e attività ludica.* Rossi-Landi si sofferma a considerare anche le situazioni di intreccio fra lavoro e attività, che è un caso del generale intrecciarsi e sovrapporsi delle categorie nelle scienze umane a cui Rossi-Landi dedica un intero capitolo di *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni* (p. 98-113). I casi di sovrapposizione delle categorie non dimostrano che non sia necessario distinguerle, né inficiano la loro validità analitica; al contrario le categorie in generale, soprattutto quelle usate nelle scienze umane, divengono efficaci strumenti conoscitivi solo se si dedica al loro sovrapporsi tutta l'attenzione necessaria (v. *ivi*: 101). La separazione rigida fra lavoro e attività ludica, fine a se stessa, deriva anche dalla particolare situazione alienata del lavoro nella società capitalistica. Ciò comporta che ci si debba riferire alla produzione artistica, non per nulla spesso indicata come "attività creativa," per trovare forme di lavoro i cui prodotti abbiano una finalità anche in se stessi e in cui si possa parlare di "improduttività," "intransitività" (Barthes 2022), "intrattenimento infinito" (Blanchot 1969).

- 33 In base alla prospettiva assunta da Rossi-Landi, secondo cui si precisa che il linguaggio non è un'attività ma è lavoro e che le lingue sono l'obiettivazione, la sedimentazione di tale lavoro, si chiarisce la tesi secondo cui il linguaggio non è un fatto naturale, ma un fatto umano, culturale, una funzione sociale, e può essere meglio compreso il senso in cui sono in rapporto la *langue* e la *parole*.

- 34 Che il linguaggio sia lavoro umano significa anche che esso non è un fatto puramente convenzionale, il prodotto di un processo arbitrario, e che le sue regole non sono costituite come le regole di un gioco. Come ogni lavoro, il linguaggio dev'essere considerato in riferimento al rapporto uomo-natura e ai rapporti sociali reali; come il lavoro manipolativo e trasformativo, esso ha la sua radice e la sua giustificazione in questi rapporti.
- 35 Intendendo il linguaggio come lavoro Rossi-Landi stabilisce un rapporto di *omologia* tra “lavoro materiale” e “lavoro linguistico” (oggi “lavoro immateriale,” “risorsa immateriale”) (Petrilli 2004; Petrilli e Ponzio 2004).
- 36 Il “metodo omologico” di Rossi-Landi fa parte del tipo di ragionamento abduttivo capace di individuare rapporti non previsti nel sapere dato, non solo perché instaura legami fra ambiti di questo sapere considerati separati, ma anche perché le leggi che stabilisce non sono reperibili in esso, in quanto l'unità individuata è qualitativamente diversa dalle parti di cui è composta:
- L'elemento omologico rompe le specializzazioni: obbliga a tener conto contemporaneamente di cose diverse, disturba il gioco indipendente delle sotto-totalità separate, richiama a una totalità più vasta, le cui leggi non sono quelle delle sue parti. In altre parole, un metodo omologico è un metodo antiseperatistico e ricostruttivo, come tale sgradito agli specialisti. (Rossi-Landi 2006 [1985]: 53)
- 37 La distinzione che Rossi-Landi individua fra *analogia*, *isomorfismo* e *omologia* può, inoltre, contribuire all'approfondimento della distinzione fra diversi tipi di somiglianza, ovvero di rapporto iconico, e anche alla spiegazione, attraverso tale distinzione, della differenza del grado innovativo ottenibile nel reperimento delle somiglianze.
- 38 Peirce (CP.2.277) distingue le icone in *immagini*, *diagrammi* e *metafore*. Nell'*immagine* il rapporto iconico è di somiglianza diretta, come nel caso di un ritratto; nel *diagramma* la somiglianza riguarda invece la relazione fra le parti, che viene rappresentata per mezzo di relazioni analoghe; nella *metafora* si rappresenta un parallelismo fra una certa cosa e qualcosa d'altro. Immagini, diagrammi (Peirce insiste sull'importanza che, nel processo conoscitivo, rivestono i diagrammi e in particolare i grafi) e metafore contribuiscono – dato il ruolo dell'icona, cui abbiamo detto – alla costituzione del *ragionamento abduttivo* (cfr. Bonfantini 1987, 2015; Peirce 2021 [2003]).
- 39 Tuttavia, la distinzione dell'icona in immagini, diagrammi e metafore nulla dice del grado di innovazione di tale tipo di ragionamento, l'abduzione. Invece, l'alto grado di capacità innovativa del ragionamento per somiglianza può essere spiegato dalla distinzione proposta da Rossi-Landi nell'ambito dei rapporti di somiglianza fra *analogia*, *isomorfismo* e *omologia*. L'*analogia*, secondo Rossi-Landi, consiste nell'individuazione di somiglianze fra cose così come sono date, quali si presentano al livello sensoriale, immediato, superficiale, del già saputo, del “mondo già dato, già fatto” (Husserl). Conseguentemente gli oggetti sono considerati nel loro reciproco isolamento e nella loro immobilità. Manca qui ogni riferimento, nel rilevamento della similarità, al loro processo di costituzione. Un caso estremo di analogia è l'*isomorfismo* in quanto spinge la similarità fino all'identità senza però preoccuparsi di spiegarla tramite il processo di costituzione degli oggetti considerati isomorfi. L'*isomorfismo* è l'arresto di ogni spinta allo studio di processi genetico-strutturali. Un esempio di isomorfismo è la credenza nella corrispondenza strutturale fra lingua-linguaggio (*Sprache*) e mondo ontologicamente inteso, prescindendo dall'indagine sulla formazione di tale corrispondenza e dei due termini che si fanno corrispondere. Il riferimento è qui

evidentemente al rapporto stabilito dal Wittgenstein del *Tractatus* fra linguaggio (lingua) e mondo.

- 40 La capacità di sviluppo conoscitivo e di innovazione dell'omologia – che per il suo carattere ipotetico e dunque non garantito e rischioso, non va presa, come Rossi-Landi avverte, indiscriminatamente, ma come strumento metodologico valido entro confini da determinarsi volta per volta in base alle esigenze della ricerca – dipende dal fatto che essa individua somiglianze nei processi di formazione, integrando analisi strutturale e analisi dinamica e procedendo sulla base di astrazioni, modelli, e non in base alla diretta e immediata somiglianza di cose individuali (v. 2006 [1985]: 53-5).²
- 41 Si comprende allora – ed è questo un contributo importante che possiamo trarre dal concetto Rossilandiano di *omologia* – che l'icona, sia come immagine, sia come diagramma, sia come metafora, non costituisce *di per se stessa il valore innovativo dell'abduzione*. Infatti, essa può essere impiegata anche nella direzione dell'analogia e dell'isomorfismo. *L'elemento di innovazione è invece dato dal carattere omologico dell'icona*.
- 42 Rossi-Landi sa che la metafora per se stessa non contribuisce allo sviluppo conoscitivo. Nel saggio “Sul denaro linguistico” (1973-74; ora in 2006 [1985]), egli si occupa direttamente della metafora, prendendo posizione sia contro il “mito della letteralità,” sia contro “l'orgia pseudo-liberatoria del metaforico.” Riprendendo quanto sulla metafora diceva Vailati e, indirettamente, attraverso lui, Welby (2010, 2021), Rossi-Landi afferma che non si può stabilire in linea di massima una netta distinzione fra metaforicità e letteralità. La possibilità di distinzione può esserci soltanto di volta in volta, in un determinato contesto, e in base ad una determinata ricerca. Egli dice:
- Se proprio si dovesse scegliere, direi che in questa linea di principio è meglio una misura controllata di metaforicità, con la sua ricchezza, che un eccesso di letteralità, con le sue insuperabili restrizioni di fondo e con la metafisica che le sta dietro. Ma mi affrettarei ad aggiungere che ogni sforzo deve essere sempre compiuto nella direzione di evitare o ridurre tutte le *metafore inutili*. (Rossi-Landi 2006 [1985]: 119)
- 43 Sicché, egli aggiunge, se espressioni fondamentali, da lui proposte, circa il rapporto tra linguistica e economia, quali “lavoro linguistico” e “mercato linguistico,” possono essere utili nello studio del linguaggio, ciò è dovuto al fatto che esse non sono delle semplici metafore, e non possono essere quindi liquidate sbrigativamente con l'accusa di metaforicità.

5. L'eredità di Giovanni Vailati nell'opera di Rossi-Landi

- 44 In *Il metodo della filosofia*, 1957, Rossi-Landi presentava undici articoli di Giovanni Vailati (1863-1909). Vailati, matematico, logico e filosofo pragmatista, discepolo di Giuseppe Peano, insegnò matematica e fisica come assistente nell'Università di Torino (1892-1899) e successivamente in diverse scuole statali. Attento alle più varie voci del pensiero filosofico e scientifico internazionale, fu in contatto epistolare con studiosi come Vilfredo Pareto, Ernst Mach, Franz Brentano, Federico Enriques, Benedetto Croce e Victoria Welby. Apprezzò e sviluppò la teoria dei segni di Welby, la *significs*. Comprensive l'importanza del pragmatismo di Peirce, che introdusse in Italia. Nella sua breve vita si distinse per l'originalità e capacità innovativa nell'ambito della filosofia del linguaggio, della logica, dell'epistemologia, della storia della scienza. Uno dei suoi obiettivi fu quello di evidenziare l'ambiguità espressiva e gli equivoci verbali. Nei suoi articoli

Vailati (1987) richiama l'attenzione sull'anarchia linguistica dovuta a un non corretto uso del linguaggio e propone di trovare gli espedienti, anche pedagogici, per rendere abituale la percezione delle ambiguità linguistiche (v. lettera a Welby, 12 luglio 1898, in Vailati 1971: 141).

- 45 Vailati è uno degli autori più citati da Rossi-Landi nel libro del 1961 riguardo alla semiotica e alla filosofia del linguaggio. All'insegnamento "precorrente e controcorrente" di Vailati, Rossi-Landi (1998 [1961]: 18) si richiamava in quel libro, per collocarsi nella tradizione locale, del tutto minoritaria, rappresentata, oltre che da Vailati, da autori quali Peano, Calderoni, Enriques e Colorni (cf. Colorni 1973; Rossi-Landi 1953b).
- 46 A Vailati Rossi-Landi attribuisce il merito di aver saputo riconoscere in Peirce e non in James il vero maestro di insegnamenti duraturi e nell'aver compreso il significato metodologico del pragmatismo di contro all'opinione allora corrente e a lungo diffusa che per pragmatismo si debba intendere, e soltanto, una specie di valutazione utilitaristica delle credenze e una dipendenza della verità dall'utilità.
- 47 Nella nota introduttiva all'edizione del 1957 degli scritti di Vailati, Rossi-Landi faceva osservare il carattere "ingannevole" che può avere l'etichetta di "pragmatista," impiegata dallo stesso Vailati per indicare il suo debito verso Peirce. Dice Rossi-Landi in tale nota introduttiva:

Correva allora l'idea, ancor oggi non del tutto spentasi nelle menti retrive, che per pragmatismo si debba intendere sempre e soltanto una specie di valutazione utilitaristica delle credenze e delle teorie e un asservimento del criterio di verità al criterio di utilità. Vailati, in questo appunto seguace di C.S. Peirce più che di W. James, dichiarò con la massima chiarezza che l'etichetta gli serviva invece per indicare alcune regole metodologiche intese soprattutto a evitare fraintendimenti. La principale regola era questa, che nel pronunciare un'asserzione o nel mettere in campo un problema qualsiasi, si debbono dichiarare le esperienze particolari e concrete cui ci si sta riferendo. Non è altrimenti possibile sapere quale sia il significato dell'asserzione o problema; anzi, non è nemmeno possibile stabilire con rigore se un qualche significato ci sia. [...]

Ma tant'è. Si corre sempre il rischio che un Vailati così consapevole sia "liquidato" sotto l'accusa rivolta da un filosofo attualista a Peirce, cioè di interpretare tutta la filosofia come creazione di concetti il cui valore è determinato solo dal successo. Di fronte a così sommari giudizi, e a evitare quel rischio, non c'è nulla di più rinfrescante che riferire per esteso alcuni brani di Vailati sull'argomento. (Vailati 2000 [1957]: vi-vii)

- 48 E Rossi-Landi aggiunge:
- L'unico senso nel quale il "pragmatismo" possa considerarsi avere un carattere "utilitaristico" è in quanto conduce a scartare un certo numero di questioni "inutili," però non per altra ragione che perché esse non sono che delle questioni apparenti, o, più precisamente, non sono delle questioni affatto... (ivi: 7)
- 49 Ci piace riportare queste considerazioni di Rossi-Landi riferite a Vailati, ma che valgono anche al di là del loro riferimento particolare:

[...] In questo mondo, e nel nostro Paese forse più che in altri, il successo è legato non solo al merito ma anche al clamore; non solo alle realizzazioni effettive ma anche alle intenzioni sbandierate e ai risultati comunque raggiunti. La modestia, lo spirito di rinuncia, il rifiuto di fare a tutti i costi quello che fanno gli altri per il solo fatto che lo fanno, la ritrosia verso quanto suona troppo facile, il tenersi onestamente e rigidamente nei limiti della propria preparazione, e via dicendo, son

tutte virtù che sembrano fatte apposta per isolare un pensatore, specie in Italia.

Furono appunto le virtù tipiche dell'uomo e del filosofo Vailati. (ivi: viii)

- 50 Vailati lavora sul doppio versante della filosofia del linguaggio e della teoria della conoscenza, anticipando, come osserva Rossi-Landi (2000 [1957]: viii), “certe soluzioni proposte da filosofi come Wittgenstein, Dewey, Bridgman, Dingler, Morris, Stevenson e molti altri, e rintracciabili anche nei testi dei maestri della linguistica novecentesca.”
- 51 Da Vailati Rossi-Landi poteva derivare anche l'esigenza metodologica di considerare le omologie fra linguaggio verbale e linguaggi non-verbali. Particolare importanza Rossi-Landi annette allo scritto “La grammatica dell'algebra” dove Vailati estende il termine “linguaggio” anche ai sistemi di segni non-verbali, instaurando la trasposizione di categorie impiegate nello studio del linguaggio verbale per lo studio dei linguaggi non-verbali, sia per quanto concerne gli aspetti semantico-concettuali, sia riguardo a quelli logico-sintattici.
- 52 Rossi-Landi non perde occasione di menzionare Vailati per riconoscergli il merito di aver anticipato concezioni e indicazioni metodologiche che la semiotica e le altre scienze dei segni solo recentemente hanno raggiunto e apprezzato. Così dopo aver mostrato che una prova del carattere non-isomorfo dei segni rispetto alla realtà è la loro possibilità di trarre in inganno o sostenere qualcosa di falso (Harnad, Steklis e Lancaster 1976) e dopo aver ricordato la proposta di Eco (1975: 17) di definire la semiotica come la disciplina che studia tutto ciò che può essere usato per mentire, Rossi-Landi ricorda che già nel 1907 Vailati intitolava la sua recensione a *L'arte di persuadere* di Prezzolini “Un manuale per i bugiardi” (Rossi-Landi 2006 [1985]: 234).
- 53 In tutta la ricerca di Rossi-Landi il lavoro di Vailati è un punto di riferimento costante tanto che il rapporto con Vailati va considerato uno dei tratti caratterizzanti dell'opera di Rossi-Landi. Ed Eco, nell'articolo commemorativo apparso su “La Repubblica” alcuni giorni dopo la morte di Rossi-Landi, non mancava di nominare, pur nella necessaria brevità del testo, “un autore italiano a lungo dimenticato e che Rossi-Landi si adoperò sempre a rivalutare, Giovanni Vailati.”

6. Uso linguistico e lavoro linguistico

- 54 La concezione wittgensteiniana del significato come uso linguistico formulata nelle *Ricerche Filosofiche* risulta già messa in discussione da Rossi-Landi con la nozione di *parlare comune* del 1961. Nella seconda edizione di *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* (1973), Rossi-Landi fa precedere il libro dal capitolo (il primo dunque) intitolato “Per un uso marxiano di Wittgenstein.” Qui il termine di contrasto è dato da “il linguaggio come lavoro.” La critica della nozione di uso linguistico viene posta in termini marxiani, dicendo che a Wittgenstein manca la nozione di valore-lavoro: “cioè del valore di un determinato oggetto, in questo caso linguistico, come prodotto di un determinato lavoro linguistico. Egli va dall'oggetto linguistico in avanti, non dall'oggetto linguistico all'indietro” (2003 [1968]: 56). Nel 1961 questo movimento a ritroso è ottenuto tramite l'accostamento della nozione di uso linguistico alla nozione di linguaggio-pensiero ripresa da Peirce e Bradley.
- 55 La messa in discussione già nel libro del 1961 – prima ancora dell'impiego della prospettiva marxiana nella messa in discussione della concezione wittgensteiniana – fa comprendere che la visione di Rossi-Landi era già realizzata sulla base di una

prospettiva che gli consentiva di inquadrare lo studio del linguaggio verbale in termini semiotici e il significato come processo interpretativo per il quale esso sussiste soltanto in una catena aperta di interpretanti.

- 56 Direttamente, o indirettamente attraverso Morris, il pragmatismo peirciano consentiva a Rossi-Landi di rendersi conto della necessità di una semiotica dell'interpretazione in contrasto alla semiotica del codice, della decodificazione, alla semiologia. Tale nozione è già direttamente messa in discussione in *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune*.

Quello che nella comunicazione può corrispondere al pacco postale è soltanto il suo veicolo, cioè i vocaboli in quanto pronunciati o scritti o uditi o visti [...]. Ma per quanto riguarda il processo interpretativo e la quantità e qualità delle informazioni trasmesse, il modello di un oggetto che cambia luogo è del tutto inadeguato [...]. Meglio sarebbe forse parlare di un "fiume informativo": noi vediamo, cioè cogliamo subito, la superficie; e sappiamo che sotto c'è tutto il volume delle acque che si muovono. Arricchendo l'immagine potremmo parlare di battello sul fiume. Il primo corrisponde al significato detto "di partenza" perché più visibile e cospicuo, cioè diretto e immediato; il secondo a tutto il resto. Quello che viene comunicato non è soltanto il battello, è anche il fiume. Già prima avevamo parlato del "galleggiare" del significato di partenza su tutto uno spessore del materiale del significante. (Rossi-Landi 1998 [1961]: 207-8)

- 57 Rispetto all'intero flusso informativo, si possono distinguere parti consapevoli e inconsapevoli in senso relativo, dicendo che ciò che scorre in superficie è la parte immediatamente consapevole e ciò che si muove in profondità è la parte non-immediatamente consapevole, trattandosi dunque di una successione di gradi di consapevolezza.
- 58 Riprendendo da Silvio Ceccato (1959) il modello del lavoro mentale come *polifonia*, cioè come scorrere contemporaneo di varie linee sovrapposte, Rossi-Landi propone di considerare il significato di partenza la "linea melodica principale," e i significati aggiuntivi tutte le altre. La nozione di "polifonia" potrebbe suggerire ulteriori confronti con Michail Bachtin che ne fa uso nella sua interpretazione del genere romanzo in Dostoevskij (in Bachtin e il suo Circolo 2014 [1929]).
- 59 Particolarmente ricca di implicazioni teoriche è l'affermazione contenuta in *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune* (già presente in Rossi-Landi 1953a, ripresa in seguito soprattutto nella critica di alcune travisanti interpretazioni della semiotica di Morris) circa l'inseparabilità delle tre dimensioni del segno, cioè della dimensione sintattica, semantica e pragmatica: non c'è segno se non con altri segni, per un interprete e con una designazione (*designatum*) ed eventualmente una denotazione (*denotatum*).
- 60 Anche da questo punto di vista la teoria del parlare comune di Rossi-Landi costituisce un punto di riferimento importante per la critica della teoria linguistica chomskiana. Infatti, anche se Chomsky, diversamente da quanto aveva affermato nelle *Syntactic Structures*, ha riconosciuto la necessità del collegamento fra sintassi e semantica nel linguaggio verbale, considerandole insieme alla dimensione fonologica come parti costitutive della grammatica, ha però trascurato deliberatamente la dimensione pragmatica. Come invece dice Rossi-Landi, la pragmatica sottende le dimensioni sintattica e semantica, così come queste ultime due sottendono la pragmatica (v. Rossi-Landi 1998 [1961]: 171). Sotto questo riguardo è rilevante la precisazione di Rossi-Landi (nella stessa pagina) che, se la significazione e la denotazione (e quindi il *significatum* e il *denotatum*) fanno parte della dimensione semantica, il significato (*meaning*), invece, come avere senso e voler dire qualcosa, "è presente in tutte e tre le dimensioni."

- 61 Ci si rende conto del significato nuovo della posizione di Rossi-Landi nei confronti delle teorie del linguaggio alle quali si accosta, quando la si considera in rapporto alla concezione del linguaggio del Wittgenstein delle *Ricerche filosofiche*, della quale sembra riprendere alcuni motivi fondamentali. Si pensi ad affermazioni di Wittgenstein quali: le parole sono strumenti; il linguaggio tutto intero è uno strumento guidato dai nostri interessi; il parlare è un'attività umana in mezzo alle altre o con esse interagente; la lingua ha significato nel suo contesto pubblico; immaginare una lingua significa immaginare una forma di vita.
- 62 L'interpretazione del linguaggio come lavoro, considerata nei confronti della posizione di Wittgenstein, comporta, prima di tutto, che risulti insufficiente sostenere, come fa Wittgenstein, che il linguaggio è un fatto "pubblico," controllabile intersoggettivamente, e che il comportamento linguistico si svolge necessariamente fra due o più persone. Bisogna che questo svolgersi in pubblico venga visto come un essere sociale, che non ci si limiti a descrivere cosa succede quando individui già formati si mettono a parlare, ma si riconosca che gli individui si sono socialmente formati come individui anche perché parlano una certa lingua; che l'individuo, come dice Marx nei *Grundrisse* (1857-58, trad. it. 1970, vol. I: 15), sta in rapporto alla lingua come *sua propria* solo quale membro naturale di una comunità umana.
- 63 Insufficiente risulta pure la teoria del significato come uso, dal momento che con essa ci si limita a descrivere l'uso delle parole in base al riferimento alle situazioni nelle quali i giochi linguistici si realizzano, senza indagare *come* quel determinato uso, quella determinata parola si siano prodotti; e di conseguenza si considerano gli strumenti di cui ci serviamo per comunicare, come datici, come naturali, anziché considerarli come prodotti storico-sociali. Un'analisi linguistica che non voglia limitarsi alla constatazione o alla descrizione degli usi delle parole, deve prendere in considerazione il lavoro linguistico mediante il quale certi significati si *costituiscono*, le sue motivazioni, l'organizzazione dei rapporti sociali, gli interessi, le condizioni sociali ed economiche, i bisogni storicamente specificati dei soggetti che impiegano determinate parole.
- 64 Ciò permette anche, come Rossi-Landi mostra a partire da *Linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* e *Semiotica e ideologia*, di riconsiderare la questione delle "trappole del linguaggio," segnalata da Wittgenstein, evidenziandone pure i risvolti ideologici, i condizionamenti sociali; e quindi di rivederla anche in termini di *alienazione linguistica*. Certo, tutto questo rifacendosi a Karl Marx (cf. Petrilli 2016; Zhang Bi e Tang Xiaolin 2016). Ma l'angolatura prospettica e la struttura metodologica, la sua "metodica filosofica" – e Rossi-Landi ne era pienamente consapevole come dichiara nella "Prefazione all'edizione americana," al libro del 1968 –, è la stessa del libro del 1961. E se dovessimo necessariamente qualificare tale "metodica filosofica," noi riteniamo che potremmo parlare di *pragmatismo* (nel senso di Peirce ovviamente, e di Vailati).

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NOTE

1. Anche Sebastian Šaumjan (1965) ha evidenziato il limite del modello generativo-trasformatore di Chomsky, che confonde elementi facenti parte di momenti differenti di astrazione: il linguaggio ideale e il linguaggio naturale. Sicché il modello di Chomsky non può essere applicato a una lingua qualsiasi, perché essa risulta diversa dalla lingua scelta per la sua costruzione. Diversamente da Chomsky, Šaumjan propone una teoria bigraduale della grammatica generativo-trasformatore basata appunto sulla distinzione di due livelli di astrazione: quello del linguaggio *genotipico* e quello del linguaggio *fenotipico*.
 2. Sono proprio questi aspetti del metodo omologico a permettere il raffronto fra Rossi-Landi e la linguistica dinamica di Šaumjan (v. Ponzio 1974).
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RIASSUNTI

As already emerges in his 1961 book, *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune*, Rossi-Landi reflects on sign and language relatedly to the American tradition in pragmatism from Peirce to Morris (he published a monograph on Morris in 1953). He also recovers the contribution made by Giovanni Vailati, who was among the first in Italy to recognize the importance of Peirce's pragmatism. Through Peircean pragmatism, Rossi-Landi oriented his work from the very beginning in the direction of a semiotics of interpretation in contrast to a semiotics – or better semiology in this case – of the code, of decodification. His “philosophical methodics” continues to be characterized in terms of “pragmatism,” from his works of the late 1960s and early 1970s (*Linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato*, 1968, and *Semiotica e ideologia*, 1972), to his last book *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni* (1985, the year of his death), in which recovering Wittgenstein he reconsiders the question of the “traps of language” in the Marxian terms of “linguistic alienation.”

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Alcune osservazioni su Richard Rorty, Aldo Giorgio Gargani e la filosofia in Italia alla fine del Novecento

Luigi Perissinotto

- 1 1. Alla fine del secolo scorso, Richard Rorty è stato un pensatore importante non solo nel mondo anglo-americano, ma anche per una parte significativa della filosofia e della cultura italiane.¹ Tutte le sue opere più rilevanti furono allora tradotte in italiano, talora in tempo reale o quasi, e diedero luogo a molteplici discussioni, polemiche e prese di posizione a cui parteciparono voci non secondarie della filosofia del tempo.² La prima domanda che occorre, pertanto, porci è con quali obiettivi in vista e per soddisfare quali bisogni o mancanze Rorty fu introdotto in Italia e fatto conoscere al pubblico filosofico italiano.
- 2 2. Con una certa plausibilità, e senza alcuna pretesa di ricostruire, nemmeno in abbozzo, la situazione filosofica in Italia alla fine del Novecento, mi sembra di poter suggerire che il pensiero di Rorty rispondeva, anzitutto per stile, spirito e richiami filosofici, ad alcune esigenze allora molto diffuse e sentite.³ La prima aveva sicuramente a che fare con quella filosofia analitica che nei due decenni finali del secolo scorso iniziò a trovare spazio e ascolto anche in Italia nelle Università, nei convegni e nelle riviste,⁴ non senza, peraltro, suscitare sospetti, timori e ripulse. In questo clima, che meriterebbe sicuramente qualche indagine storico-filosofica più approfondita, appariva importante richiamarsi, soprattutto da parte di chi provava nei confronti di quella filosofia avversione o diffidenza, a un filosofo che era stato, a quel che sembrava e si raccontava, un filosofo analitico militante, ma che della filosofia analitica aveva poi messo in evidenza, con insistenza e arguzia, le molte debolezze e le diverse distorsioni.⁵ Per chi voleva opporsi alla filosofia analitica o contrastarne l'avanzata era, insomma, importante dar la parola a un filosofo che quella filosofia era in grado di incalzare, per così dire, sul suo stesso terreno, avendola conosciuta molto da vicino e praticata con grande successo e non pochi riconoscimenti.⁶ Tra l'altro, si potevano così

preventivamente parare le accuse di quanti sostenevano che molte delle critiche allora rivolte alla filosofia analitica avevano come bersaglio non la filosofia analitica “così come effettivamente era,” ma una sorta di fantoccio prodotto da una mescolanza di ignoranza, pregiudizi, paure e preclusioni ideologiche. Non va, infatti, dimenticato che l’idea che parecchi filosofi italiani si erano fatti della filosofia analitica era ben lungi dall’essere chiara e univoca. Per un verso, con “filosofia analitica” ci si riferiva a quella presunta forma di soggezione della filosofia alla scienza (o, come preferivano dire gli heideggeriani, alla scienza-tecnica) che sarebbe stata teorizzata e praticata dai neopositivisti, prima e dopo la loro fuga dall’Europa nazista, e che sarebbe stata alla base del loro programma apertamente anti-metafisico, per non dire anti-filosofico. Dall’altro,⁷ si avevano in mente quei cosiddetti “filosofi del linguaggio ordinario” nei confronti dei quali molti sembravano condividere quanto aveva scritto qualche anno prima Herbert Marcuse, quando aveva osservato che una filosofia come quella del “secondo” Wittgenstein, di John L. Austin e di Gilbert Ryle, segnava “il trionfo del pensiero positivo,” ossia di un pensiero che, trattando in “modo sprezzante le alternative all’uso comune delle parole,” provvedeva “una giustificazione intellettuale per quello che la società ha da tempo realizzato – vale a dire, la denigrazione dei modi alternativi di pensare che contraddicono l’universo stabilito di discorso” (Marcuse 1967: 186-94).⁸

- 3 Ma se Rorty poteva servire alla causa degli anti-analitici, egli poteva anche rappresentare, non senza un qualche sentore di paradosso, un luogo d’incontro e di scambio tra i filosofi analitici e quei filosofi che si riconoscevano in altri orientamenti di pensiero, in particolare nella tradizione ermeneutico-heideggeriana. In effetti, un filosofo come Rorty che parlava la lingua degli analitici, ma che comprendeva e, in parte, parlava anche quella, per esempio, di Martin Heidegger o di Hans-Georg Gadamer e che, a differenza di molti analitici, non disdegnava affatto di confrontarsi con la storia della filosofia poteva essere letto anche da un analitico, anche se scriveva di Jacques Derrida o di Jean-François Lyotard, così come poteva essere letto da chi analitico non era, anche quando scriveva di Quine o di Davidson. Non può, allora, stupire che la *Nota introduttiva* alla traduzione italiana di *La filosofia e lo specchio della natura* porti la firma congiunta di Diego Marconi, uno tra i più noti e influenti filosofi analitici, e di Gianni Vattimo, uno degli alfieri del pensiero ermeneutico-heideggeriano,⁹ e che essa rappresenti un evidente tentativo di rendere intelligibile il progetto filosofico di Rorty sia ai lettori analitici sia a quelli attirati (o incuriositi) dal suo approdo “ermeneutico.”¹⁰
- 4 In realtà, le cose sono andate diversamente da come ci si aspettava e forse si sperava. Nel corso degli anni, infatti, Rorty ha finito con l’essere disconosciuto sia dagli analitici, che si sono sempre meno riconosciuti nei suoi atteggiamenti filosofici e nella sua stessa scrittura filosofica, sia dai filosofi ermeneutico-heideggeriani, a cui il suo pensiero è apparso ancora troppo “analitico” e, in ogni caso, ben lontano dalla radicalità che essi cercavano nella filosofia.¹¹ Del resto, è difficile pensare che questi ultimi potessero riconoscersi in un filosofo che poteva scrivere che, una volta ammesso che “forse non ci sono questioni centrali o fondazionali in filosofia,” ciò che ci resta potrebbe essere “soltanto una filosofia come un *curiosare*” (Rorty 1994b: 135). Va anche sottolineato come il richiamo insistito di Rorty al pragmatismo americano, se poteva risultare non sgradito agli analitici,¹² non era sicuramente fatto per convincere i non-analitici, soprattutto di ascendenza heideggeriana, per molti dei quali il pragmatismo non era che una delle tante manifestazioni, e sicuramente non tra le più raffinate, di un’epoca

dominata dalla “desolante frenesia della tecnica scatenata e dell’organizzazione senza radici dell’uomo massificato” (Heidegger 1990: 48).

- 5 Ma c’è anche una seconda, e forse più importante, ragione che può spiegare la rilevanza riconosciuta a Rorty nella filosofia italiana degli ultimi due decenni del secolo scorso. In effetti, appare abbastanza evidente come molte idee e atteggiamenti filosofici di Rorty fossero, sotto più di un aspetto, in sintonia con un’atmosfera “anti-fondazionalista”¹³ che si era diffusa in quegli stessi anni nella filosofia italiana¹⁴ e che aveva condotto a parlare con sempre più insistenza di “crisi della ragione,” di “sapere senza fondamenti” o di “pensiero debole.” Ovviamente, questo “anti-fondazionalismo” non era un prodotto esclusivamente autoctono,¹⁵ ma ebbe in Italia sviluppi intensi e, per alcuni versi, originali. Ad ogni modo, non è un caso che due dei filosofi che più contribuirono a far conoscere Rorty in Italia siano stati Gianni Vattimo, uno dei curatori del volume *Il pensiero debole* (Rovatti & Vattimo 1986), e Aldo G. Gargani, che, dopo aver pubblicato *Il sapere senza fondamenti* (Gargani 1978), curerà l’anno dopo la raccolta di saggi significativamente, anche se un po’ ambiguamente, intitolata *La crisi della ragione* (Gargani 1979). Ovviamente, la storia filosofica di Gargani era molto diversa da quella di Vattimo, così come lo era, rispetto ad entrambi, quella di Rorty. Nondimeno, Rorty apparve sia a Vattimo che, ancor di più, a Gargani¹⁶ un prezioso e, forse, inaspettato alleato nell’impresa di dare un nuovo indirizzo alla filosofia come allora intesa e praticata in Italia (e non solo).
- 6 2. Quello che vorrei domandarmi in questo breve articolo è quale sia l’immagine di Rorty che, soprattutto con le sue prefazioni o introduzioni,¹⁷ Gargani ha voluto trasmettere al lettore italiano e che cosa egli riteneva che la filosofia italiana, così come si configurava negli ultimi due decenni del novecento, potesse imparare da Rorty e dal suo modo di prendere le distanze dalla Filosofia, ossia la filosofia “sistematica e fondante” (Marconi & Vattimo 1986: vii) con la effe enfaticamente maiuscola, a favore non di una qualche anti-filosofia, ma, piuttosto, di una “post-Filosofia,”¹⁸ di una filosofia con la effe sobriamente minuscola che, sapendosi “una voce,” una delle tante voci, “nella conversazione del genere umano,” si prefiggesse come suo “scopo essenziale [...] il mantenimento della conversazione, piuttosto che la scoperta della verità oggettiva” (Rorty 1986: 290).
- 7 Un buon punto di partenza può essere quello di considerare il modo in cui Gargani, ricorrendo alle diverse formulazioni di cui sono ricchi i saggi di Rorty, caratterizza quello che è l’obiettivo più esplicito di Rorty: abbandonare o accantonare la filosofia “come è stata intesa a partire da Kant” (*ibid.*: 11), ossia quella filosofia che si vuole “fondativa,” “sistematica” e “costruttiva,” cartesianamente capace di “rispondere allo scettico epistemologico” e basata su una “nozione di conoscenza come rappresentazione accurata” (*ibid.*: 9).¹⁹
- 8 La prima cosa che colpisce il lettore, e che doveva risultare abbastanza evidente a chi in Italia in quegli anni, avesse letto, prima di Rorty, Gargani, è la forte sintonia che lega, almeno per quanto riguarda la parte, diciamo così, critico-negativa, il filosofo italiano a quello americano. Ciò diventa ancora più lampante se si paragona *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* di Rorty, uscito nel 1979, a *Il sapere senza fondamenti* di Gargani, uscito l’anno prima. In effetti, quello che, secondo Gargani, è l’obiettivo perseguito da Rorty, almeno dal testo del 1979 in avanti, non sembra molto diverso da quello che egli si prefigge nel suo *Il sapere senza fondamenti*. Insomma, quello che scrive di Rorty, ossia che egli vuole affrancare l’“analisi filosofica contemporanea [...] dalla superstizione o

dall'isteria accademica di fondamenti logico-metafisici permanenti, astorici, sottratti, come dire, alle intemperie dello spazio e del tempo” (Gargani 1994: viii), Gargani lo avrebbe potuto scrivere, senza significative modifiche o aggiunte, anche di se stesso e del progetto filosofico intrapreso a partire dalla metà degli anni settanta. Basti ricordare, a questo riguardo, quei passaggi della *Prefazione a Il sapere senza fondamenti* in cui Gargani esplicita il duplice obiettivo del suo lavoro. Da una parte, come egli scrive con impliciti richiami (“abiti decisionali,” “abiti della condotta”) al pragmatismo, ciò che egli si propone di mostrare è (a) che “[l]e dottrine scientifiche e filosofiche hanno tratto il movimento della loro origine non da atteggiamenti di tipo esclusivamente cognitivo, ma anche dalla matrice costruttiva delle procedure e degli abiti decisionali che hanno disciplinato, nelle loro varie forme, la vita degli uomini” (Gargani 1978: vii); dall'altra, egli vuole indurci a riconoscere (b) che, “messe a confronto con le loro matrici costruttive, con gli abiti della condotta, con le procedure decisionali e operative, le istituzioni della scienza e della filosofia perdono il loro statuto di irrevocabilità e di inesorabilità,” rivelando così quanto “illusorie e fallaci” siano “le strategie epistemologiche di tipo fondazionale che sono andate e vanno tuttora alla caccia di certezze e sicurezze teoriche (*ibid.*: viii).

- 9 In realtà, a scorrere l'indice dei nomi di *Il sapere senza fondamenti* non si trova nessuno dei riferimenti che forse, dalla prospettiva odierna, ci si poteva aspettare. Non è citato Rorty, ma non è citato nemmeno Thomas Kuhn, lo storico e filosofo della scienza così importante per Rorty; né si trova traccia degli esponenti classici del pragmatismo americano (Charles S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey) o di quei filosofi analitici (o post-analitici) che ricorrono con insistenza nelle pagine di Rorty: Wilfrid Sellars, Willard V. O. Quine, Donald Davidson. Della triade Wittgenstein, Heidegger e Dewey, i “tre filosofi più importanti del nostro secolo” (Rorty 1986: 9), solo Wittgenstein compare a più riprese in *Il sapere senza fondamenti*. Ma, com'è ovvio, Wittgenstein non è semplicemente citato, essendo egli il vero ispiratore e nume tutelare di queste pagine, al punto che certi passaggi, come il seguente, suonano quasi come dei commenti a Wittgenstein: “Le certezze e le garanzie ricercate dalle dottrine fondazionaliste non si possono incontrare, non già perché saremmo sprovvisti di fondamenti teorici basici e rocciosi, ma in quanto la stessa matrice costruttiva e operativa della scienza è, in ultima analisi, senza fondamento. [...] [A]lla fine di ogni ricerca si arriva al punto in cui si deve dire. Facciamo così e basta.” (Gargani 1978: viii).
- 10 In ogni caso, leggendo quello che Gargani scrive su Rorty è difficile evitare l'impressione che, parlando di Rorty, egli ci parli anche di se stesso: ciò vale, per esempio, quando ci ricorda che “[q]uello contro cui si batte Rorty è in sostanza il filosofo idealizzato, portatore di visioni totalizzanti e permanenti della realtà” (Gargani 1994: xi) e, soprattutto, quando precisa che “la figura umana disegnata da Rorty non è quella di un soggetto portatore di razionalità nei termini di principi apriorici-atemporali e di procedure di legittimazione canoniche e normalizzate. Non è quella cioè della tradizione instaurata da Descartes, Locke e Kant sino a Husserl, ma è quella di un essere umano che è un intreccio di desideri e di credenze” (*ibid.*: ix), di “emozioni” (*ibid.*: x) e di “intenzioni” (*ibid.*: xv).²⁰
- 11 Del resto, come non è difficile constatare, queste sono, più o meno, le idee che stanno alla base di *La crisi della ragione*, una raccolta di saggi curata da Gargani, che porta come significativo sottotitolo *Nuovi modelli nel rapporto tra sapere e attività umane*, e che uscirà nel 1979 suscitando, negli anni immediatamente successivi, dibattiti e polemiche e

guadagnandosi anche, in alcuni casi, l'accusa di irrazionalismo.²¹ Una accusa, a dir poco, ingiusta, se si considera che quella ragione di cui nel titolo si dichiarava la crisi era, per Gargani, un mito o un feticcio della filosofia, in particolare di quella filosofia cartesiana e post-cartesiana che aveva coltivato la pretesa, del tutto illusoria, di fare dell'uomo (e del filosofo) "il soggetto portatore di una razionalità universale" (Gargani 1994: xv). Per questo, anche della raccolta del 1979 si potrebbe dire quello che Gargani afferma del libro del 1978, ossia che uno dei suoi scopi principali è di farci riconoscere che "[u]na prassi infondata non deve essere qui intesa come un sintomo di irrazionalità o come un elogio del disordine" (Gargani 1978: viii).²²

- 12 3. Non deve, allora, stupire che, contro questo mito della ragione, Gargani mostri di concordare con l'antropologia "naturalizzata" di Rorty (Gargani 1994: xv), ossia con una antropologia che guarda all'uomo come a una "creatura naturalizzata che reagisce, attraverso il filtro delle sue credenze e dei suoi desideri, agli stimoli, alle perturbazioni, alle ansie che gli provengono dall'ambiente esterno" (*ibid.*: x). Tra l'altro, è questo approccio "naturalizzato" che consente di sottrarsi all'oscillazione tra realismo e idealismo (umanismo) e di recuperare con ciò la lezione del pragmatismo americano di James e di Dewey. Nei suoi testi introduttivi, Gargani insiste, a ragione, sull'importanza che per l'elaborazione di questa antropologia "naturalizzata" ha avuto Davidson. Seguendo Davidson,²³ infatti, Rorty può riconoscere (contro l'idealismo)²⁴ che l'ambiente o il mondo esterno modifica gli uomini, esercitando un'azione causale su di essi (vedi Gargani 1994: xv), ma può anche affermare (contro il realismo o un certo tipo di realismo delle cose "in sé")²⁵ che "queste cause [...] non contengono il significato dell'effetto, che viene invece elaborato dal soggetto il quale, ritessendo le proprie credenze che sono abitudini all'azione, produce [sulla base delle sue intenzioni e desideri e di un particolare sfondo culturale] una reazione adatta all'ambiente" (*ibid.*: xv). Da questo punto di vista, il "causalismo" di Rorty (e di Davidson), proprio perché riconosce che un organismo non "recepisce l'effetto di una causa passivamente, [...] ma [...] elabora una risposta" è del tutto differente dal "causalismo naturalistico della tradizione positivista" (*ibid.*: xvi); allo stesso tempo, un "causalismo" così inteso ci mette al riparo dalla tentazione idealistica. Infatti, la realtà non è né per Davidson né per Rorty, ma nemmeno per Gargani, "plasmata dall'uomo." In questo senso, afferma Gargani, Rorty "è un pragmatista più che un umanista" (*ibid.*: x). E lo stesso, si potrebbe dire, vale per Gargani, almeno per quanto riguarda il punto in questione.
- 13 Non va qui nemmeno dimenticato, come peraltro Gargani si affretta a sottolineare, che questo "causalismo" costituisce un'ulteriore tappa nella battaglia condotta da Rorty contro il "rappresentazionalismo," ossia contro l'idea che entrare in rapporto con il mondo significhi rappresentarselo. Per questa concezione, insomma, tra il soggetto e il mondo vi è sempre un "medium di rappresentazione" (Rorty 1994b: 145) o una "interfaccia" (*ibid.*: 134). Poco importa qui che questa interfaccia sia costituita, come pensava Locke, dalle idee o, come pensano i filosofi della svolta linguistica, dal linguaggio. Infatti, il problema non è quale sia questo medium, ma perché mai dovremmo pensare che occorra un qualche medium o interfaccia.²⁶ Contro il rappresentazionalismo così inteso e nello spirito del pragmatismo, occorre piuttosto riconoscere, come scrive Gargani interpretando Rorty, che "[p]arlare, dire, asserire, domandare, rispondere non sono modi di rappresentare la realtà, di porsi faccia a faccia con il mondo, ma sono essi stessi azioni, modi di spuntarla con l'ambiente, strumenti per far fronte alle perturbazioni, all'alea delle turbolenze che si originano dal mondo esterno" (Gargani 1994: xi).²⁷ Peraltro, va necessariamente precisato che a

questa antropologia “naturalizzata” non corrisponde alcuna concezione “riduzionistica” del mondo esterno, come mostrano, e nel modo più evidente, gli esempi con cui Gargani illustra il punto: “Il mondo esterno esercita un’azione causale sugli uomini, i quali non possono fare a meno di avere una coscienza modificata se improvvisamente si apre una porta che fa loro percepire un nuovo scenario, se viene loro mostrato un documento o una fotografia dai quali risulta che il loro migliore amico è un criminale anti-semita, se qualcuno dà un bacio oppure uno schiaffo, se improvvisamente una notte uno sconosciuto emette il suo grido ignoto.” (*Ibid.*: xv).

- 14 4. A voler riassumere, possiamo dire che sono almeno tre i tratti o gli aspetti della Filosofia (con la maiuscola) su cui Gargani, in sintonia con Rorty, insiste criticamente. Il primo tratto è costituito da quel modello di razionalità, che ha segnato l’intera tradizione metafisica occidentale, secondo cui la razionalità consiste “nello stato di costrizione sotto regole” (Gargani 1994: xi), “*nell’essere costretti da regole*” (Gargani 1989: xiv). Come ci ricorda Gargani, è proprio questa concezione “a costituire il bersaglio critico dell’opera di Rorty” (*ibid.*). A sua volta, questa concezione o modello della razionalità è strettamente collegata al predominio, nella tradizione occidentale, di quella che Rorty chiama “epistemologia” e che si può identificare, usando le parole dagli echi wittgensteiniani di Gargani, con la pretesa “di arrampicarci con la mente là dove nessuna mente umana può installarsi allo scopo di domandarsi, come hanno fatto Platone, Descartes, Locke, Kant, Russell, Kripke, Dummett, B. Williams, T. Nagel, qual è il rapporto fra le nostre rappresentazioni e la realtà effettiva” (Gargani 1994: ix). Per l’epistemologia, insomma, “il mondo esterno,” il mondo “là fuori,” costituisce “l’oggetto di rappresentazioni” che sono “prodotte nel *foro interno* del soggetto conoscente” (Gargani 1989: xiv).²⁸ Secondo questa prospettiva, si può anche dire, le teorie “sono specchi delle cose come esse sono in sé,” e non “espressioni delle modalità alternative di trarre inferenze che si confrontano tra loro” (Gargani 2003: xix). Ciò significa che non siamo noi, con i nostri vocabolari, che facciamo parlare le cose, ma sono le cose che parlano, per così dire, da sole (vedi Gargani 2003: xix). Il terzo tratto, emerso soprattutto con Kant, ma ancora operante nella filosofia contemporanea, anche in quella analitica, è costituito dall’idea che la posizione della filosofia sia quella “di giudice delle altre aree della cultura, sulla base della sua speciale conoscenza dei ‘fondamenti’ di queste aree” (Rorty 1986: 11).
- 15 Ovviamente, a questo modo di intendere la tradizione metafisica “platonizzante” (Gargani 1994: ix) dell’Occidente andrebbe dedicato molto spazio, iniziando probabilmente dalla domanda se si sia mai dato o sia mai esistito qualcosa di simile. Qui mi limito ad alcune osservazioni conclusive suggerite dai testi introduttivi di Gargani. Come abbiamo visto, Gargani si domanda più di una volta, con Rorty, come ci si possa affrancare “dalla superstizione di [...] fondamenti logico-metafisici permanenti, astorici” (Gargani 1994: viii). C’è tuttavia un passo in cui egli sembra suggerire che di questi “fondamenti logico-metafisici” ce ne siamo già, volenti o nolenti, liberati, se è vero, come egli scrive, che “[s]tiamo vivendo un’epoca filosofica²⁹ che ci intriga proprio per la varietà dei vocabolari che vi sono in gioco” e che “[s]iamo immersi in uno scenario culturale che è incendiato da segni, indicazioni, messaggi e prospettive che non possiamo, e forse non vogliamo assestare entro la griglia teorica di una sintesi definitiva e conclusiva” (Gargani 1989: ix). Sembra quasi che quella che Gargani chiama la “utopia postmetafisica e liberale di Rorty,” la quale “pone l’accento sulla varietà dei

vocabolari e delle narrazioni³⁰ con cui gli uomini possono dar senso al mondo che li circonda” (Gargani 2003: xviii), sia già, per così dire, la “realtà” della nostra epoca.

- 16 Di solito il problema che questa “utopia” pone agli interpreti è se questo porre l’accento sulla varietà imprevedibile o incalcolabile, nel senso di “non regolata da [...] ‘algoritmi’ o ‘programmi’” (Putnam 1992: 40), dei vocabolari non equivalga a negare la validità della “funzione razionale e argomentativa” (Gargani 2003: xviii). La risposta di Gargani è che non è così; quella funzione “mantiene la sua validità ovviamente in quanto controllo della coerenza delle inferenze nell’ambito e all’interno di un certo definito sistema sociale e linguistico,” ossia nell’ambito di quello che, seguendo Kuhn, possiamo chiamare “discorso normale” (*ibid.*).³¹ Le stesse considerazioni possono valere, del resto, per la nozione di verità. Certo, il ruolo che la nozione di verità ha avuto nella cultura umana appare a Rorty “sovraestimato e perfino ossessivo” (Gargani 2003: vii). Infatti, secondo Rorty, almeno per come lo interpreta Gargani, “la verità non rispecchia l’oggettività del mondo come esso è in sé, ma è l’espressione storica del consenso condiviso dalla comunità linguistica dei parlanti” (*ibid.*: ix).³² Non per questo, se ne deve concludere che la parola “vero” non ha alcun uso. Per esempio, essa ha un uso “cautelare” che è quello che troviamo in espressioni come “pienamente giustificato ma forse non vero” (Rorty 2003: 23).³³
- 17 Vi è tuttavia una questione diversa che quanto appena detto solleva. Viene, infatti, da domandarsi se alla filosofia edificante di Rorty non si possano rivolgere le stesse obiezioni che Gargani altrove rivolge a quelle che chiama “le culture dei *paradigmi*, delle *versioni del mondo*, degli *schemi concettuali*” (Gargani 1987: 5). Una volta criticata, con Rorty, l’idea che la verità consista “nel *combaciare* di una rappresentazione con qualcosa, con un dato” o nell’“*adeguamento* di un’immagine o di una rappresentazione a qualcosa” (*ibid.*: 7), non resta, infatti, ancora da domandarsi quale sia la necessità e la verità³⁴ di quello che diciamo e scriviamo? Come osserva ancora Gargani, “[è] controintuitivo impegnarsi su qualcosa il cui significato è in linea di principio esperito come qualcosa di non diverso dall’aggiungere un’ulteriore versione del mondo [un ulteriore vocabolario] alla collezione di quelle già esistenti. Sembra che si renda necessario un effetto di attrito, un ritorno sul terreno dell’attrito per fare proprio tutte quelle cose che i filosofi chiamano versioni del mondo, paradigmi di visioni o schemi concettuali” (*ibid.*: 6), ma anche, forse, vocabolari.
- 18 Ma dove cercare questo attrito? Una risposta Gargani non sembra aspettarsela né da Rorty né dal pragmatismo. A un certo punto, egli sembra addirittura riporre le sue speranze in Heidegger, ma non in quello di *Essere e tempo*, apprezzato da Rorty, ma nello Heidegger di quella ontologia dell’essere che Rorty, da parte sua, respinge “quale nuova imposizione di un sovrano essere metafisico” (Gargani 1993a: 171). Secondo Gargani, però, Rorty respinge l’ontologia di Heidegger senza vedere che questa ontologia, che considera “il linguaggio come un essere che è punto di applicazione dell’ascolto e dell’interrogazione, è la condizione che consente di revocare [in maniera più radicale di quanto non abbia saputo fare la tradizione pragmatista da James fino a Rorty incluso]³⁵ verità e significato come corrispondenza,” nel senso di “corrispondenza a una qualche realtà già data e prestabilita” (*ibid.*). Nell’ontologia di Heidegger, infatti, la parola “si inaugura non come un atto di enunciazione di un messaggio o di un contenuto prestabilito o da lungo tempo preparato, bensì come parola che emerge [...] dal vuoto nel quale è perennemente coinvolta” (*ibid.*: 172). Qui non è possibile valutare il senso e tutta la portata di questo richiamo a Heidegger e alla ontologia dell’essere che irrompe,

per così dire, nelle pagine di Gargani e che resta, almeno in parte, allo stato grezzo. Basti ricordare che, nonostante tutto, questo “impiego” della ontologia heideggeriana è ancora, per Gargani, un modo per continuare il suo confronto con Rorty.

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NOTE

1. Come scriveva Marconi (1994: 7), "Rorty è oggi uno dei filosofi più letti e discussi." Anche in Francia Rorty conobbe un certo successo, grazie soprattutto a Jean-Pierre Cometti, che tradusse alcuni suoi saggi (vedi Rorty 1990 e Rorty 1994c) e si impegnò a farne conoscere il pensiero (vedi, per esempio, Cometti 1992).
2. Non si può, tuttavia, evitare di sottolineare come questo abbia prodotto ben pochi studi approfonditi sul pensiero di Rorty. Oltre alle prefazioni/introduzioni di Gargani su cui torneremo in questo saggio e a Marconi & Vattimo 1986 e Marconi 1994, si deve almeno ricordare Restaino 1990.
3. Per farsi una prima idea del clima e dei problemi che agitavano la filosofia italiana nel corso degli anni ottanta è ancora utile Jacobelli 1986.
4. Basti ricordare che la fondazione della Società Italiana di Filosofia Analitica (SIFA) risale solo al 1992.
5. Su alcune pecche e limiti di questa ricostruzione del percorso filosofico di Rorty si veda Calcaterra (2016: 21-50).

6. Come si legge nella *Nota introduttiva* alla traduzione italiana di *La filosofia e lo specchio della natura*, “[i]l libro ha [...] anche il carattere di un’autocritica della filosofia analitica: critica condotta da un filosofo di formazione analitica, nel linguaggio della filosofia analitica e con argomenti almeno in parte elaborati in seno alla tradizione analitica” (Marconi & Vattimo 1986: viii-ix).
7. Dalla prospettiva italiana, i due orientamenti filosofici non apparivano così distinti e diversi come potevano apparire agli occhi dei loro rispettivi esponenti.
8. Come scrive Marcuse (1967: 191), in quanto espressione estrema del “pensiero positivo,” la filosofia del linguaggio ordinario disconosce radicalmente “il diritto, il *bisogno* di pensare e di parlare in termini diversi da quelli dell’uso comune, ossia in termini che sono densi di significato, razionali e validi, precisamente perché sono diversi.” Peraltro, l’atteggiamento che traspare in questo e altri passi di Marcuse non è molto lontano da quello assunto da Rorty nei confronti dei filosofi del linguaggio ordinario; vedi, per esempio, Rorty (1994b: 96-9); per un commento Marconi (1994: 12-3).
9. Ovviamente, non va dimenticato che Marconi e Vattimo condividevano lo stesso maestro, Luigi Pareyson, e la stessa formazione torinese, anche se le loro strade filosofiche sono andate, nel corso dei decenni, sempre più divergendo.
10. Si ricordi che il capitolo 7 di *La filosofia e lo specchio della natura* si intitola “Dall’epistemologia all’ermeneutica.”
11. Da questo punto di vista, potremmo dire che la sorte di Rorty è stata, per certi aspetti, simile a quella di Gadamer, ossia a un filosofo che, pur provenendo da Heidegger, non è quasi mai stato considerato all’altezza della radicalità filosofica del suo maestro.
12. Almeno nella misura in cui era in gioco la figura di Charles S. Peirce, il pragmatista che gli analitici sentivano filosoficamente più vicino. Più problematico poteva risultare agli occhi degli analitici la grande importanza che Rorty assegnava, più che a Peirce, a William James e, soprattutto, a John Dewey. Vedi, al riguardo, Calcaterra (2016: 21-32).
13. L’“anti-fondazionalismo” era strettamente legato ad atteggiamenti che potremmo chiamare “anti-realisti” e “anti-essenzialisti.”
14. Ovviamente, in quegli stessi anni erano presenti nella filosofia italiana anche molti altri e diversi orientamenti filosofici: filosofia neoscolastica, fenomenologia, marxismo, ecc. ecc.
15. A creare questa atmosfera contribuiscono diversi apporti e influenze, da Heidegger e l’ermeneutica filosofica al decostruzionismo di Derrida, dall’idea di postmodernità (Lyotard, ecc.) alla “nuova” filosofia della scienza post-neopositivistica (Kuhn, Feyerabend, ecc.) e al pensiero del “secondo” Wittgenstein.
16. Non va dimenticato che Gargani e Rorty condividevano lo stesso interesse per Wittgenstein e che la conoscenza da parte di Gargani della filosofia analitica era sicuramente più profonda e simpatetica di quella che si poteva attribuire a Vattimo.
17. Ricordo che Gargani ha scritto la prefazione/introduzione di Rorty 1989, Rorty 1993, Rorty 1994a, Rorty 2003.
18. Sulla nozione di “post-Filosofia” vedi Calcaterra (2016: 43-50).
19. Rorty qui si richiama, in particolare, a Wittgenstein, Heidegger e Dewey, osservando che ciò in cui essi concordano è “che deve essere abbandonata la nozione di conoscenza come rappresentazione accurata, resa possibile da processi mentali speciali e comprensibile attraverso una teoria generale della rappresentazione” (*ibid.*).
20. In questo senso, essa è “[p]iù vicina [...] alla psicoanalisi che non all’epistemologia logicizzante che da Kant arriva sino al Circolo di Vienna, al neo-positivismo logico, alla filosofia analitica delle scuole di Oxford e di Cambridge, di Harvard e di Princeton. La figura umana delineata da Rorty somiglia maggiormente ai personaggi della tradizione del romanzo europeo [...] che non al paradigma ideale del filosofo analitico [...] capace, come scrive Rorty, di ‘fornirci

un fondamento per l'opera futura nel campo della filosofia del linguaggio o, in generale, in campo filosofico.'” (Gargani 1994: ix).

21. Peraltro, gli autori dei saggi raccolti nel volume (oltre a Gargani, C. Ginzburg, G. Lepschy, F. Orlando, F. Rella, V. Strada, R. Bodei, N. Badaloni, S. Veca, C. A. Viano) erano difficilmente accusabili di irrazionalismo.

22. È qui evidente il richiamo alle annotazioni di Wittgenstein pubblicate con il titolo *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein 1969). Va ricordato che nel 1978 ne esce la traduzione italiana con il titolo *Della certezza* e con un saggio introduttivo proprio di Gargani.

23. O dicendo di seguirlo. Se tutto quello che Rorty fa dire a Davidson sarebbe stato effettivamente condiviso da Davidson è un problema ancora del tutto aperto. Su questo e sull'importanza di Davidson per Rorty si veda Calcaterra (2016: 80-7).

24. Qui idealista è chi sostiene che le cose (“gli alberi, le rocce, i mari, i continenti, le stelle, le menti altrui”) sono plasmate “come costruzioni della mente umana” (Gargani 1994: xvi).

25. Per questo realista le cose “esistono per se stesse” e si tratta solo di scoprirle (Gargani 1994: xvi). Va notato che, secondo Gargani o il Rorty di Gargani, “[a]lla fine, anche se può apparire paradossale, bisognerà rinfrescare le nozioni di realismo, di causalità, di ambiente esterno” (*ibid.*: xiv). Quell'inciso (“anche se può apparire paradossale”) è una efficace testimonianza del clima filosofico della fine del secolo scorso.

26. Da questo punto di vista, l'importanza della svolta linguistica per la filosofia è che, favorendo “il passaggio dal discettare sull'esperienza come medium di rappresentazione al parlare di linguaggio come tale medium,” ha contribuito alla fin fine “all'accantonamento della nozione stessa di rappresentazione” (Rorty 1994b: 145-6); vedi, su questo punto, Marconi (1994: 15-6).

27. “Per Rorty, l'uomo interagisce con le cose e le persone, piuttosto che raffigurarsele.” (Gargani 1994: xi).

28. Questa caratterizzazione vale, ovviamente, per la filosofia moderna da Descartes in avanti; ma la stessa “concezione della conoscenza nei termini di un'essenza rispecchiante [...] una realtà che sta ‘là fuori’” si trova anche nella filosofia greca che considera l'essere come “l'oggetto di una visione intellettuale purificata dai sensi” (Gargani 1989: xiv).

29. Si ricordi che queste parole sono scritte alla fine degli anni Ottanta del secolo scorso.

30. Con “edificazione” e “filosofia edificante” Rorty indica il “progetto per la scoperta di maniere di parlare nuove, migliori, più interessanti e più fruttuose. [...] [I]l discorso edificante si suppone che sia anormale, che ci tragga fuori dai nostri vecchi io con la forza dell'estraneità, e ci aiuti a diventare degli esseri nuovi” (Rorty 1986: 276).

31. Su questo punto si veda, però, la critica rivolta a Rorty da Hilary Putnam (1992: 39-46).

32. Questa “sdivinizzazione della verità” (Gargani 2003: vii) è parte di quello che Gargani descrive come “il passaggio da una cultura della rappresentazione accurata e mimetica della realtà, assunta come principale motore di ricerca, a una nuova, inedita cultura che nei più diversi campi e nelle più svariate forme non ha per oggetto la rappresentazione di qualcosa, di un mondo davanti, ‘out there,’ là fuori” (*ibid.*: ix).

33. L'uso cautelare di “vero” equivale all'avvertenza “che la giustificazione è relativa a un uditorio e non si può mai escludere la possibilità che esista, o venga in essere, un uditorio migliore per il quale una credenza giustificabile per noi non sarebbe più tale.” Qui “migliore” significa: “un uditorio meglio informato [dell'uditorio dato] e insieme più ricco di immaginazione, un uditorio capace di pensare alternative finora mai sognate alla credenza che viene proposta.” (Rorty 2003: 23). Ovviamente, non si possono nascondere le molte e diverse difficoltà a cui formulazioni come queste vanno incontro.

34. Scrive Gargani (1987: 7): “Vero è un termine primitivo, che indica il riconoscimento dell'incontro di un pensiero con la necessità di questo pensiero.” (*Ibid.*). E anche: “Ciò che essi [gli uomini] cercano è l'origine della necessità che li ha fatti pensare, odiare, scrivere e dipingere.” (*Ibid.*).

35. “Anche l’interpretazione della verità nel senso di ‘ciò che è buono o utile da credere,’ di quello che risulta valido *in the way of belief* nella tradizione pragmatista che da William James arriva sino a Richard Rorty, anziché spodestare, come essa ha creduto, le nozioni tradizionali della verità e del significato come corrispondenza, ha finito per riconfermarle con la variante che, ora, anziché essere strutture della realtà o tavole di valori eterni a dover essere conformate o corrisposte, sono atteggiamenti della credenza che devono essere conformati o corrisposti dai giudizi e dalle azioni.” (Gargani 1993a: 177).

RIASSUNTI

The article sheds light on some points of convergence between Rorty’s theoretical proposal to reject systematic and foundational philosophy favoring a “post-Philosophy” and Gargani’s idea of knowledge without foundations. In particular, the article argues how Gargani’s interpretation of Rorty’s thought is in line with Gargani’s critique of universal and ahistorical rationality in favor of naturalized anthropology, expressing in a praxis that, although without foundations, is not an expression of irrationality. The last part of the article highlights some differences between Gargani and Rorty on the possibility of adopting some different facets of Heidegger’s thought.

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Essays

Rorty deflazionista

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- ¹ Nel presente articolo intendo proporre una ricostruzione della filosofia della mente di Richard Rorty, volta a mostrarne sia la sistematicità che taluni esiti piuttosto originali e poco considerati in ambito critico. Prenderò le mosse da un articolo molto importante del periodo giovanile immediatamente successivo al rifiuto del fisicalismo radicale,¹ *Incorregibility as the Mark of the Mental*, nel quale Rorty prende appunto posizione sul tema del marchio del mentale. Si tratta di un lavoro piuttosto interessante perché, se da un lato pone le basi teoretiche per i successivi sviluppi della concezione rortyana del mentale, dall'altro rappresenta anche uno spaccato significativo dei dibattiti che in quegli anni impegnavano la filosofia della mente. Una volta evidenziato come il risultato di quel lavoro sia una concezione debole del marchio del mentale, cercherò di sottolineare in che modo questa idea sfocerà nel testo più noto di Rorty: *La filosofia e lo specchio della natura*. Infine, una volta messi in luce i principali risultati del testo del 1979, ne mostrerò le conseguenze per quanto concerne lo specifico problema degli oggetti finzionali, affrontato da Rorty nel saggio *Esiste un problema a proposito del discorso immaginario?* L'idea è di evidenziare come la concezione di Rorty approdi a esiti che possono essere interpretati in una direzione deflazionista per quanto riguarda gli oggetti intenzionali, che per certi versi pare compatibile con le posizioni recentemente assunte da Crane.

1. Il paradosso di Rorty

- ² Nel dibattuto articolo intitolato *Incorregibility as the Mark of the Mental*, pubblicato nel 1970 e da molti considerato una vera e propria summa della filosofia della mente degli anni Sessanta (Leach & Tartaglia 2014: 10),² Rorty argomenta a favore della tesi per cui i resoconti neutrali delle asserzioni mentalistiche, così come vengono proposti dai materialisti, sono insoddisfacenti, non essendo in grado di cogliere effettivamente l'elemento mentalistico presente nelle medesime asserzioni. Per Rorty, infatti, al fine di isolare il suddetto elemento è necessario insistere sull'incorreggibilità dei resoconti in prima persona degli stati mentali ed è proprio questa istanza, peraltro, a costituire il principale ostacolo al materialismo stesso.

- 3 L'idea alla base del tentativo di proporre resoconti neutrali va rinvenuta nello sforzo di evitare "l'obiezione delle proprietà irriducibili" mossa contro la tesi materialistica dell'identità tra gli stati cerebrali e gli stati mentali. Proprio questa è la direzione intrapresa agli inizi degli anni Sessanta da Smart (Smart 1959) e ripresa poi da Armstrong (Armstrong 1968), le cui posizioni vengono discusse con grande attenzione nell'articolo del 1970.
- 4 Il punto che Rorty evidenzia come problematico, nella strategia materialistica, ha a che fare con la nozione di sinonimia. Infatti, per mostrare che tutte le proprietà attribuibili agli stati mentali sono proprietà di stati cerebrali, la strategia adottata per esempio da Smart consiste nel tradurre enunciati come quelli relativi alle sensazioni con enunciati equivalenti riferiti a stati cerebrali. Vale a dire, per esempio, tradurre "sto avendo una sensazione di rosso" con "qualcosa sta accadendo dentro di me come ciò che accade quando vedo qualcosa di rosso." Smart ritiene quindi che il secondo enunciato sia un perfetto sinonimo del primo e che, in virtù di ciò, possa "significare" la medesima proprietà.
- 5 Sostenere questa posizione non è certo facile, appare anzi piuttosto dubitabile che gli enunciati indicati da Smart come traduzione delle asserzioni riferite alle sensazioni possano essere considerati delle traduzioni in senso stretto.³ Come sottolinea peraltro lo stesso Rorty, Smart sembra essere consapevole dei problemi insiti in una simile posizione, al punto da giungere a sostenere non un'equivalenza stretta tra gli enunciati ma solo che non esistendo le sensazioni così come vengono intese nei resoconti del senso comune, le funzioni esplicative svolte dalle asserzioni che si riferiscono a queste pseudo-entità sono meglio svolte facendo diretto riferimento ai processi cerebrali.
- 6 I materialisti, quindi, una volta esclusa la possibilità di rendere i resoconti neutrali come delle traduzioni autentiche, hanno davanti due opzioni:
1. Scavalcare il principio per cui le proprietà sono identiche solo se i termini che le identificano possiedono lo stesso significato;
 2. Adottare il principio secondo il quale due cose possono essere identiche, filosoficamente parlando, anche se non mostrano in senso stretto le stesse proprietà.
- 7 Il punto 1 è esemplificato dalla concezione della mente proposta da Armstrong. Tale concezione, proprio nel tentativo di seguire la strategia esemplificata in 1, va incontro per Rorty a un problema di difficile soluzione: si tende infatti, perseguendo tale idea, a identificare il mentale con qualcosa che può rivelarsi parimenti un riferimento all'identificare la dimensione fisica. In altri termini, date due categorie mutualmente esclusive, si finisce per indicarle con un qualcosa che potrebbe appartenere a entrambe. Proprio questo avverrebbe nella proposta di Armstrong, dal momento che la sua "definizione di stato mentale abbraccia molte cose che generalmente sono classificate come stati fisici" (Rorty 1970: 150).⁴
- 8 Il tentativo di replica, proposto da Armstrong, si basa sul concetto di complessità delle cause. Ovvero sull'idea che il concetto di stato mentale sia identificabile con il concetto di una causa la cui complessità rispecchia la complessità del comportamento che è in grado di mettere in atto. Ma, data questa impostazione, il solo grado di complessità effettivamente misurabile è quello del comportamento stesso, non dello stato disposizionale che si crede possa averlo prodotto. In altre parole, questo tentativo di soluzione si fonda in realtà su di un'aprioristica assunzione del dualismo tra stati materiali e immateriali o, per meglio dire, tra cause materiali e comportamento

manifesto, ovvero di quel medesimo dualismo che il materialismo intende criticare. Lo stesso Armstrong, d'altro canto, ammette che, da questo punto di vista, la teoria dello stato centrale è “pericolosamente vicina ad ammettere le disposizioni del comportamentismo” (Armstrong 1968: 85). Tuttavia, ad avviso del filosofo australiano, c'è una profonda differenza tra le due posizioni nella misura in cui il comportamentismo mantiene una trattazione fenomenica delle disposizioni, mentre la teoria dello stato centrale ne propone una fortemente realista. Per Rorty, però, tutto ciò non risolve davvero il problema: “assumere una tale visione realista equivale a dire che c'è qualche spiegazione, anche se sconosciuta, di una data disposizione e che tale spiegazione non deve essere anch'essa data in termini di proprietà disposizionali.” (Rorty 1970: 151).

- 9 In fin dei conti, però, attribuire una proprietà disposizionale equivale a sostenere che un “dato condizionale congiuntivo è vero” (*ibid.*: 152). Ma, continua Rorty, i condizionali congiuntivi derivano dalle generalizzazioni nomologiche e risulta pertanto difficile dire quale nuova asserzione di tipo nomologico sia in grado di attribuire disposizioni e quale, al contrario, semplici “caratteristiche categoriali.” La sola risposta possibile, nella prospettiva di Armstrong, è assimilare spiegazioni micro-strutturali al rinvenimento di caratteristiche categoriali come avviene nell'esempio, da lui stesso citato, in cui una nuova brillantezza del vetro viene spiegata tramite il ricorso a schemi molecolari. In sostanza, pertanto, “quando ci limitiamo a rinvenire una nuova legge che regola il comportamento di un'entità, senza trovare o postulare alcuna nuova entità, abbiamo semplicemente spiegato una disposizione tramite un'altra disposizione. Ma quando troviamo o postuliamo nuove entità, stiamo spiegando una disposizione facendo riferimento a uno stato categoriale.” (*Ibid.*: 152).
- 10 La conseguenza di questa analisi è che, se si accetta il modello del mentale proposto da Armstrong, accanto alla concezione realista delle disposizioni, il materialismo viene assunto come modello di riferimento a priori senza che sia possibile giustificare tale assunzione. Ovvero, il mentale non può essere una sorta di reame autosufficiente poiché gli stati mentali, in quanto stati disposizionali, non possono avere le proprie basi categoriali in altri stati mentali, ma in entità fisiche.
- 11 Le conseguenze dell'esame proposto da Rorty della teoria dello stato centrale convergono nell'indicare come il materiale sia una nozione vuota senza il riferimento al mentale e che concetti come quello di immateriale assumono senso soltanto se il mentale è dato come una sua istanza. Quindi, assumere il punto di vista della teoria dello stato centrale equivale a impegnarsi metafisicamente asserendo l'esistenza di entità fisiche la cui natura consiste nel rendere le proprietà disposizionali ciò che effettivamente sono.
- 12 In definitiva, la rielaborazione di Armstrong di posizioni come quella proposta da Smart finisce per ricadere nella medesima incongruenza; entrambe le concezioni, infatti, riducendo la nozione di mentale all'idea di una relazione, più o meno misteriosa, tra entità fisiche, “priva la nozione di ‘fisico’ del proprio senso, eliminandone l'opposizione con un altro reame d'esistenza incompatibile con tale nozione” (*ibid.*: 154). Ecco emergere quello che ho definito, intitolando il presente paragrafo, il *paradosso di Rorty*. Esso consiste dunque nel mostrare come, riducendo il mentale al fisico, alla maniera del materialismo dello stato centrale, lo stesso fisico perde la propria consistenza nel momento in cui viene destrutturato il solo concetto in opposizione al quale poteva definirsi.

2. Eventi vs Caratteristiche

- 13 È ancora con Cartesio, dunque, che bisogna fare i conti poiché, come attestato tanto dalla posizione di Smart, quanto da quella di Armstrong, il senso ordinario in cui parliamo di mentale è intriso ancora di convincimenti dualistici. Chiarire questo punto costituisce pertanto la mossa di partenza in qualsiasi discussione sul marchio del mentale. Rorty tenta di farlo muovendo dal distinguere due nozioni di mentale. Nella prima, quella degli *eventi mentali*, rientrano pensieri e sensazioni. Con pensieri Rorty intende solo quel tipo di entità cui si fa riferimento tramite asserzioni del tipo: “il pensiero che *p* improvvisamente mi ha colpito.” Con sensazioni, invece, si riferisce non alle percezioni, ma alle entità riportate in resoconti come: “ho una sensazione di rosso” o “ho una sensazione di dolore alla gamba.” Detto altrimenti, queste due tipologie di stati mentali descrivono il contenuto del flusso di coscienza, forniscono cioè la risposta al quesito: “Cosa sta succedendo in me in questo preciso momento?”
- 14 Nella seconda classe di stati mentali rientrano invece credenze, emozioni, desideri, stati d’animo, intenzioni e tutto ciò che non può rientrare nella classe degli *eventi*. Piuttosto che *entità mentali*, Rorty preferisce chiamare tali stati *caratteristiche mentali*.
- 15 Entrambe queste classi sono in qualche modo “recalcitanti a una riduzione comportamentista” (Rorty 1970: 155). Che gli eventi possano essere considerati disposizioni appare del tutto controintuitivo. Per quanto concerne invece la seconda classe degli stati mentali, quella contenente desideri, credenze, intenzioni, ecc., la questione appare più sottile, ma ugualmente problematica. È infatti impossibile tradurre resoconti come “Carlo vuole X” in descrizioni comportamentali equivalenti (enunciati ryleani) senza far ricorso a enunciati introduttivi come “dato che Carlo vuole X... .” Tali resoconti non possono pertanto essere ridotti a resoconti disposizionali senza l’ulteriore riferimento ad altre disposizioni.
- 16 L’idea sostenuta da Rorty è che la prima classe di stati mentali, quella degli *eventi*, rappresenta “l’illustrazione paradigmatica di cosa si intenda con la nozione cartesiana di mentale inteso come un reame separato” (*ibid.*: 156). Se, difatti, avessimo avuto soltanto nozioni relative alla seconda classe di stati mentali, senza avere alcuna idea della nozione di *evento* mentale, “non avremmo mai avuto alcun problema mente-corpo, e Ryle non avrebbe avuto alcun motivo per scrivere” (*ibid.*: 152); ci sarebbe difatti stato solo un *dualismo povero*, tra gli umani intesi come agenti oppure come semplici corpi o, in altri termini, tra le spiegazioni psicologiche e quelle non-psicologiche dell’agire umano, qualcosa di ben diverso dal dualismo dei due reami sancito da Cartesio.
- 17 A questo punto la strategia del filosofo americano, nel tentare di fornire una risposta al quesito sul marchio del mentale, si configura come segue:
1. Stabilire una distinzione tra *eventi mentali* e *caratteristiche mentali*;
 2. Rinvenire nella prima classe la natura dell’opposizione tra i due reami;
 3. Concentrarsi sulla prima classe nella ricerca del marchio del mentale;
 4. Individuare quale caratteristica hanno in comune pensieri e sensazioni tra di loro e con ciò che non è fisico;
 5. Costatare se tale caratteristica è comune anche alle *caratteristiche mentali*, ovvero alla seconda classe di stati mentali.

- 18 Il primo candidato tra gli aspiranti al titolo di marchio del mentale è quello più tradizionale; l'intenzionalità, che Rorty indaga sulla base della caratterizzazione che della stessa propone Chisholm.⁵ Avere una sensazione, infatti, come quando dico “ho una sensazione di rosso,” non può costituire un'affermazione di tipo intenzionale: “non sembra esserci alcuna distintiva intenzionalità nelle sensazioni,” poiché possiamo tranquillamente spiegare “cosa sia una sensazione senza alcun riferimento a credenze o desideri” (Rorty 1970: 157). Quindi, se si vuole individuare qualcosa che le sensazioni hanno in comune con i pensieri e che possa distinguere entrambi dall'orizzonte del mondo fisico, si devono valutare altri candidati: *introspezzibilità*, *nonspazialità*, e *privatezza*. Sono queste, infatti, “le caratteristiche che distinguono i contenuti del flusso di coscienza dal ‘mondo esterno’ e generano la nozione del fisico e del mentale come reami distinti” (*ibid.*).

3. Il marchio del mentale

- 19 Il primo candidato, l'*introspezzibilità*, entra in crisi nel momento in cui si considera che per spiegare tale nozione dobbiamo fare riferimento a una pre-compresa nozione di mentale. Dire che il mentale è esplicabile tramite l'*introspezzibilità*, in altri termini, fornisce solo un'argomentazione tautologica analoga al dire che “i fenomeni mentali sono conoscibili nel solo modo in cui conosciamo i nostri stati mentali” (*ibid.*). Questo appare evidente quando si cerca di distinguere l'*introspezzizione* da alcuni casi particolari; come quando si sente per esempio che lo stomaco di qualcuno sta “rumoreggiando.”
- 20 Il secondo candidato, la *non-spazialità*, costituisce una nozione troppo vaga. Seppure ha il vantaggio, dal punto di vista della “teoria dell'identità,” di fornire un appiglio per identificare pensieri e sensazioni con processi cerebrali, si limita ad asserire che questi sono localizzati dove è localizzata la persona che pensa o sperimenta, appunto, tali sensazioni. Ma tutto questo è possibile dirlo, con la medesima vaghezza, anche per cose tipo “il mio peso” o “la mia salute”; pertanto, conclude Rorty, “dal punto di vista di chi cerca il marchio del mentale, non si può utilizzare la nozione ‘vaga di spazialità’ come opposta a quella di ‘posizione precisamente localizzabile’” (*ibid.*). Piuttosto, in certi casi, si confonde il mentale con l'immaginario o con gli oggetti presenti nei sogni e nelle allucinazioni. Se per esempio parlo, seguendo l'esempio di Rorty, del “pugnale della mente di Macbeth,” è chiaro che tale pugnale non occupa uno spazio fisico, ma non può essere utilizzato un simile esempio come paradigmatico di ciò che è il mentale in quanto si riferisce a qualcosa che non esiste. In questo modo gli stati mentali vengono erroneamente considerati degli oggetti e ciò conduce all'insostenibile assimilazione di mentale e inesistente o immaginario. Si tratta di riproporre, in sostanza, la preoccupazione cartesiana per il sogno, proprio quella preoccupazione che per prima ha condotto l'oscurità all'interno della nozione di mentale.
- 21 Per meglio esplicitare questo punto, Rorty apre una parentesi su alcune considerazioni proposte da Sellars.⁶ Sellars, infatti, pone in risalto quanto da lui stesso sottolineato, ovvero l'idea che sensazioni e pensieri, ovvero la classe degli *eventi* mentali, vadano considerati come stati soggettivi e non come quasi-sostanze. Ciò, per Sellars, conduce direttamente alla constatazione che questo tipo di entità possiede delle caratteristiche intrinseche che non vengono palesate dagli oggetti fisici, che siano essi reali o immaginari. In questa accezione i pensieri sono originariamente delle entità teoretiche, postulate come stati interiori in grado di spiegare alcuni tipi di comportamenti. Ma ciò

non equivale a dire che si tratta di disposizioni in senso ryleano o alla maniera di Armstrong, perché possiedono, appunto, delle caratteristiche intrinseche come l'essere vere o false o l'essere rivolte alle cose allo stesso modo in cui lo sono le asserzioni. In altri termini, i pensieri mostrano le caratteristiche semantiche delle affermazioni linguistiche non intese però come iscrizioni, oggetti fisici, ma solo come classi.

- 22 Allo stesso modo, anche le sensazioni devono essere originariamente intese come entità teoretiche necessarie a spiegare l'occorrenza di pensieri come il pensiero che c'è un triangolo giallo davanti a me. Anche tali entità possiedono quindi caratteristiche intrinseche, ma che non possono essere assimilate a quelle degli oggetti fisici. Si tratta, piuttosto, di sensazioni quale la sensazione "di giallo" o quella "di un triangolo," ma il "di" in questo contesto non specifica alcuna relazione; è solo uno strumento per introdurre predicati che si applicano "esclusivamente alle sensazioni e che fondano la propria applicazione su 'regole di correlazione' come quella che dice che triangoli di un certo colore percepiti in condizioni normali danno origine a sensazioni" (Rorty 1970: 159) quali quella "di-giallo" o "di-triangolo." Per Sellars, quindi, quando vengono postulate come entità teoretiche le sensazioni non costituiscono il contenuto di un'esperienza immediata, non sono un dato non-inferenziale che può costituire la base di qualsiasi edificio conoscitivo, un resoconto introspettivo immediato ma, al contrario sono supposte esistere nella medesima maniera in cui viene supposta l'esistenza degli elettroni, ovvero per inferenza dal comportamento che causano. Come mostra il mito di Jones, solo in seguito, una volta che il loro utilizzo è divenuto automatico dopo un lungo allenamento da parte di coloro che ne fanno uso, possono divenire l'oggetto presunto di resoconti non-inferenziali relativi a stati introspettivi.
- 23 Il mito introdotto da Sellars, però, non conduce a individuare una caratteristica comune per pensieri e sensazioni, non scopre cioè un possibile marchio del mentale: Jones non inventa una mente, ma "solo la nozione di stati interiori non osservabili che possiedono caratteristiche intrinseche" (*ibid.*: 160). Sellars propone, in tal modo, una descrizione micro-strutturale delle cause al di sotto del comportamento umano, ma non una descrizione in termini di specifici stati mentali. Non c'è in atto il tentativo, alla Armstrong, di tramutare "l'essere adatto" in uno specifico stato mentale avente determinate caratteristiche. E questo perché, nella proposta di Sellars, tra le caratteristiche intrinseche degli *eventi* mentali non se ne può rinvenire una in grado di "separare nettamente questi stati da tutti gli altri stati che conosciamo e, di conseguenza, stabilire una nuova categoria di esistenza" (*ibid.*).
- 24 La teoria di Sellars può costituire, in definitiva, una ragionevole descrizione di come il mentale è entrato nel linguaggio comune, ma non evita i rischi contenuti nelle trattazioni del mentale fornite da Smart e da Armstrong: la nozione di stato mentale "su *p*" o "di giallo" rischia infatti di costituire la base per una nozione del mentale come di qualcosa *categoricamente* distinto da tutto il resto. Questo, seppure potrebbe condurre a qualche risultato nell'individuazione del cosiddetto marchio del mentale, non lo fa però nella direzione auspicata da Rorty.
- 25 La rilettura della posizione sellarsiana pone in luce, comunque, il tratto essenziale che deve possedere il candidato più idoneo a ottenere il titolo di marchio del mentale: essere una caratteristica comune agli *eventi* mentali, in grado di porli su un piano di esistenza del tutto altro rispetto agli stati fisici. Questo porta direttamente a prendere in considerazione il terzo dei candidati individuati da Rorty, ovvero la *privatezza*. Questa è stata definita da Ayer, nel saggio *Il concetto di persona* uscito per la prima volta nel

1963, come avente le seguenti caratteristiche: incomunicabilità, accesso diretto, non-condivisibilità e incorreggibilità (Ayer 1966 [1963]: 83). L'incomunicabilità indica che una cosa è privata se soltanto la persona che si trova in quello stato può conoscere la sua esistenza o, quanto meno, può conoscere alcune delle sue caratteristiche peculiari. Ma questo non può essere certo assimilato agli *eventi* mentali, poiché equivarrebbe a dire che sono incomunicabili in un linguaggio pubblicamente accessibile, cosa che Rorty rifiuta in quanto palesemente in contrasto con il nostro senso comune.

- 26 Secondo la caratteristica dell'accesso diretto, invece, una cosa è privata solo se il soggetto in possesso della suddetta può esserne a conoscenza secondo modalità differenti da quelle tramite le quali può essere conosciuta da altri. Ma, secondo tale prospettiva, qualsiasi parte del corpo è privata. Pertanto, non è possibile basare sull'accesso diretto il marchio del mentale.
- 27 La caratteristica della non-condivisibilità è anch'essa poco utile, non tanto per via degli esperimenti mentali basati sul fenomeno della telepatia, quanto perché comporta che nessun altro può possedere il supposto stato privato avente quella caratteristica. Ma, se così stanno le cose, questo vale anche per cose del tutto differenti dagli *eventi* mentali, quali la salute, il comportamento e via dicendo.

4. L'incorreggibilità

- 28 È l'incorreggibilità, per Rorty, a costituire il candidato migliore: “gli eventi mentali sono, a differenza di tutti gli altri, incorreggibili in quanto certe asserzioni conoscitive su di loro non possono essere ignorate. Non abbiamo nessun criterio per considerare errori alcuni resoconti immediati in prima persona relativi a pensieri e sensazioni, mentre al contrario ne abbiamo per giudicare resoconti che concernono qualsiasi altra cosa.” (Rorty 1970: 161).
- 29 Generalmente la definizione di incorreggibilità è data in relazione alla nozione logica di implicazione. Rorty porta come esempio la descrizione proposta da Nakhnikian (Nakhnikian 1968) il quale fornisce la seguente definizione. Qualcosa “è incorreggibile per S in t che p” se:
1. È logicamente possibile che in t S creda precisamente che p, e
 2. “In t S crede precisamente che p” implica “in t sa che p.”
- 30 È chiaro però che Rorty dubita fortemente, sulla scia di Quine, delle modalità logiche: “sia per una certa diffidenza riguardo l'esistenza di necessità che non siano quelle ‘naturali,’ sia per delle particolari difficoltà che emergono quando proviamo a chiarire ‘logicamente possibile’ in questo contesto.” (Rorty 1970: 163). Rorty si riferisce all'idea che lasciarsi guidare dalle modalità logiche per definire l'incorreggibilità rischia di fermarsi alle medesime conclusioni cui rischia di condurre lo stesso Mito di Jones: ovvero che il significato di “pensiero” sia cambiato nel momento in cui le persone hanno imparato a fornire resoconti non inferenziali dei propri pensieri. Ma ciò non è sufficiente e proprio a questo si riferisce Rorty quando sottolinea la necessità di “raccontare una storia coerente lungo le linee tratteggiate dal Mito di Jones” (*ibid.*: 164), che è un altro modo per sollecitare una definizione di incorreggibilità che faccia riferimento alle pratiche linguistiche di individui post-jonesiani. Si tratta di fornire, in altri termini, una storia di come le persone abbiano acquisito nuove credenze sui pensieri e sulle sensazioni e, di conseguenza, di definire l'incorreggibilità non come

possibilità logica, ma nei termini delle “procedure utilizzate per risolvere dubbi accettati in una data era” (*ibid.*: 163). Ovvero, deve divenire un vincolo per le spiegazioni del comportamento che tali spiegazioni siano in grado di adattarsi ai resoconti di pensieri e sensazioni forniti nel contesto generale.

- 31 Pertanto, Rorty ricorre alla seguente formulazione:
- S crede incorreggibilmente che *p* in *t* se e solo se
1. S crede che *p* in *t*.
 2. Non esistono procedure accettate applicando le quali sarebbe razionale credere che non-*p*, data la credenza di S che *p* in *t*. (*Ibid.*: 165)
- 32 Tale definizione delle credenze incorreggibili, secondo Rorty, mette innanzitutto a riparo dalle obiezioni, come quelle di Armstrong, volte a colpire l’idea che le credenze incorreggibili implicino la loro stessa verità. Secondo Armstrong, infatti, c’è una incompatibilità di fondo tra l’asserto materialistico per il quale la conoscenza del proprio stato mentale da parte di un soggetto derivi da una sorta di auto esame del cervello e l’idea che si possa possedere una conoscenza logicamente incorreggibile di tali stati. La domanda di Armstrong, in altre parole, è “come si può escludere sul piano logico che il processo di auto-scansione del cervello possa fallire?” (*Ibid.*).⁷ La definizione di Rorty sfugge a questo problema poiché definisce l’incorreggibilità delle credenze relative agli stati mentali come l’inesistenza di una procedura certa per correggerle qualora fossero errate.
- 33 Se però, questa definizione è in grado di evitare le obiezioni più comuni come quelle appena ricordate, amplia il discorso fino a includere asserzioni che vanno oltre la mera conoscenza del mentale. Esistono infatti tre tipi di asserzioni che potrebbero essere incorreggibili nel senso proposto da Rorty: a) asserzioni conoscibili *a priori*; b) resoconti di eventi mentali; c) asserzioni che concernono come qualcosa si mostra, sembra, appare.
- 34 Nel caso del primo gruppo, la frase “S crede che *p*” della definizione va semplicemente depennata dalla definizione generale. Questo perché le verità *a priori*, espresse da asserzioni come “2+2=4,” garantiscono credenze per le quali sono decisamente assenti procedure in grado di smentirle.
- 35 Per quanto concerne b) e c), però, tale strategia non è percorribile. Il fatto che non esistano procedure che conducano a una chiara evidenza per non-*p* non significa quindi che non possiamo comunque dubitare di quanto asserisce S, ovvero di *p*. Non c’è alcun modo razionale di smentire S, ma nemmeno per evitare l’esercizio del dubbio. Proprio questo è il motivo per cui Rorty preferisce parlare di *incorreggibilità* piuttosto che di *indubitabilità*, dal momento che ogni credenza può essere dubitabile seppure il dubbio, non essendo razionalmente riducibile, non possa condurre a una sua correzione.
- 36 Ora, data questa definizione di incorreggibilità, la domanda da porsi è come essa possa essere intesa quale marchio del mentale. La tesi di Rorty è che “tutti e solo gli eventi mentali sono quel tipo di entità per le quali alcuni resoconti sono incorreggibili” (Rorty 1970: 166). Questo permette a Rorty, in primo luogo, di “sbarazzarsi” di a) in quanto gli enunciati concernenti credenze *a priori* non costituiscono resoconti, ovvero descrizioni di stati di cose.
- 37 Come vanno però le cose con c)? Per Rorty le asserzioni su come qualcosa appare sono utilizzabili anche in una maniera pre-jonesiana, ovvero senza aver mai sentito parlare di pensieri e sensazioni. Da questo punto di vista essi non possono essere considerati, primariamente, come dei resoconti ma, al massimo, possono assumere questo ruolo in

sensu *derivato*. Con la nozione di resoconto, in altri termini, Rorty cerca di limitare il campo di ciò che è considerabile un'asserzione incorreggibile concernente solo uno stato mentale. Solo i resoconti, infatti, riguardano stati mentali intesi come descrizioni di stati di cose.

- 38 Un'asserzione del tipo "X sembra rosso" può essere la descrizione di uno stato di cose, ma non in senso primario; in tal senso è infatti il semplice esitare a descrivere la credenza su un certo stato di cose, ovvero che "X è rosso." In questo modo, la strategia di Rorty ha condotto all'individuazione di un insieme di condizioni necessarie e sufficienti affinché qualcosa possa essere considerato uno stato mentale: "se c'è una persona, che può avere un'incorreggibile credenza in qualche asserzione *P* la quale è un resoconto su *X*, allora *X* è un evento mentale." (*Ibid.*: 167).
- 39 Ma ciò che vale per la categoria degli *eventi* mentali non vale per le asserzioni su desideri, stati d'animo, emozioni, intenzioni e tutto ciò che non può essere classificato come un pensiero o una sensazione, ovvero ciò che Rorty definisce come *caratteristiche mentali*. Le asserzioni su tali entità costituiscono infatti, nell'accezione non-episodica di Rorty, predizioni implicite di comportamenti futuri. Predizioni che possono essere falsificate e per le quali, dunque, tali falsificazioni costituiscono procedure accettabili di correzione dei relativi resoconti: "in questo differiscono dai resoconti relativi ai pensieri e alle sensazioni, i quali sono compatibili con qualsiasi tipo di comportamento futuro." (*Ibid.*).
- 40 Tutto ciò non inficia la versione del marchio del mentale proposta da Rorty in quanto la possibilità di correggere resoconti circa le entità mentali suddette esiste, ma è piuttosto rara. Questo perché se le entità mentali come i desideri o le emozioni divengono più specifiche, avvicinandosi a episodi piuttosto che a disposizioni, diventano parallelamente "più incorreggibili." Non esistono infatti chiare procedure per sovrascrivere il resoconto sincero di qualcuno che dichiara, per esempio, "in questo momento desidero una pesca." Questo avviene, secondo Rorty, perché non c'è una chiara distinzione tra l'asserire "voglio una pesca in questo momento" e il dire che il pensiero "quanto vorrei una pesca!" mi ha colto in questo momento. Emozioni e desideri, in altre parole, tendono a *collassare* in pensieri o sensazioni momentanee⁸ ed è quindi, da questo punto di vista, più difficile considerarli predizioni di un futuro comportamento.
- 41 L'approccio anti-disposizionalista di Rorty lo porta dunque a evidenziare come certe caratteristiche del mentale, seppure non incorreggibili in senso stretto come gli eventi, tendono a diventarli nel momento in cui assumono una connotazione più specifica e limitata. Il marchio del mentale, a questo punto, può essere individuato nell'incorreggibilità intesa nel duplice senso: forte quando ci si riferisce agli *eventi*, debole quando si guarda altresì alle *caratteristiche*.
- 42 Ho fatto riferimento all'ampio dibattito sul marchio del mentale, al quale Rorty partecipa nell'importante lavoro sull'incorreggibilità, poiché ne emerge un approccio anti-essenzialista, e quindi anti-cartesiano, nella trattazione dello statuto degli stati mentali che contiene già *in nuce* gli elementi che si svilupperanno, nelle opere più mature del filosofo americano, dapprima in una direzione eminentemente pragmatista e wittgensteiniana per quanto concerne la filosofia del linguaggio, poi negli esiti deflazionisti che cercherò di evidenziare facendo riferimento al tema degli oggetti finzionali.

5. Fisico e mentale

- 43 In *La filosofia e lo specchio della natura* Rorty evidenzia che le discussioni interne alla filosofia della mente fanno ancora fatica a liberarsi del substrato cartesiano che pare condizionarle in maniera inevitabile. Ciò ha forse a che fare con il fatto che la distinzione tra fisico e mentale possiede dei tratti intuitivi. In questa presunta ovvietà albergano le difficoltà in cui si trovano sia i materialisti che i comportamentisti, le cui figure emblematiche, cui Rorty fa soprattutto riferimento, rimangono Ryle e Smart. C'è, dunque, una sorta di immediatezza nel modo in cui classifichiamo il rapporto mente-corpo, distinguendo tra ciò che viene collocato nella dimensione puramente mentale (desideri, intenzioni, sogni, allucinazioni, ecc.) da ciò che viene invece riferito a quella corporea (dolori, connessioni tattili con il mondo, ecc.). La spontaneità e la naturalezza con cui scindiamo la nostra natura pare rimandare quindi all'idea che la mente appartenga a una dimensione a-spaziale ben distinta da quella fisica.
- 44 Questo approccio, peraltro, mostra chiaramente come la discussione critica cui Rorty sottopone la filosofia analitica si sviluppi a partire da un substrato chiaramente pragmatista. La critica a Cartesio costituisce infatti il punto di partenza del pragmatismo stesso, come mostrano i noti saggi anti-cartesiani di Peirce nei quali il filosofo americano sottopone a una radicale revisione il concetto cartesiano di intuizione immediata e tutta la gnoseologia che si fonda su di esso. Nella serrata analisi di Peirce viene perfino smantellata la possibilità che sussista una “autocoscienza intuitiva,” ovvero l'idea che si possa avere una conoscenza diretta di sé stessi in quanto soggetti pensanti (Peirce 2011 [1868]: 317).
- 45 Appare quindi inevitabile leggere certe analisi rortyane come appartenenti a questa linea di pensiero, il cui fine ultimo è smantellare credenze radicatesi a partire da idee entrate ormai nel senso comune.⁹ Su queste idee del senso comune si fonda la sopravvivenza del dualismo cartesiano, che si protrae ben oltre la vita dello stesso sostanzialismo e che, a livello filosofico, viene tradotta nella constatazione che il programma fisicalista non è in grado di dimostrare ancora la propria validità. La distinzione fisico-mentale, in tal modo, non può “essere colmata da mezzi empirici” nella misura in cui resta difficile affermare che uno stato mentale somiglia “a una disposizione più di quanto non assomigli a un neurone” ma, al contempo, “nessuna scoperta scientifica può rivelare un'identità” (Rorty 2004 [1979]: 45). Su queste basi, quelli che Rorty chiama neodualisti fondano le proprie concezioni tutte accomunate dall'idea che tra fisico e mentale sussista una “frattura incolmabile.”
- 46 A questo punto, però, Rorty si interroga sull'effettiva consistenza di queste posizioni. In primo luogo, si occupa di coloro che definisce neodualisti i quali, rivolgendosi alla linguistica, parlano di descrizioni alternative per le due dimensioni del fisico e del mentale. Ne conclude che tale impostazione, basata sull'idea delle “descrizioni differenti,” mostra le proprie lacune nel momento in cui si considera a cosa effettivamente si riferiscano tali descrizioni incompatibili. Sembrano infatti, tali posizioni, riavvicinarsi al materialismo nel momento in cui tendono a spiegare il *modo in cui qualcuno si sente come un modo alternativo per descrivere le condizioni in cui si trovano parti del suo corpo*.
- 47 Il dilemma che ne deriva è il seguente: i neodualisti sono costretti o a “fornire una descrizione epistemologica del modo in cui sappiamo a priori che le entità appartengono a due specie irriducibilmente distinte” o, in alternativa, a “trovare una

qualche maniera di esprimere il loro dualismo che non si fondi né sulla nozione di ‘frattura ontologica’ né su quella di ‘descrizione alternativa’” (*ibid.*: 47). Andando a fondo nell’analisi di questo dilemma, Rorty si chiede se l’idea di frattura ontologica abbia a che fare, in una qualche maniera, con quella che mentale e immateriale siano sinonimi, come evidenzia appunto l’analisi del senso comune dalla quale la sua argomentazione ha preso le mosse.

- 48 Ma tale sinonimia è tutto fuorché scontata, come dimostrano, per esempio, le secolari dispute intorno allo statuto degli universali. Di certo, però, il concetto opposto a mentale, nelle posizioni dualiste, è quello di fisico e, tale opposizione, ricalca quella tra immateriale e materiale. In questo modo Rorty ritiene di aver posto in luce una tensione profonda e si chiede: dato che fisico e materiale paiono indubitabilmente sinonimi, “come possono due concetti distinti avere sinonimi tra loro contrari?” (*Ibid.*: 49).
- 49 Rorty dimostra, pur senza affermarlo forse in modo esplicito, che la tensione appena sottolineata è alla base del problema del marchio del mentale ed evidenzia come ne rappresenti lo specifico luogo d’origine; se sussiste infatti un’opposizione, data per scontata dal senso comune, tra fisico e non fisico, quale ruolo assume il mentale all’interno di questo quadro? E, soprattutto, come risponde a questa domanda il fautore di un programma fiscalista, ma anche colui che si oppone a una simile impostazione, asserendo alla Brentano che il mentale è distinto dal fisico?

6. Somiglianze di famiglia

- 50 All’inizio de *La filosofia e lo specchio della natura* Rorty torna dunque a occuparsi delle questioni già affrontate nell’articolo del 1970, ma prova a farlo con un approccio genealogico, cercando di mostrare dove origina la distinzione tra fisico e mentale. La risposta alle domande poste alla fine del precedente paragrafo potrebbe infatti rinvenirsi, qualora esistesse, in una caratteristica in grado di accomunare ogni stato mentale o, quanto meno, tutto ciò che ricade sotto l’etichetta linguistica *mentale*,¹⁰ da intendere proprio come opposto a fisico. Una caratteristica in grado, dunque, di costituire il fondamento tanto dell’intenzionale quanto del fenomenico, entrambi considerati come paradigmaticamente distinti dalla dimensione del materiale. Con le parole di Rorty, prese in prestito da Wittgenstein, l’idea che esista un marchio del mentale, si fonda su di una supposta “somialianza di famiglia” tra stati intenzionali e stati fenomenici. In quest’ottica i pensieri occasionali e le immagini mentali sembrano assurgere il ruolo di *paradigmi del mentale*, in virtù del loro essere al contempo intenzionali e fenomenici. Gli stati intenzionali senza proprietà fenomeniche come giudizi, desideri e intenzioni e quelli fenomenici ma non intenzionali quali le sensazioni grezze (dolori o percezioni dei neonati) possono essere considerati mentali in virtù della loro somiglianza, sotto alcune caratteristiche, con gli stati paradigmatici. Il “puramente fisico” sembrerebbe allora caratterizzarsi per accorpate stati che non sono né fenomenici né intenzionali.
- 51 Questo approccio fondato sull’idea di una somiglianza di famiglia, che Rorty propone con lo scopo approfondire la critica alla visione essenzialistica del marchio del mentale, ovvero all’idea che possa esistere una natura intrinseca del mentale alla Brentano, si basa su una concezione wittgensteiniana del concetto di somiglianza. Wittgenstein introduce questa idea nelle *Ricerche* al fine di spiegare la critica alla definizione di

concetto chiuso fornita da Frege. Per quest'ultimo, un concetto è tale se esiste una specifica proprietà che possa permettere di determinare per ogni oggetto se questo ricada sotto il concetto stesso (Frege 2019 [1884]: §53). Wittgenstein critica la presunta assolutezza di questa tesi, sostenendo che esistono anche concetti aperti, come ad esempio quello di gioco. All'idea di una caratteristica strutturale comune a tutti gli oggetti contenuti in un determinato concetto, Wittgenstein sostituisce quella connessa alla possibilità che esistano mere somiglianze di famiglia tra i membri di una certa classe, ovvero "una rete complicata di somiglianze che si sovrappongono e si incrociano a vicenda. Somiglianze in grande e in piccolo" (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953]: §66). E, continua, "non posso caratterizzare meglio queste somiglianze che con l'espressione 'somiglianze di famiglia'; infatti le varie somiglianze che sussistono tra i membri di una famiglia si sovrappongono e si incrociano nello stesso modo" (*ibid.*: §67).

- 52 Rorty, quindi, mette in campo una strategia analoga a quella proposta da Wittgenstein per negare le teorie filosofiche volte a fornire una visione sostanzialista del linguaggio e la estende alla nozione di mentale. Con l'idea di concetto aperto, fondato sulla *somiglianza di famiglia*, intende negare la possibilità per la ricerca filosofica di individuare un'essenza unitaria del mentale, ovvero intende sgombrare il campo dagli eredi di Cartesio. Ne emerge una visione disgiuntiva del mentale, nella quale non può sussistere un legame concettuale, inteso in senso forte, tra il fenomenico e l'intenzionale.
- 53 Le conseguenze di questa analisi del mentale sono vaste quanto ben note e vanno dalla critica al fondazionalismo rappresentazionalista alla riabilitazione della contingenza. Ciò che in questa sede interessa è focalizzare l'attenzione sulla decostruzione dei concetti ontologici di mentale e fisico, per sottolinearne alcune conseguenze sul piano della filosofia della mente e del linguaggio. Se i concetti di mente e corpo non fanno più riferimento a delle essenze, allora vanno interpretati, come visto, sulla base dell'idea delle *somiglianze di famiglia*. Divengono cioè strumenti per raggruppare una serie di nozioni piuttosto eterogenee, non di certo etichette utili a definire due categorie ontologiche. Gran parte della filosofia post-cartesiana, però, è rimasta prigioniera di un quesito epistemologico sollevato proprio da Cartesio: giustificare il problematico e complesso mondo "esterno" a partire dall'indubitabile mondo "interno."
- 54 Cartesio ha difatti commesso l'errore di tramutare l'incorreggibile nell'indubitabile e di identificare in esso, contraddittoriamente peraltro, il marchio del mentale. Contraddittoriamente perché sarebbe stato ben più consono alla sua posizione definire il mentale come l'aspirabile, nella misura in cui egli definisce la sostanza fisica, proprio in opposizione alla *res cogitans*, come *extensa*.¹¹ Di questa ambigua operazione è rimasta vittima gran parte della filosofia successiva e su di essa si basa il fondazionalismo e la visione rappresentazionalistica del linguaggio che ne deriva. Il grande peccato cartesiano consiste pertanto nell'aver indicato come unico dominio epistemico fondamentale e garantito quello degli oggetti mentali. A questo regno dell'indubitabile si contrappone tutto ciò che, non essendo mentale, è appunto dubitabile per definizione; è così che il dualismo cartesiano costruisce il quesito epistemologico sopra riportato, lasciandolo come costringente eredità al pensiero successivo. Il senso del richiamo di Rorty alla contingenza sta proprio nel rompere il dominio di quell'indubitabilità già messa in discussione nello scritto sull'incorreggibilità: ciò che Cartesio ha definito come un insieme di oggetti o fenomeni la cui realtà non è in discussione si presenta ora come parte della totalità mondo selezionata e individuata da

un concetto debole e aperto. Il punto fondamentale da sottolineare è che la caratterizzazione di un concetto come somiglianza aperta ne sfuma inevitabilmente i confini rendendoli mutevoli. Gli oggetti che appartengono a esso, in sostanza, non sono fissati una volta per tutte, ma possono cambiare, se ne possono aggiungere altri nel corso del tempo come alcuni possono essere estromessi. Se non abbiamo, per una determinata classe di oggetti, un criterio fisso, o per meglio dire sostanziale di caratterizzazione, ma solo l'idea che ci sia tra di essi una somiglianza, è chiaro che i membri della classe stessa non sono definiti una volta per tutte.

7. Antirappresentazionalismo

- 55 L'analisi del mentale proposta in *La filosofia e lo specchio della natura*, recuperando alcuni elementi presenti nello scritto sull'incorreggibilità, approfondisce l'idea che l'indagine sul marchio del mentale non possa essere condotta all'interno di un quadro dualistico e sostanzialistico.¹² Questa radicale critica del cartesianesimo conduce a conseguenze piuttosto rilevanti in filosofia del linguaggio, dove Rorty fa proprie le istanze del secondo Wittgenstein e la critica alla tradizionale concezione del linguaggio come immagine.
- 56 La deontologizzazione della distinzione mente/corpo conduce infatti Rorty a criticare *in toto* l'impresa moderna di fondare un'epistemologia della necessità. Smontando l'ancoraggio cartesiano all'indubitabilità della sostanza pensante, toglie forza al concetto stesso di necessità. Non esiste più la verità necessaria, ma solo proposizioni inferite da premesse per le quali non sono date obiezioni fondate: esistono in definitiva, e verrebbe da dire pragmaticamente, argomentazioni più o meno solide basate su premesse più o meno condivise. La conoscenza è un'impresa che, in una maniera che ricorda molto da vicino il secondo Wittgenstein nonché alcune tra le posizioni inferenzialiste, Rorty riconduce del tutto all'interno della prassi linguistica socialmente intesa e che riduce dunque a una mera relazione tra enunciati che giustificano altri enunciati o che, per un qualche motivo, non risultano essere messi in discussione.
- 57 Non si tratta più di usare in senso epistemico il concetto di rappresentazione, perché viene smantellata l'idea che vi sia un mondo contrapposto a un pensiero e rappresentabile attraverso il *medium* linguistico. Non ha più senso chiedersi se vi sia un criterio stabile in base al quale decidere della correttezza delle nostre rappresentazioni del reale. Rorty individua in Davidson colui che ha inferto il colpo definitivo all'idea che un enunciato possa considerarsi vero solo se corrisponda a qualcosa (Rorty 1999). Questo ci consente di “guardare al linguaggio non come a un *tertium quid* tra Soggetto e Oggetto, né come a un medium tramite il quale cerchiamo di formare immagini della realtà, ma come parte del comportamento degli esseri umani” (Rorty 1986 [1982]: 16). Di conseguenza, “non è possibile pensare il mondo o i nostri scopi se non usando il linguaggio. Si può usare il linguaggio per criticarlo e arricchirlo [...], ma non si può considerare il linguaggio come un tutto in relazione a qualcos'altro cui si applichi o di cui sia termine ultimo.” (*Ibid.*).
- 58 La critica all'uso epistemico del concetto di rappresentazione conduce Rorty, ancora sulla scia di Wittgenstein, ma soprattutto di Sellars, a sancire una netta distinzione tra descrittivo e normativo. Le rappresentazioni mentali, se considerate solo in ottica cognitiva e non epistemologica, sono dunque fenomeni descrivibili, ma che non vanno vagliati sulla base della domanda circa il loro più o meno autentico rappresentare la

realtà. L'antipsicologismo, anche in Rorty, si presenta dunque come una critica alla lettura epistemologica della psicologia che ricorda la distinzione sellarsiana tra logica descrittiva e logica giustificativa, utilizzata per evidenziare come le descrizioni empiriche non possano costituire degli episodi conoscitivi poiché questi ultimi vanno collocati “nello spazio logico delle ragioni,” ovvero “nello spazio in cui si giustifica e si è in grado di giustificare quel che si dice” (Sellars 2004 [1956]: 56).

- 59 È soprattutto per posizioni come questa che Sellars viene assunto da Rorty come uno dei campioni dell'antifondazionalismo e inserito nel gruppo di filosofi che considera i suoi principali ispiratori, ovvero Peirce e i già citati Wittgenstein e Davidson. Ciò che interessa in questa sede, però, non è la peculiare lettura della storia della filosofia che Rorty presenta nelle sue opere, ma sottolineare come, muovendo dal classico problema del marchio del mentale, egli sia approdato a una critica del modello cartesiano della mente fondata sull'insostenibilità del concetto di indubitabilità. Da ciò, deriva il sospetto verso il rappresentazionalismo epistemologico e la conseguente adesione a una concezione pragmatista del linguaggio che, basandosi sulla distinzione descrittivo/normativo, riconduce la totalità dell'impresa conoscitiva alla dimensione del rendere ragione e, in ultima istanza, come cercherò di evidenziare, apre le porte al deflazionismo.

8. Oggetti immaginari

- 60 La difesa di una posizione che, seppure mai espressamente definita tale, pare avere tutti i caratteri del deflazionismo, viene condotta da Rorty soprattutto nell'articolo *Esiste un problema a proposito del discorso immaginario?*, presentato per la prima volta nel 1981. Qui Rorty prende posizione su un problema classico in filosofia analitica; quello relativo alla “verità degli oggetti immaginari.” Il problema si iscrive nel quadro complessivo della riflessione sulla verità nella misura in cui le soluzioni proposte alla questione dello statuto degli oggetti immaginari possiedono inevitabili ricadute sulla teoria generale della verità nella quale si inseriscono. Nel quadro complessivo della riflessione filosofica rortyana, questo lavoro acquisisce una certa rilevanza, però, poiché è utile per evidenziare la connessione tra la critica al rappresentazionalismo, così come è emersa in *La filosofia e lo specchio della natura*, e l'assunzione di una posizione deflazionista coerente con essa e con il modello del mentale sul quale quella stessa critica trova le proprie basi.
- 61 Il problema dello statuto degli oggetti immaginari è infatti usato da Rorty come grimaldello per forzare, una volta di più, la coerenza insita nel rappresentazionalismo e palesarne l'insostenibilità: se la verità viene infatti intesa come corrispondenza, per un enunciato come “Sherlock Holmes è nato in Inghilterra” diviene piuttosto problematico trovare un riferimento veritativo. Al contrario, se la verità è intesa come “asseribilità garantita” le soluzioni al problema sono di certo più agevoli: “la scelta tra il considerare la verità in termini di ‘corrispondenza alla realtà’ o di ‘asseribilità garantita’ è la scelta fra trattare il linguaggio come immagine o come gioco.” (Rorty 1986 [1982]: 124).
- 62 Emblematica dell'idea che il linguaggio sia un'immagine è, per Rorty, la trattazione russelliana del riferimento che emerge dal modo in cui il filosofo inglese affronta il tema della finzione. Per Russell, infatti, tutto ciò cui si fa riferimento deve esistere e, secondo Rorty, egli è condotto a sostenere questa posizione sulla base dell'idea che si

può parlare solo di ciò che è conosciuto per esperienza diretta (*knowledge by acquaintance*). In questo modo Russell “mise la nozione semantica di riferimento di Frege al servizio di una visione epistemologica il cui nucleo era il tradizionale empirismo britannico” (*ibid.*: 127). Connettendo la semantica all’epistemologia, in altri termini, Russell identifica il significato di un enunciato con il processo di verifica degli oggetti, di cui si ha prensione diretta, che lo rendono vero. Da ciò deriva direttamente l’idea che tutti gli enunciati concernenti l’inesistente devono necessariamente essere falsi.

- 63 Il presupposto di Russell, secondo cui tutto ciò che esiste deve essere un possibile oggetto dell’apprensione diretta, è strettamente connesso all’idea che la relazione tra il mondo e il linguaggio sia un problema centrale in filosofia, ovvero il problema definito dal concetto di riferimento. Ebbene, per Rorty questi nuclei concettuali costituiscono il fondamento della visione del linguaggio come “immagine” ed è proprio quella visione, la cui formulazione più evidente è offerta nel *Tractatus* di Wittgenstein, a rendere problematica qualsiasi teoria sugli oggetti immaginari.
- 64 Rorty oppone a questa idea, sulla scia di Dewey, Sellars e soprattutto del secondo Wittgenstein, la concezione già definita in *La filosofia e lo specchio della natura* per la quale ogni asserzione va intesa come mossa di un gioco linguistico. In tal modo il concetto di verità, e quindi di riferimento, viene sostituito da quello pragmatico di “asseribilità garantita” e, in virtù di ciò, “qualunque funzione si assegni alla semantica, essa non vi dirà mai nulla sul ‘modo in cui le parole hanno rapporto con il mondo’ perché non c’è niente di *generale* da dire” (*ibid.*: 140). Tutto ciò di cui la filosofia ha bisogno è una “nozione di senso comune del ‘stare parlando di’” nella quale il principio per stabilire su cosa verte un enunciato è solo “ciò che il suo emittente ‘ha in mente,’ e cioè, ciò di cui egli *pensa* di stare parlando” (*ibid.*).
- 65 Nelle soluzioni classiche date al problema degli oggetti fittizi, riecheggia secondo Rorty la preoccupazione che ha condizionato l’epistemologia moderna; cercare di fornire un resoconto delle rappresentazioni in grado di rispondere al dubbio scettico, ovvero un resoconto che garantisca il mantenimento di un legame con il mondo esterno. Seppure sia stato modificato l’oggetto di indagine, dalle rappresentazioni mentali a quelle linguistiche, dall’epistemologia alla semantica, non è mutato il problema di fondo: trovare una teoria che non celi al proprio interno il rischio di perdere il contatto con il reale. La teoria dei giochi linguistici proposta da Wittgenstein nelle *Ricerche*, e assunta esplicitamente da Rorty come modello di riferimento nell’articolo sui problemi della finzione, abbandona la concezione del linguaggio come immagine “ammettendo che il fatto che un enunciato abbia senso (sia intelligibile e vero o falso) può dipendere dal fatto che un altro enunciato sia vero” (*ibid.*: 142). Questa mossa è sufficiente a mettere da parte i problemi sulle entità fittizie sollevate dal modello russelliano. Questo avviene perché, come già palesato nell’analisi sulla contingenza del linguaggio condotta in *La filosofia e lo specchio della natura*, se la verità si gioca tutta all’interno delle connessioni inferenziali tra le proposizioni, sfumando la distinzione tra necessario e contingente finisce per svanire anche quella tra reale e immaginario, per lo meno l’idea che tale distinzione si possa fondare sul fatto che il linguaggio sia o meno “agganciato al mondo.”
- 66 Quando evidenziato è sufficiente per asserire che Rorty difende il deflazionismo oggettuale ricorrendo a una nozione deflazionista del riferimento piuttosto che degli oggetti: questa nozione di riferimento è la relazione che “può essere *costituita* dal

discorso – dal momento che per parlare di Sherlock Holmes e di calorico non si richiede nulla più che scambiarsi sistematicamente le parole ‘Sherlock Holmes’ e ‘calorico’” (*ibid.*: 144). Tale difesa è condotta facendo riferimento, come visto, al Wittgenstein delle *Ricerche*. Il deflazionismo oggettuale è la dottrina per la quale, oltre agli oggetti materiali, vanno ontologicamente ammesse anche tutte le entità di cui possiamo parlare.¹³ Non si tratta più di trovare una verità forte che corrisponda alla sola rappresentazione autentica della realtà, non è più necessario studiare una nozione di riferimento in grado di fugare il dubbio scettico; si tratta solo di individuare le connessioni inferenziali in grado, all’interno di un gioco linguistico, di garantire l’“asseribilità garantita.” Se osservate con gli occhi del modello russelliano, la verità nella concezione del linguaggio come gioco linguistico è sempre “verità immaginaria”; ecco perché l’analisi del problema degli enunciati finzionali costituisce per Rorty un banco di prova fondamentale.

- 67 Interessante notare come sia possibile, nel concludere il percorso tratteggiato, avvicinare il deflazionismo oggettuale di Rorty a quanto sostiene Crane riguardo gli oggetti intenzionali, recuperando la celebre idea proposta per la prima volta da Anscombe (Anscombe 1966).¹⁴ Le questioni relative allo statuto degli oggetti finzionali sono infatti inestricabilmente connesse al tema dell’intenzionalità. Se l’intenzionalità è difatti, secondo la definizione classica, ciò su cui verte il pensiero, ciò verso cui sono diretti gli stati mentali, è chiaro che questi ultimi possano vertere anche su oggetti immaginari o che non esistono nel senso ordinario del termine. Con le parole di Crane: “è un fatto innegabile che certi stati intenzionali possano concernere cose che non esistono.” (Crane 2003 [2001]: 19). Chiaro che un’asserzione di questo tipo possa contenere degli enigmi qualora, ad esempio, si tenti di comprenderla da un punto di vista analogo a quello di Searle che vuole assimilare gli oggetti intenzionali a quelli ordinari. Ne scaturirebbe, difatti, un corto circuito dovuto al dover ammettere che, paradossalmente, alcuni oggetti ordinari sono, al contempo, oggetti che non esistono.¹⁵
- 68 È interessante provare a vedere come, nell’ambito di un deflazionismo oggettuale quale quello proposto da Rorty, per il quale è necessario ammettere l’esistenza degli oggetti di cui si parla, si possa approcciare un simile problema. La mia idea è che la soluzione che Rorty troverebbe più accettabile è quella connessa alla definizione, fornita appunto da Crane, di concezione *schematica* dell’oggetto. Ciò che c’è di rortyanamente promettente in questa idea è che si definisce in opposizione alla teoria metafisica dell’oggetto, per la quale esistono generi di oggetti che sono tali in virtù della propria natura. Si tratta, in quest’ultimo caso, di una visione sostanzialistica dell’oggettualità del tutto inconcepibile nel quadro teorico descritto in questo articolo, alla quale Crane oppone, appunto, la visione *schematica* esplicitata emblematicamente da quel tipo di oggetti che egli definisce “oggetti grammaticali,” ovvero gli oggetti definiti per il ruolo che svolgono all’interno degli enunciati: “un oggetto grammaticale è tutto ciò che sta in relazione appropriata con un verbo transitivo. L’oggetto di un enunciato è un oggetto in senso schematico, e non in senso sostanziale.” (2003 [2001]: 22). Gli oggetti schematici sono dunque oggetti che non hanno di per sé nessuna natura particolare, ma si trovano, grammaticalmente, in una determinata posizione, ovvero intrattengono un certo tipo di relazioni.
- 69 Questa idea, per Crane, supera le difficoltà che sorgono nel concepire gli oggetti del pensiero come una categoria metafisicamente unitaria; non sono infatti assimilabili a sole proprietà, o particolari o eventi. Inoltre, come ormai chiarito, non si può nemmeno

considerare oggetto, ordinariamente, solo ciò che esiste. A questo ordine di considerazione va aggiunta quella già sottolineata da Anscombe, ovvero la constatazione che taluni oggetti intenzionali, ancora una volta a differenza di quelli ordinari, sono indeterminati; nel senso che posso pensare a un cane senza pensare a una specifica taglia di cane, ma non posso portare al guinzaglio un cane generico. Perciò, conclude Crane, “invece di introdurre una classe di oggetti che includa eventi e proprietà reali, entità indeterminate, e cose che non esistono, dovremmo concludere che gli oggetti intenzionali *non hanno una natura loro propria*” (*ibid.*: 23). È questo il senso ultimo dell’idea *schematica* di oggetto che va pensata in aperta opposizione a quella sostanziale.

- 70 A questo punto, è fruttuoso notare come la risposta che Crane fornisce alla domanda “cosa significa essere un oggetto intenzionale?”, rievoca una posizione che è possibile rinvenire tra le righe degli scritti di Rorty fin dall’articolo sull’incorreggibilità e che è chiaramente sostenuta nel lavoro sulla finzione: “significa essere ciò verso cui la mente è diretta quando si trova in uno stato intenzionale.” (*Ibid.*: 24). Se penso qualcosa, l’oggetto di quel pensiero è individuabile rispondendo, in modo corretto, alla domanda “a cosa stai pensando?” In questo senso, Rorty, al pari di Crane accetterebbe quanto dice Valberg, ovvero che è possibile sostituire la parola “oggetto” con la parola “cosa,” quando parliamo di enti fisici, ma non è possibile farlo quando ci riferiamo a “oggetti di esperienza” o a “oggetti intenzionali” (Valberg 1992: 22). In questi casi, gli oggetti non sono classificabili in una categoria unitaria, come mostrano per esempio gli oggetti finzionali che non si può certo dire esistano alla maniera in cui esistono le cose del mondo fisico, ma sono semplicemente ciò verso cui il pensiero è diretto, ciò su cui si impegna un atto mentale.
- 71 Quanto sostenuto da Crane sembra la perfetta conclusione dell’analisi di Rorty culminata in *Esiste un problema a proposito del discorso immaginario?* Applicando infatti al tema dell’intenzionalità la critica alla scissione tra reale e immaginario, e il deflazionismo che ne scaturisce, è possibile evitare le ambiguità, sul tema del discorso immaginario, palesate dalle classiche concezioni semantiche. Quelle medesime ambiguità che Rorty indica come inscindibilmente connesse alle tradizionali concezioni tanto del mentale quanto del linguaggio.

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NOTE

1. Per una ricostruzione sistematica della filosofia di Rorty si veda: Calcaterra 2016.
2. Come si evincerà, il riferimento primario dei dibattiti di quel periodo è ancora il lavoro svolto da Ryle in *The Concept of Mind*, uscito nel 1949.
3. Si vedano le critiche, cui si riferisce esplicitamente lo stesso Rorty, in Cornman 1968, e in Bradley 1963.
4. Laddove non è diversamente specificato, le traduzioni dall'inglese sono le mie.
5. Qui Rorty ha in mente, in particolare, Chisholm 1957.
6. Qui Rorty analizza la celebre parte di *Empirismo e filosofia della mente*, in gran parte occupata dal cosiddetto Mito di Jones, nella quale Sellars critica il mentalismo adattando una strategia derivata dalla psicologia comportamentista, senza però accettare quest'ultima come quadro teorico di riferimento ma solo come strumento metodologico. Lo scopo di Sellars è mostrare come i pensieri siano una derivazione del linguaggio teorico utilizzato per esplicitare verbalmente i comportamenti. In altre parole, lo sviluppo evolutivo di una teoria sul linguaggio relativo ai comportamenti manifesti si è sviluppata per Sellars fino a rendere automatico il riferimento all'orizzonte dei pensieri. In questo senso, quando Jones spiega la sua teoria sugli episodi interiori (che chiama pensieri) ai compagni, questi imparano a fornire descrizioni di se stessi servendosi del linguaggio della teoria: in questo modo, quello che era un "linguaggio con un uso puramente teorico ha acquisito un ruolo per fornire resoconti." È così che Sellars può fondare l'idea che il pensiero sia derivato dal linguaggio (Sellars 2004 [1956]: 79).
7. In questo caso il bersaglio critico è soprattutto Armstrong 1963.
8. "Ancora, non c'è una netta distinzione tra il dire 'Ho paura della tigre che ho incontrato' e il dire 'Ho una sensazione di paura quando la incontro'." (Rorty 1970: 168).
9. Sui rapporti tra Rorty e il pragmatismo si veda Brodsky 1982, Hall 1994, Marchetti 1999, Koopman 2009, Calcaterra 2011, Malachowski 2013.
10. Per un'analisi di questo problema in Rorty si veda Tartaglia 2008.
11. Per un'analisi di questa idea, Jacquette 2009.
12. Peraltro, questo non comporta, Rorty lo dice espressamente, negare alla stregua del "fisicalismo più spoglio" la distinzione tra intenzionale e non-intenzionale. È infatti questa

medesima distinzione a chiarire la scissione tra normativo e descrittivo che non può essere in alcun modo abbandonata, pena l'approdo a una "filosofia del tutto sterile" (Rorty 1998: 394).

13. Sul perché questo tipo di deflazionismo non possa essere addebitato a Wittgenstein, si veda Voltolini 2008.

14. Dove Anscombe polemizza con Russell (1973 [1905]).

15. Per una trattazione generica di questi temi, da parte di Rorty, si veda Rorty 1994.

RIASSUNTI

The aim of this paper is to propose a reconstruction of Richard Rorty's philosophy of mind aimed at showing both its systematic structure and the originality of some outcomes, not adequately underlined by critics. My starting point is an early paper, titled *Incorrigibility as the Mark of the Mental*, in which Rorty takes sides on the venerable question of the mark of the mental. I will show that Rorty defends a weak view on the above question and that his idea, according to which a particular concept of incorrigibility provides the most promising way of distinguishing the mental from the physical, has a deep influence on *Philosophy and the Mirror of the Nature*. In the last part of the paper, I will underline the consequences of Rorty's peculiar idea of the mental on the specific problem of fictional entities, showing how his position could be seen as a form of deflationism which in some ways seems compatible with the positions recently engaged by Crane.

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Book Reviews

Review of Pia CAMPEGGIANI, *Introduzione alla filosofia delle emozioni*

Bologna, Biblioteca Clueb, 2021, 223 p.

Gabriele Aleandri

NOTIZIA

Pia CAMPEGGIANI, *Introduzione alla filosofia delle emozioni*, Bologna, Biblioteca Clueb, 2021, 223 p.

- 1 Il libro di Pia Campeggiani *Introduzione alla filosofia delle emozioni* è un contributo molto rilevante al campo di studi della filosofia delle emozioni, che sta conoscendo negli ultimi anni una grande espansione. Come preannunciato chiaramente dal titolo, l'obiettivo fondamentale di questo testo è dare ai lettori una prospettiva aggiornata e comprensiva su quest'area di intersezione tra neuropsicologia, filosofia morale e antropologia evuzionistica – per citare solo le più importanti tra le discipline afferenti. Coerentemente con questo proposito, i capitoli del libro sono organizzati tematicamente attorno a quattro aspetti fondamentali delle emozioni: la loro definizione, la loro espressione, la loro esperienza e il loro ruolo pratico. Ciascuno di essi viene canonicamente discusso confrontando le differenti posizioni che sono state adottate dai movimenti scientifici e filosofici più influenti. Tuttavia, se nella maggior parte dei manuali universitari la discussione concettuale è poco più che un elegante pretesto per elencare agli studenti una lista di autori e di idee, in questa *Introduzione alla filosofia delle emozioni* i lettori si trovano felicemente coinvolti nella strategia espositiva opposta: il filo conduttore del testo è la discussione teoretica, continuamente rafforzata e ampliata dal confronto serrato con gli autori. Nondimeno, la posizione di Campeggiani emerge più dal modo in cui il dibattito sulle emozioni viene presentato, anziché dal modo in cui viene esplicitamente commentato, e questa fluida continuità tra un lavoro di letteratura primaria e uno di letteratura secondaria è forse la migliore virtù del libro.

- 2 Sin dal capitolo introduttivo, l'autrice fa forte affidamento su due punti metodologici: un approccio che potremmo definire "cumulativo" all'argomento del testo e la concessione di un ruolo co-primario agli studi scientifici ed empirici come guida della discussione concettuale. L'approccio è cumulativo, anziché oppositivo o definitorio, nel senso che l'immagine finale delle emozioni che emerge da quest'*Introduzione* è la risultante di differenti prospettive su tale fenomeno e non di parti di informazione meccanicamente, storiograficamente o gerarchicamente dedotte l'una dall'altra. Questo modo di guardare alle emozioni è effettivamente coerente con una delle caratteristiche più originali e interessanti del libro, cioè l'esplicita convinzione dell'autrice che l'oggetto della sua ricerca non abbia una natura o essenza univoca.
- 3 Tuttavia, questa concezione aperta e inclusiva potrebbe risultare in qualche modo limitata dalla scelta di dare un ruolo centrale alle scienze naturali e ai movimenti filosofici che hanno costruito le proprie posizioni sul commento o sull'interpretazione dei loro risultati. Al contrario, una prospettiva multifocale sulle emozioni avrebbe potuto trarre un grande beneficio dall'inclusione di riflessioni proprie di correnti di pensiero con approcci differenti: le tradizioni fenomenologica ed esistenzialista, la ricchezza casuistica e aneddotica tipica dei testi poetici e letterari, e la comprensione sistemica delle interazioni umane (e non solo umane) tipica delle scienze sociali. Le ragioni che rendono i filosofi e gli scienziati naturali scettici sull'utilità classificatoria e generalizzante delle riflessioni introspettive e della sociologia sono fin troppo note, ma un libro sulle emozioni avrebbe potuto rappresentare un'occasione significativa per metterle in questione. In ogni caso, il lavoro di Campeggiani è tutto fuorché una schematica sistematizzazione di opinioni scientifiche sulla natura delle emozioni.
- 4 Per cominciare, l'autrice sembra manifestare una consapevolezza insolitamente profonda, e certamente superiore a quella dei colleghi di riferimento le cui posizioni sono commentate nel corso del libro, di quanto sia fragile l'ipotesi del senso comune secondo cui le emozioni – spavento, gioia, disgusto, sorpresa, etc. – sono tipi naturali. Questa consapevolezza traspare chiaramente sia nella ricostruzione etimologica e storica del termine "emozione," dall'originale discredito che ne accompagnò la traduzione dal francese alle altre lingue europee fino al suo enorme successo contemporaneo, sia nell'ampio spazio che viene dato a quei fenomeni, come il coinvolgimento emotivo verso entità fittizie o immaginarie, che ci fanno sollevare seri dubbi sull'oggettività dei resoconti personali su emozioni e sentimenti, e persino sulla loro genuina esistenza. In questo senso sarebbe forse stato utile portare nella discussione del libro anche i classici del comportamentismo e i loro eredi eliminativisti, che sono invece quasi assenti. Se la loro rigida prospettiva verificazionista, secondo cui gli oggetti dell'introspezione non esistono, è abbastanza fuori moda (e sarebbe suonata perfino paradossale in un libro dedicato alle emozioni), è pur vero che la loro insistenza sul ruolo della creatività psicologica come origine delle emozioni avrebbe potuto costituire un valido strumento concettuale in vari punti del libro.
- 5 In secondo luogo, l'approccio naturalistico al tema della ricerca non ha obiettivi riduzionistici; al contrario, il legame evolucionistico tra le nostre emozioni e la nostra struttura e origine biologica viene impiegata con l'evidente obiettivo di disegnare una caratterizzazione antropologica e ontologica molto ampia. È particolarmente importante, in questo senso, che il Darwin presentato in questo libro sia notevolmente diverso dall'ideologo della selezione naturale usualmente riportato nei testi di autori neo-darwiniani; quando si tratta dello sviluppo e dell'ereditarietà di comportamenti ed

emozioni, Darwin aveva delle esplicite simpatie per alcune versioni del neolamarckismo che furono poi bandite, sulla base di ragioni empiriche molto fragili, dall'ortodossia biologica. È quindi un peccato che l'autrice scarti rapidamente queste intuizioni darwiniane come scientificamente sorpassate, dal momento che negli ultimi decenni numerosi studi stanno dimostrando la possibilità dell'ereditarietà di caratteri acquisiti in molti organismi viventi e, più in generale, stanno conducendo a una profonda integrazione e revisione del rigido e limitante modello "mutazione casuale/selezione cieca" tipico della Sintesi Moderna (vedi Laland *et al.* 2015). Un approfondimento su questi consistenti cambiamenti nelle più recenti teorie evoluzionistiche, di principio importante per ogni discussione scientifica sul comportamento umano e animale, sarebbe ancor più cruciale quando si parla di caratteristiche complesse come le emozioni, e avrebbe tra l'altro rinforzato l'appropriata critica che Campeggiani muove implicitamente all'ostinata intransigenza della tradizione darwiniana nell'assegnare una priorità filogenetica all'esclusivo ruolo organico delle emozioni a svantaggio di quello comunicativo.

- 6 In terzo luogo, il libro si trova a proprio agio nell'alternare una certa varietà di registri linguistici e concettuali. È possibile passare da un capitolo in cui le emozioni sono descritte in termini di reazioni somatiche a un altro in cui sono concepite come oggetti formali, senza avvertire un senso di straniamento o di discontinuità nell'argomento trattato. Questo potrebbe sembrare ovvio, dal momento che tali differenze sono tipiche delle contrastanti teorie che il libro intende presentare. Ma Campeggiani resiste alla tentazione di tradurre il linguaggio di una teoria nell'altra, o di creare un linguaggio neutrale e intermedio, e questa scelta è particolarmente utile a mostrare quanto non ci sia bisogno di un armamentario concettuale rigido o completamente coerente per darci un quadro comprensivo del fenomeno dell'emozione – la lezione che sembra emergere dal testo è forse contraria.
- 7 Dal punto di vista della proposta teorica sulle emozioni, in ogni caso, il testo sembra procedere con una struttura di fondo abbastanza chiara: c'è una prima opposizione tra la teoria BET (*basic emotions theory*) e l'ipotesi costruttivista sulla natura indistinta del *core affect*, una seconda opposizione tra una teoria funzionale/somatica di derivazione pragmatista e una intenzionale di origine cognitivista, e una riflessione finale sull'integrazione tra emozione e azione. Prendendo un esempio classico di emozione come la paura, queste cinque proposte ne focalizzano aspetti diversi: per la teoria BET la paura è definibile come una reazione psicosomatica specifica e innata (è quello che succede a tutti gli animali coscienti e sani davanti a un predatore); per il costruttivismo è il risultato di meccanismi psicologici appresi che strutturano un sentimento di base indeterminato (è quello che succede alla nostra autocoscienza quando riconosciamo una pistola sotto la giacca di uno sconosciuto); per la teoria funzionalista coincide con uno stato psicofisico con precisi requisiti (il brivido, il pallore, la stretta allo stomaco, etc.); per le teorie di derivazione cognitivista è uno stato mentale caratterizzato da una relazione tipologica con l'oggetto dell'emozione (il giudizio sull'arma dello sconosciuto); mentre per le teorie enattiviste e pragmatiche è l'insieme delle disposizioni all'azione (in questo caso alla fuga o al silenzio).
- 8 Possiamo dividere queste cinque posizioni in due grandi gruppi: le prime due sono teorie genetiche, cioè sono interessate a spiegarci l'*origine* delle emozioni. Le altre tre sono teorie categoriali, cioè ci indicano *che cos'è* un'emozione. Per quanto riguarda le teorie genetiche, l'opposizione tra BET e costruttivismo può essere risolta (dal punto di

vista filosofico) con una semplice mediazione, dal momento che specialmente negli esseri umani lo stato emotivo è particolarmente condizionato da complessi fattori psicologici e cognitivi: questa soluzione sembra implicitamente indicata anche dal testo di Campeggiani. Come accennato sopra, sarebbe tuttavia utile riconsiderare la tradizionale teoria selettiva darwiniana per analizzare più da vicino la possibilità di un ruolo evolutivo per la funzione comunicativa delle emozioni, che costituirebbe una continuità *concreta* tra la teoria innatista e quella costruttivista. Per quanto riguarda le teorie categoriali, invece, una mediazione è più difficile: esse riguardano le condizioni necessarie e sufficienti per individuare un'emozione, e quindi una differenza teorica potrebbe portare nel loro caso a considerare uno stato psicofisico come un'emozione o no (oppure un'emozione anziché un'altra).

- 9 Una possibile strategia risolutiva, che nel testo viene percorsa abbastanza di rado, è provare a restringere più precisamente il campo delle emozioni, distinguendole anzitutto dagli umori (*nervosismo, allegria, etc.*) e dai sentimenti (*benevolenza, antipatia, etc.*): i primi sono condizioni transitorie e prive di referente, i secondi inclinazioni durature e dotate di referente. In secondo luogo, se il concetto di emozione deve essere assunto in modo acritico dal linguaggio ordinario (come viene fatto in questa *Introduzione*), allora le emozioni devono avere il carattere della coscienza e dell'intenzionalità: una persona disgustata, impaurita, eccitata, sorpresa, gioiosa non può non sapere di esserlo, e non può non avere idee più o meno precise sul perché. Con queste chiarificazioni concettuali la differenza tra le teorie funzionaliste e le teorie cognitiviste dovrebbero ridursi considerevolmente. Infatti, la tensione tra causalità e intenzionalità (tra giudicare ciò che fa paura come *causa* della reazione psicosomatica o come *oggetto* dello stato mentale) può essere superata considerando come emozioni tutte quelle che stiano in una generica relazione con un certo evento o entità tipologicamente connotati dal punto di vista del soggetto, indipendentemente che questo evento o entità abbia il ruolo attivo di causa o il ruolo passivo di oggetto. Per ciò che riguarda l'esperienza soggettiva dell'emozione, invece, sia un approccio psicosomatico che un approccio intenzionale sembrano presupporre in modo robusto una consapevolezza conscia dell'emozione, evidenziandone ovviamente aspetti diversi.
- 10 La riflessione conclusiva sul ruolo delle disposizioni pratiche nell'esperienza emotiva è particolarmente interessante perché lega il tema del libro alla teoria 4E (*embodied, embedded, enacted, extended*) della mente, che ricopre un ruolo centrale nel dibattito odierno. Tuttavia, all'interno di questo vasto campo di riforma della psicologia teoretica tradizionale si muovono orientamenti diametralmente opposti, che vanno dal recupero del panpsichismo all'esternalismo eliminativista (vedi Newen, De Bruin & Gallagher 2020). Una filosofia delle emozioni del tipo tratteggiato in quest'*Introduzione*, con un forte radicamento nel corpo soggettivo e nell'esperienza cosciente, può muoversi agevolmente nelle dimensioni *embodied* ed *embedded*, con più difficoltà in quella *enacted*, e con limitati margini di compatibilità in quella *extended*. Queste limitazioni, lungi dall'essere un impedimento, costituiscono un banco di prova delle teorie 4E, spesso influenzate in modo eccessivo dalla tensione tra paradigmi post-comportamentisti e post-cognitivisti, e sostanzialmente in difficoltà se messe in dialogo con temi tradizionalmente coscienzialisti e relazionali come l'affettività, l'emozione o l'intuizione; ma costituiscono anche una prova di resistenza e di compatibilità per tutte le filosofie dell'esperienza soggettiva che siano, comprensibilmente, affascinate dalla portata liberatoria della teoria 4E nei confronti delle scuole psicologiche tradizionali.

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Book Reviews and Critical Notices

Review of John KAAG, *Sick Souls, Healthy Minds: How William James Can Save Your Life*

Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2020

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REFERENCES

John KAAG, *Sick Souls, Healthy Minds: How William James Can Save Your Life*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2020, 210 p.

- 1 William James is a philosopher who gets under your skin. Easily. While, to a large degree, this has to do with his understanding of philosophy as a live (and lively) experiment in self-interrogation and conduct, an activity one might find herself performing while engaged in his work and because of it, further evidence of the mesmeric force upon the reader lies in the personal tone of his voice as well as in his ability to read through his times and foresee ours. Despite being the most famous philosopher of his generation (for sure in the US, and ranked quite high in Europe as well), James was *not* a philosopher's philosopher, and tried to widen the boundaries of philosophical practice to attract audience from without the university hall and seminar room. Part of his point and mission was exactly that of unleashing the philosophical potential in us all, testing our willingness to leave no stone unturned in the path to self-understanding. James indeed worked with an old-fashioned conception of philosophy as an art of living, and wrote accordingly. Nearly nowhere in his corpus do we find material which is not up for grabs and meant to be critically received and put to work. From his earlier work in psychology to his later entries into ethics, religion and epistemology, James was at his happiest when the conceptions and views put forward were *used*, rather than simply *taken*, by his interlocutors. James wanted us to try (in practice), rather than to abide (in theory). He himself was hardly happy with his formulations, and repeatedly adjusted his work to meet a new challenge, personal or

intellectual alike. Pragmatism was then, in James's hands, a project for (more) work to be performed rather than a doctrine to be received. Not a worldview to be trusted but rather a hypothesis to be tested. What proved to be particularly prophetic is the quality and breadth of observations into the human psyche and conduct which James amassed and weaved together, a tour guide to some of the most pressing issues we are still struggling with one hundred years on. James sticks with the reader more than the local sage or national hero in his ability to speak to the reader intimately and yet putting her in a much wider circle of acquaintances and concerns – a voice at once friendly and experienced counselling one from a standpoint both distant and innermost.

- 2 Writing about James without capturing this side of his work is as dangerous as misleading, sterile perhaps. Presenting and discussing his ideas without placing them in this metaphilosophical perspective means doing a violence to them as well as impoverishing our use of them. John Kaag is among those who took James's provocation for a lived philosophy to heart, and his book is designed as a personal dialogue with James through which distilling pills of his teachings as well as trying to put them to good work. Kaag is not new to the task, since part of his previous work has been devoted (also thanks to James, at least retroactively) to the exploration of philosophical figures as exemplars of examined lives to be digested as much as to be inspired by. Pragmatism as a whole (*American Philosophy: A Love Story*), Nietzsche (*Hiking with Nietzsche*), and now James are met and portrayed as travel companions in the vicissitudes of life. This does not mean to undermine the arguments, even the theories advanced by these figures, but rather to get invested in them, to be involved in them as (if) one's life depends on their truth.
- 3 The subtitle of the book under review leaves no room for doubt in this regard: "How William James Can Save Your Life." Each word of this phrase is telling, even though the meaning as a whole is a matter of emphasis. Kaag, likely because of *his own use of* James, stresses the "saving" bit, which in turn betrays the idea of an author whose power is redemptive and salvific. When one is on the verge of losing oneself, whatever one means by it, James would ("can") help us ("your life") to keep her on balance, sober, and rolling. Understood this way, James's is a philosophy which transforms one by aiding one not to give up – to despair, boredom, demoralization, nihilism, or all of the above. When things go south or into the blue, James might be there for you ("how"?) by reminding you of the uneven character of lives and reality, unmaking and possibly hindering those attempts to have clear-cut and ready-made solutions for what the world throws at you. But his pragmatism is also a tale of hope in one's (individual and collective) capacity to turn things around – a fallibilistic and melioristic faith in the healing over (and of) time. The therapeutic register of this approach and mindset lies in the reworking of the expectations we often overburden ourselves with, such as the pretension to be fully in charge of ourselves and of our relationship with others and the world, a pretension betraying a sense of self as boundless and affirmative, likely to be frustrated by those novelties we haven't predicted as well as by those old habits hard to die. James struggled against a deterministic world, that is a world in which our say is not called for, against those accidental factors closing off or at least limiting our movements, and those morbid traits threatening our mental sanity. Mastery, over one's mind and body, was a key issue for James: one which nearly completely absorbed him given his crave for freedom and fear of losing touch with the meaning of things, largely a matter of freely choosing to attend to them. And yet, as said, such control, freedom,

and autonomy are dangerous ideas to play with as one easily gets intoxicated with and by them, hence the discomfort when the world does not reflect us or welcomes our plans for it.

- 4 Despite I have some quarrel with the very word “save,” which to my European ears is way too compromised with a religious perspective and background, and would have replaced it with the more sober (and atheistic) “help,” “better,” or “soothe,” I am positively impressed by Kaag’s reading and use of James. The hinging on the therapeutic potential of James’s writings sounds about right to me, and the book reads as a compelling introduction to his thought from the point of view of someone whose life has been touched – and not simply informed – by it. In reading the book one gets the impression of a philosophy in the making, in the sense of a philosophy made real in the course of embodying – and not simply endorsing – it. As said, I would not have employed the concept of being saved, or rescued, or redeemed by James, as those suggest the idea of a destiny to be overturned or a life to be amended almost from without, but rather that of being aided, untapped, or spurred from within, as in a self in need of assistance when a certain confidence and ease in one’s path is threatened or estranged. Kaag is most precious when, in the progression of his tale, he presents James’s ventures into determinism, freedom, mental health, consciousness, truth, and hope as emerging from an earnest reflection on the many ways life can be put under pressure and eventually make it through the night. Kaag presents us with what James himself underwent and survived, showing how he tested his own conceptions on himself before handling them over to us. This is no small feat, as only a human being truly touched by such concerns is a philosopher worth reading. As Wittgenstein once said, famously, about James: “that is what makes him a good philosopher; he was a real human being.”
- 5 The scholarship exhibited by Kaag is thus inseparable from his appreciation of James as a live option. While it would be rather pointless to dispute over the particular bent given to each notion or concept discussed in the book, as that would mean betraying an anxiety of “getting James right” where no such thing should be possible if not as an exercise to distill a James most congenial to one’s personal and intellectual condition, I would here like to highlight some possible tension internal to Kaag’s rendering of James’s project – a tension possibly affecting James’s project itself, which would make the issue all the more pressing. The tension I have in mind is a familiar one for pragmatist *afficionados*, and pertains to the way in which we understand James’s overall call for a move from theory to practice, that is from asking the question about “what there is” to asking the question about “what happens if.” What I have in mind is the difference between an ontological and a fundamentally psycho-historical question and register, and more in particular the difference between the analysis of determinate phenomena as occurrences of more general laws of nature or culture instantiated in singular lives and as options whose reality (hence validity) depends on the liver in a far more radical way. While in the former case what is at stake in, say, freedom is a dynamic between certain elements (e.g., chance, willingness, regret, foreclosure, etc.) pertaining to how a certain account of the fabric of the world impinges on a determinate life, in the latter it consists in a personal elaboration on and of the consequences of running such elements together. Practice it is in both cases, and yet of a rather different stripe: an ontology of practices as opposed to a psycho-history of practices.

- 6 Now, sometimes Kaag (writes as if he) takes James as endorsing option one while at other times as more prone to championing option two. That is, sometimes James is taken to be illustrating us the practical meaning of freedom (mental health, etc.) in terms of how we may actually inhabit it and live with it, embodying a concept whose meaning and life is however at least partially fixed in advance of such appropriation; while at other times freedom (etc.) is explored in terms of the effects it might have on us if we take it front and center and organize our life around it, hence spinning the fates of the concepts we live by *in the making* and with reference to their relevance in our psycho-historical constitution. This difference practically boils down to understanding James as either redefining some key concepts and phenomena after the particular experience and use we might make of them, or investing us with the responsibility to blaze our own conceptual and phenomenological trail through strokes of practice and check ourselves accordingly. Depending on the choice, the very use one might make of James will be rather different: either reading him as someone inviting you to try out the path he profitably if tentatively strolled for himself and see what one might make of it, or as someone whose most precious message and gift was that of encouraging us to explore the consequences of our own wanderings by measuring our own reaction to the scenes he plotted together.
- 7 Despite having said relatively little of the wealth of details about the various doctrines and views James put forward and their genesis, my focus on the metaphilosophical fabric and spirit of the volume was meant to offer a way into those. The volume is a welcome addition to the scholarship on James, and together with a few other gems – among which I list Jacques Barzun’s *A Stroll with William James* (The University of Chicago Press, 1983) and William Gavin’s *William James in Focus* (Indiana University Press, 2013) – convincingly advances a reading of James as a philosopher for those willing to engage in self-scrutiny, having spent the best part of his own personal and intellectual life accordingly and uncompromisingly.

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Review of David RIDLEY, *The Method of Democracy. John Dewey's Theory of Collective Intelligence*

Oxford, Peter Lang, 2021

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David RIDLEY, *The Method of Democracy. John Dewey's Theory of Collective Intelligence*, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2021

- 1 In its 2021 report on the state of world democracies, the US-based thinktank Freedom House declared that democracy was “under siege,” with worrying signs of retreat and resurgent authoritarianism across the world. In this book, a former university lecturer and trade unionist and now journalist and Green New Deal organiser takes up the problem of democracy as fundamental for understanding the opportunities and challenges facing the Left. In the wake of pessimism and right-wing populism, Ridley argues that the philosopher John Dewey holds the key for reinvigorating democracy as a form of collective practice, co-inquiry and way of life. In this unusual, original and important book, Dewey's work is taken on a journey to unexpected places, from the rise of neoliberalism to the marketisation of modern British universities.
- 2 Central to the book is the concept of collective intelligence. As Ridley understands it,

Collective intelligence itself arises out of the human struggle to impose form and order on nature and is always ready to re-emerge when collective problems require collective, intelligent solutions. (5)
- 3 This broad definition is explored within the framework of education, important of course to Dewey, but developed in the book through a particular focus on the role of higher education. Is the role of universities to make the “consumers” of its learning services more “employable,” or is its role to create intellectually proactive citizens who

actively participate in the public life of its communities? Ridley makes the case for the latter, and in the process presents a radical challenge to university managers and the discipline of sociology to rediscover their public and democratic purpose and values.

- 4 But what kind of understanding of Dewey does the book rely on? Among many achievements, Dewey radically reconceived the role of education and democracy. For Dewey, the value of education lies within a wider process of social or collective intelligence, in which public forms of inquiry around common problems lead to self-education, democratic mobilisation and the positive transformation of society. Ridley is fascinated by this concept of collective intelligence, which is used to explain a range of political crisis points today.
- 5 Ridley argues that the denial of collective intelligence has brought about the rise of right-wing populism as well as the decline of the Left into melancholia, nostalgia and esoteric squabbles. Workers have become disempowered and disconnected from one another by more specialised tasks that require only immediate knowledge. This is an effect of free-market capitalism and its neoliberal proponents, who, as Ridley shows, fell under new practices of scientific management in which they were unable to develop a more general understanding of how everything fits together. In the process, public issues became private troubles, to invert the famous line by C. Wright Mills that Ridley uses to effect in the book.
- 6 Whereas the left-wing criticism of neoliberalism has become familiar, Ridley begins in the more unusual spot of how two different strands of post-WW2 socialist thought, the Frankfurt School and the more heterogeneous currents of the New Left, have also failed to recognise the possibilities inherent in collective intelligence. For what it describes is not merely how groups of people learn together, but a wider democratic method and reason, in which a shared inquiry into a common problem becomes the basis for generating a coherent, collective agent with the capacity to address it. In the process, democratic publics are formed. This is an important development in an era marked by high rates of loneliness and declining forms of solidarity (e.g., Silva 2019).
- 7 John Dewey is the missing figure. Unlike the Frankfurt School pessimism about working class emancipation, Dewey argues that capitalism can never achieve total domination in consciousness. Consciousness is always incomplete, and domination is a process that requires collective agency and often involves counter-struggle. Dewey's metaphysics regards life as a "rhythmic alternation" of flux and relative permanence. Through this dynamic view not just of nature, but of human intelligence as a part of that nature, and as a response to it, Ridley glimpses what he calls a "method of democracy," of democracy as a way of life. The book then considers how higher education and public sociology could be used to achieve these ends.
- 8 The book is arranged into six chapters over three parts. Part One sets out theoretical foundations. Chapter One critiques the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer around working class capacity to knowledge and action. The reading is inventive, drawing on Lukacs to consider the ways in which a collective consciousness (here, of the working class) can be fabricated out of isolated individuals. It's about methodology and process. In Chapter Two, Ridley drills under the facile dismissal of Dewey by the Frankfurt School as mere "positivism," demonstrating that his concept of democracy as a practice and method of public co-inquiry can help fill the gaps in the Frankfurters' woebegone prognosis. What Horkheimer and Co. failed to see, and where Dewey can help, is "that thinking is a practical activity that changes the world through inquiry" (36).

- 9 Ridley's remarks come through a careful, contextual account of Horkheimer, Lukacs and Dewey. While identifying problems, he takes from the Frankfurt School the importance of understanding consciousness as an aspect of the capitalist system of social reproduction, something he develops in the later chapters on the marketisation of higher education. And from Dewey, the equally ambitious and fascinating proposal that the individual's reflective intelligence contributes to that of the collective:

The continuous development of reflective practice results in the "growth" of the individual, which in turn contributes to a rise in the general level of social intelligence of a society and an overall increase in the flexibility of collective habits. (40)

- 10 But whereas for Lukacs or Marx, this work is done by party intellectuals, for Dewey people can democratically raise themselves out of false consciousness, through the interruptions and collective reflections on problematic situations.
- 11 Chapter Two introduces Dewey, the method of democracy, and the formation of inquiring communities. Ridley asks why Dewey has fallen out of fashion with the modern-day Left. He is re-introduced as a thinker suited to our times:

If individuals can form with others inquiring publics to turn "private troubles into public issues," non-public opinion can be turned into social knowledge and become the focus of democratising social action within progressive political movements. In contrast to the top-down, manipulative approach of right-wing populist mobilisation, "intelligent populism" is an emergent, bottom-up and essentially democratic process of public self-education and mobilisation. (52)

- 12 Part Two moves to the problem for democracy and collective intelligence. On the one hand, neoliberalism has become hegemonic, as he sets out in Chapter Three. It has led to widening inequality, resentment, monopolies and efforts to bypass indignant democratic publics with a right-wing populism that reinforces authoritarianism. Ridley summarises these wider historical developments over the last forty years well, and convincingly links right-wing populism as an alternative form of neoliberalism (rather than a reaction to it, as commonly argued), in that both deny collective intelligence.
- 13 Chapter Four then focuses attention on the role of higher education. Traditionally, universities are conceived as centres for the protection and cultivation of intellectual freedom and inquiry. In practice, they are being hollowed-out by the same processes of neoliberalisation that have upended other areas of political and social life. The marketisation of higher education has accelerated this change, particularly that pushed through by the Coalition government from 2010. While some elite universities will be able to protect themselves through their prestige, most modern universities will be forced to use technologies to cut staffing costs and increase student numbers in order to stay afloat, thereby reducing the quality of education, narrowing its value to an elite concept of "employability," and creating two tiers of academics – precariously employed, de-professionalised labourers who provide teaching and little else, and an elite cadre who attract research funding income. This reflects the wider rise of monopolies and the diminution of working class political and social power.
- 14 Part Three sets out two paths to reconstruction. Despite the practical promise, these final chapters are for the most part theoretical again. Chapter Five turns to the academic discipline of sociology. Ridley argues that it has lost its roots and public calling in becoming professionalised and supposedly value neutral. In the process, it becomes complicit in the neoliberal capture of collective intelligence and the privatisation of public issues. Instead, Ridley argues that sociologists should be doing

public work, initiating and developing Deweyian forms of co-inquiry with members of the public around common problems. This short, theoretical chapter is an important first step, but to land its point home, a case study or review of some real-world examples would have made the concept clearer. Obviously, that is tough when the wider point is the difficulty or failure to imagine new forms of inquiring democratic collectives.

- 15 The final chapter is excellent. It brings Dewey to bear on the neoliberal malaise of the modern university. Ridley first shows that academics attempting to protect their working conditions have often focused too much on defending existing conditions, at the expense of developing a wider end-in-view of what a university should be for. But reading Dewey helps us appreciate that a fundamental role of the university is democratisation. Universities should exist for the “production of socially useful knowledge and the education of citizens for democratic governance” (155). They should be reconceived as a “*technology*” of the public, helping citizens understand the conditions that negatively impact society and developing knowledge to positively change them. Here, academics should look to community-based organisations and cooperative forms of workplace management to reimagine the university as public, rooted in the needs of local communities, and guided by the principles of solidarity and democracy.
- 16 Overall, this book provides a very useful service in framing the problem of populism, neoliberalisation and the troubles of the Left in terms of democracy and collective intelligence. Against an always-present temptation to fall into pessimism about life in dark times, the book calls on us to recognise that at our disposal is a common capacity that each of us shares, and which no government can ever fully take away: our capacity to inquire, reason and deliberate together. This is democracy not as a destination, not as a narrow form of governance, nor as a contentious justification of western military intervention in the Middle East. This is democracy as a way of life, as a process, and as an ethos. Because we always already turn to others to talk about and understand what affects us most. To prevent the further erosion of universities’ independence and working conditions, academics should recognise just how valuable and precious universities are as public and social assets. They prove the “value societies place in collective intelligence,” and the benefits that collective intelligence can provide (187). Through them, we can “rebuild the capacity of the public to self-rule” and “amplify the cumulative intelligence of society and create a true democracy as a way of life” (187-8).
- 17 These are important if idealistic arguments. They will be heartening to many worn down by the precarious conditions that can characterise work in UK higher education. But some questions go unanswered. Who will make up these new co-inquiring publics, and who will have time to take part? How can this approach deal with the criticisms made of participatory democracy, ranging from Michael Walzer (1971: 235-6) to Carol Pateman (1988: 33-4), that they can unintentionally exclude those who do not have the same amount of free time to take part (e.g., those with care commitments)? But any argument for participatory democracy faces these problems. As Adorno and Horkheimer diagnosed, the real issue is not about *free time* but about having *no time* for others. This book is an important and untimely case for making time then, for making time and space for new practices of collective inquiry, with all the messiness, risk and adventure that they entail.

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