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From Peirce to Betti, and Return

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# Readdressing Objectivity

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## 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).<sup>1</sup> 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 within gnoseological 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).<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

#### 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 reproposes 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 transcendental of values from the transcendental 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 epistemology<sup>3</sup>) 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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