

Philosophical Semantics

Philosophical Semantics:

*Reintegrating Theoretical
Philosophy*

By

Claudio Costa

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It's not madness that turns the world upside down. It's conscience.

Bernard Malamud

PREFACE

Niemand weiß noch, wer künftig in jenem Gehäuse wohnen wird und ob am Ende dieser ungeheuren Entwicklung ganz neue Propheten oder eine mächtige Wiedergeburt alter Gedanken und Ideale stehen werden, oder aber – wenn keins von beiden – mechanisierte Versteinerung, mit einer Art von krampfhaftem sich wichtig nehmen verbrämt. Dann allerdings könnte für die “letzten Menschen” dieser Kulturentwicklung das Wort zur Wahrheit werden: “Fachmensen ohne Geist, Genußmensen ohne Herz: dies Nichts bildet sich ein, eine nie vorher erreichte Stufe des Menschentums erstiegen zu haben.”

[No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For the ‘last man’ of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: ‘Specialist without spirit, sensualist without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of humanity never before achieved.’]
—Max Weber

The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term.
—Wilfrid Sellars

Making empty is the result of making small.
—Malcolm Bull

Science (mainly applied science) rises, while culture (artistic, religious, philosophical) falls. Whereas culture was once a source of values, today science and technology have made cultural values seem superfluous.

The critical theory of society has offered some explanations for this, drawing on Max Weber’s basic idea of the *disenchantment of the world* (*Entzauberung der Welt*). According to him, Western society has undergone a long and seemingly irreversible process of rationalization, in which a scientific-technological society, characterized by increasing bureaucratic rationality, gradually becomes alienated from the values, traditions, and sentiments of older forms of social thinking and acting, without having developed suitable resources to fill the void left behind.

As a result, in a scientifically oriented society, instrumental reason tends to prevail over valuing reason, furthering science and technology at the expense of an adequate substitute for the traditional aesthetic, mystical and humanistic cultural practices, which the available science remains unable to replace. Sociologists have used terms like ‘anomia,’ ‘alienation,’ and ‘nihilism’ to designate the negative individual and social effects of this mismatch between science and humanistic thinking, complaining that our technological world demands forms of cultural alienation to feed itself. Mass culture is a poor attempt to fill the gap; another is scientism.

Given the pressure of modern social forms resulting from rapidly spreading disenchantment, we should not wonder that a kind of philosophy prevails that all too often materially and institutionally simulates the methods and aims of particular scientific fields. In fact, it often emulates the sciences in a manner suggesting the way much of continental philosophy has emulated rhetorical-literary forms, that is, taking over the place of the most proper forms of philosophical argumentation with the effect of losing much of its relation to truth. As a fact, a scientific attempt to ‘disenchant philosophy’ is incoherent because science in a wide sense must be ‘consensualizable public knowledge’ (John Ziman), opposed in this way by the inevitably non-consensualizable philosophical activity, often turning itself into a mix of pseudo-science and bad philosophy. Hence, a scientific attempt to disenchant philosophy is, in fact, a thinly veiled attempt of ‘re-enchantment.’ However, it must be a deficient one, insofar as the epistemic place of philosophy in its central domains is by intrinsic necessity deeply ingrained in older forms of a pluralist conjectural argumentative endeavor aiming at comprehensiveness, which cannot be reduced to the domain of a particular science without being severely mutilated.

We can feel this tension in praxis: by taking into account only the discussions of recent years, as science does, one might pretend that the philosophical community is going through the same linear development as science, only to find itself some time later lost in a confusing variety of foreseeable *culs-de-sac*. But an inevitably segmented ‘minute philosophy’ of the ‘last novelty’ made for ‘immediate consumption’ by and for small self-protective cliques of specialists and related scientists no longer seems, as in the tradition, to be an independent conjectural undertaking making balanced use of whatever new scientific knowledge can serve its purposes. More often, it appears often as a busy handmaiden of science suffering from loss of identity and self-esteem; a forcefully particularized pseudo-scientific guesswork, an atomized conjectural endeavor that does not look beyond its own narrow interests. This guesswork scarcely touches the

central philosophical problems inherited from the philosophical tradition or touches them in a way that is unrecognizably deformed by their own reductive-positivist perspective. They seem unprepared to see that in its most central domains philosophy should absorb science instead of being absorbed by science.

In pointing to this, I am far from embracing Manichaeism. I am not claiming that for science to exert great influence on philosophy is inevitably specious and unfruitful. There are many useful limited ways of doing philosophy. Often, particularized philosophy furthers the development of particular sciences or develops into a new field that approaches science, as in the very successful case of speech acts theory. Moreover, there are felicitous cases, like the rapid proliferation of competing theories of consciousness over the last five decades, which serves as a striking example of fruitful philosophical work very closely associated with the development of empirical science that has deepened the field of investigation. And these are only a few cases among many!

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that this same intellectual movement can easily become an ideologically motivated agenda if it tempts the theoretical philosopher to import new knowledge from particular sciences – formal or empirical – in ways that cause him to lose sight of the vast and plural scope of the philosophical landscape. A possible consequence of this is what can be aptly labeled *expansionist scientism*: an effort to reduce some wide domain of philosophy to the scope of investigative strategies and categories derived from a new more or less established particular science. In order to achieve this aim, the particular (formal or empirical) scientific field must be expanded in order to answer questions belonging to some more central domain of philosophy, using a reductionist strategy that underestimates philosophy's encompassing and multifaceted character. An earlier example of expansionist scientism was in my view Pythagoreanism, which unsuccessfully tried to find answers to the problems of life using the newly developed science of numbers. Today's example would be modal logic, which has also generated a fair amount of expansionist scientism. The price one must pay for this may be that persistent, distinctive philosophical difficulties, which cannot be accommodated within the new particularizing model must be minimized if not quietly swept under the carpet.

A chief inconsistency of scientism arises from the fact that while sciences are in various ways all particular, philosophy is most properly 'holistic': As Wittgenstein once wrote, the difficulty of philosophy is that its problems are so interconnected that it is impossible to solve any one philosophical problem without first having solved all the others. Insofar as

his claim is true, it means that a persistent difficulty of the central philosophical problems is that we need a proper grasp of the whole to be able to evaluate and answer them properly. Indeed, this is what can make philosophical understanding so unbearably complex and multifarious. And the lack of this kind of comprehensiveness is what can make fragmented contemporary analytic philosophy often appear like a headless turkey running around aimlessly. Nonetheless, taking account of parts as belonging to a whole, trying to see things *sub specie totius*, is what the great systems of classical philosophy – such as those of Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel – strove to achieve, even if paying a price that we are now better able to appreciate as unavoidably high in terms of misleading and aporetic speculation. Nonetheless, it would be too easy and hasty to conclude that *true comprehensiveness* is no longer a fundamental desideratum of philosophy (Wittgenstein was well aware of this when he called for more ‘*Übersichtlichkeit*’).

There is also an internal reason for the narrowness and fragmentation of much of our present linguistic-analytical philosophy that can be explained as follows. The new Anglo-American philosophy – from W. V.-O. Quine to Donald Davidson, and from Saul Kripke to Hilary Putnam and Timothy Williamson – has challenged a great variety of inherited commonsense starting points and challenged them in often undeniably insightful and imaginative ways, although in my view with ultimately unsustainable results. Because of this, a considerable part of theoretical philosophy has increasingly lost touch with its intuitive commonsense grounding in the way things *prima facie* seem to be and for the most part really are.

Take, for instance, the concept of meaning: the word ‘meaning’ was challenged by Quine as too vague a noise to be reasonably investigated. But an approach is inevitably limited if it, moved by contentious arguments, starts from a kind of positivist-reductionist perspective that denies or ignores commonsense certainties, like the indisputable fact that meanings exist and demand an appropriate explanation. Indeed, using the strategy of skeptically questioning all kinds of deeply ingrained truisms, scientistically oriented philosophers have sawed off the branches they were sitting on. The reason for this is that the result of the adopted strategy couldn’t be other than replacing true comprehensiveness with a superficializing positivistic fragmentation of inevitably misleadingly-grounded philosophical concerns. This movement ends by plunging philosophy into what Scott Soames confidently called the ‘age of specialization,’ while Susan Haack with a healthy touch of pessimism would call it ‘a disastrous age of fragmentation.’

Admittedly, this fragmentation can be regarded as dividing to conquer; but it may also be a matter of dividing to subjugate, and what is here to be subjugated is more often the philosophical intellect. Indeed, by focusing too much on the trees, we may lose sight of the philosophical forest and thereby even of where the trees are and how to compare them. Without the well-reasoned assumption of some deep common sense truisms, no proper *descriptive metaphysics*, to use P. F. Strawson's expression, remains possible. And without this, the only path left for originality in philosophy of language, after rigorous training in techniques of argumentation, may turn out to be the use of new formalistic pyrotechnics of unknown value or the production of intellectual artificialities of scarce intelligibility and suspicious depth. This would have the end-effect of blocking paths of inquiry, disarming adequate philosophical analysis and increasing the risk that the whole enterprise will degenerate into a sort of scholastic, fragmented, vacuous intellectual *Glasperlenspiel*.

It may be that practitioners of reductive scientific philosophy are aware of the problem, but they have found plausible excuses for neglecting to deal with it. Some have suggested that any attempt to do philosophy on a comprehensive level would not suffice to meet the present standards of scholarly adequacy demanded by the academic community. But in saying this they forget that philosophy does not need to be pursued too close on the heels of new advances in the sciences, which are continually producing and handing down new authoritative developments. Philosophy largely remains an autonomous *cultural* enterprise: it is inherently conjectural and dependent on metaphorical elements indispensable to its pursuit of comprehensiveness (Aristotle, calling his first philosophy 'the *searched for science*' was well aware of this). Indeed, most of philosophy remains a relatively free cultural enterprise with a right to controlled speculation, experimentation, and even transgression, though most properly done in the pursuit of truth.

Others have concluded that today it is impossible to develop a truly encompassing theoretical philosophy. For them this kind of philosophy cannot succeed because of the difficulties imposed by the overwhelming amount of information required, putting the task far beyond the cognitive capacity of individual human minds. We might even be – to borrow Colin McGinn's original metaphor – *cognitively closed* to finding decisive solutions for the great traditional problems of philosophy in the sense that we aren't adequately wired to solve them. That is, in our efforts to do ambitious comprehensive philosophy, we are like chimps trying to develop the theory of relativity. Just as they lack sufficient mental capacity to solve the problems of relativistic mechanics, we lack sufficient mental capacity

to develop comprehensive philosophy and will therefore never succeed! Hence, if we wish to make progress, we should shift our efforts to easier tasks...

This last answer seems specious and borders on defeatism. The very ability to initiate the discussion of broadly-inclusive philosophy suggests that we might also be able to accomplish our task. As Wittgenstein once noted, if we are able to pose an appropriate question, it is because we are also in principle able to find its answer. In contrast to human thinkers, one indication that chimps could never develop a theory of relativity is that unlike Einstein they are unable to even pose questions such as what would happen if they could move at the speed of light. Moreover, even if the total amount of scientific knowledge available to us has increased immensely, it may well be that the amount of really essential information needed to answer any given question is sufficiently limited for us to grasp and apply. Very often the science needed to do philosophy can be limited to very general findings. Furthermore, not all philosophical approaches need to be taken into account, since they are often superimposed or displaced. The main difficulty may reside in the circumstances, strategies and authenticity of attempts, in limits imposed on the context of discovery, rather than in the sheer impossibility of progress. In any case, it is a fact that in the so-called philosophy of linguistic analysis true comprehensiveness has almost disappeared in the recent years. However, my guess is that the main reason isn't impossibility in principle, but rather *the loss of a suitable cultural soil in which a more comprehensive philosophy could flourish*.

In this book, I begin by arguing that more fruitful soil can be found if we start with a better reasoned and more affirmative appreciation of commonsense truisms, combined with a more pluralistic approach, always prepared to incorporate the relevant – formal and empirical – results of science. Perhaps it is precisely against the uncomfortable return of a broader pluralistic approach that much of the mainstream of our present philosophy of language secretly struggles. Awareness of this can be obscured by some sort of dense, nearly scholastic scientific atmosphere, so thick that seasoned practitioners barely notice it surrounding them. The intellectual climate sometimes recalls the Middle Ages, when philosophical investigation was allowed, providing it left unchallenged established religious dogmas. I even entertain the suspicion that in some quarters the attempt to advance any plausible comprehensive philosophy of language against the institutional power of reductive scientism runs the risk of being ideologically discouraged as a project and silenced as a fact.

Ernst Tugendhat, who (together with Jürgen Habermas) attempted with considerable success to develop comprehensive philosophy in the

seventies, seems to have hoisted the white flag by admitting that the heyday of philosophy is past. The problem is in my view aggravated because we live in a time of widespread indifference concerning high culture, as I pointed out at the beginning – a time heavily influenced by a steady, almost exponential development of science and technology that forcefully minimizes the role of valuing reason. Though quite indispensable from the viewpoint of instrumental reason, our scientifically biased age tends to impose a compartmentalized form of alienation on philosophical research that works against more broadly oriented attempts to understand reality.

In the present book, I insist on swimming against the tide. My main task here – a risky one – is to establish the foundations of a more comprehensive philosophy of meaning and reference, while arguing against some main reductionist-scientistic approaches that are blocking the most promising paths of inquiry. Hence, it is an attempt to restore its deserved integrity to the analytic philosophy of language, without offending either common sense or science; an effort to give a balanced, systematic and sufficiently plausible overview of meaning and the mechanisms of reference, using bridges laboriously constructed between certain summits of philosophical thought. In this way, I hope to realize something of the old philosophical ambition of a comprehensive synthesis, insofar as this still sounds like a reasonable undertaking.

Paris, 2017

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Before any acknowledgments, I must emphasize Wittgenstein's major influence on my philosophical outlook. His exceedingly suggestive and multifarious approach is more far-reaching than unprepared readers could possibly grasp, and the originality of his philosophical mind is indebted to his freedom from the burdens of the academic factory. Frege's unprecedented work was equally indispensable in structuring the subject under investigation. I must also emphasize as well the strong influence on my thinking of two living philosophers: Ernst Tugendhat and John Searle.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Logic, I should maintain, must no more admit a unicorn than zoology can; for logic is concerned with the real world just as truly as zoology, though with its more abstract and general features.

—*Bertrand Russell*

A philosophical tradition which suffers from the vice of *horror mundi* in an endemic way is condemned to futility.

—*Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons, Barry Smith*

The old orthodoxy of the philosophy of language that prevailed during the first half of the twentieth century was marked by an insistence on the centrality of meaning, an eroded semantic principle of verifiability, naive correspondentialism, an elementary distinction between analytic and synthetic, crude descriptivist-internalist theories of proper names and general terms, a monolithic dichotomy between the *necessary a priori* and the *contingent a posteriori*... Could it nevertheless come closer to the truth than the now dominant causal-externalist orthodoxy?

This book was written in the conviction that this question should be answered affirmatively. I am convinced that the philosophy of language of the first half of the twentieth century that formed the bulk of the old orthodoxy was often more virtuous, more comprehensive, more profound and closer to the truth than the approaches of the new orthodoxy, and that its rough-hewn insights were often more powerful, particularly in the works of philosophers like Wittgenstein, Frege, Russell and even Husserl. My conjecture is that the reason lies in the socio-cultural background. Even if also motivated by a desire to approach the authentic consensual truth only possible for science, philosophy in itself has its own epistemic place as a cultural conjectural endeavor, unavoidably harboring metaphorical components which can be approached to those of the fine arts and comprehensive aims approachable to those of religion, even if it is in itself independent of both (Costa 2002). In its best, the first half of the twentieth century preserved these traits. One reason might be that this was still a very elitist and hierarchical intellectual world, while our present academic

world is much more level by a scientifically oriented pragmatic society, which does not make it the best place for philosophy as an effort to reach surveillability. A more important reason is that great culture is the result of a great conflict. And the period between the end of the nineteenth century and the Second World War was a time of increasing social turmoil with tragic dimensions. This conflict cast doubt on all established cultural values, creating the right atmosphere to the emergence of intellectuals and artists disposed to develop sweepingly original innovations. This could be felt not only in philosophy and the arts, but also in fields reserved for particular sciences.

Philosophy of language since the Second World War has been much more a form of strongly established academic 'normal philosophy,' to borrow Thomas Kuhn's term. On the one hand, it was a continuation of the old orthodoxy, represented in the writings of philosophers like John Austin, P. F. Strawson, Michael Dummett, John Searle, Ernst Tugendhat, Jürgen Habermas... whose side I usually take. On the other hand, we have seen the emergence of what is called the new orthodoxy, founded by Saul Kripke and Keith Donnellan in the early seventies and later elaborated by Hilary Putnam, David Kaplan, and many others. In opposition to the old orthodoxy, this approach emphasizes externalism about meaning, causalism, and anti-cognitivism. This new orthodoxy has become the contemporary mainstream position in philosophy of language.

I do not deny the philosophical relevance of this new orthodoxy. Nor do I reject its originality and dialectical force. Perhaps I am more indebted to it than I wish to admit. Nevertheless, it has already long since lost much of its creative impetus, and it now has transformed itself into a kind of scholastic discussion among specialists. Moreover, the value of the new orthodoxy in philosophy of language is in my judgment predominantly negative, since most of its conclusions fall short of the truth. This means that the significance of its ideas consists mostly in their being dialectically relevant challenges, which, I believe, could be adequately answered by an improved reformulation of old, primarily descriptivist-internalist-cognitivist views of meaning and its connection with reference that are to some extent developed in the present book. Indeed, I intend to show that the views of the old orthodoxy could be reformulated in much more sophisticated ways, not only answering the challenges of the new orthodoxy, but also suggesting solutions to problems that the contemporary philosophy of language hasn't addressed as well as it should.

My approach to the topics considered here consists in gradually developing and defending a primarily internalist, cognitivist and neodescriptivist analysis of the nature of the cognitive meanings of our expressions and

their inherent mechanisms of reference. But this approach will be indirect since the analysis will be supported by a critical examination of some central views of traditional analytic philosophy, particularly those of Wittgenstein and Frege. Furthermore, such explanations will be supplemented by a renewed reading and defense of the idea that existence is a higher-order property, a detailed reevaluation of the verificationist explanation of cognitive meaning, and a reassessment of the correspondence theory of truth, which I see as complementary to the here developed form of verificationism, involving coherence and dependent on a correct treatment of the epistemic problem of perception.

The obvious assumption that makes my project *prima facie* plausible is the idea that language is a system of rules, some of which should be the most proper sources of meaning. Following Ernst Tugendhat, I assume that the most central meaning-rules are those responsible for what Aristotle called *apophantic speech*: the representational discourse, whose meaning-rules I call *semantic-cognitive rules*. Indeed, it seems at first highly plausible to think that the cognitive meaning (i.e., informative content and not mere linguistic meaning) of our representational language cannot be given by anything other than semantic-cognitive rules or associations of such rules. Our knowledge of these typically conventional rules is – as will be shown – usually tacit, implicit, non-reflexive. That is, we are able to use them correctly in a cognitive way, though we find almost unsurmountable difficulties when trying to analyze them in a linguistically explicit way, particularly when they belong to philosophically relevant concepts.

My ultimate aim should be to investigate the structure of semantic-cognitive rules by examining our basic referential expressions – singular terms, general terms and also declarative sentences – in order to furnish an appropriate explanation of their reference mechanisms. In the present book, I do this only partially, often in the appendices, summarizing ideas already presented in my last book (2014, Chs. 2 to 4), aware that they still require development. I proceed in this way because in the main text of the present book my main concern is rather to justify and clarify my own assumptions on the philosophy of meaning and reference.

1. Ernst Tugendhat's analysis of singular predicative statements

In developing these views, I soon realized that my main goal could be seen as essentially a way to revive a program already speculatively developed by Ernst Tugendhat in his classical work *Traditional and Analytical*

Philosophy: Lectures on the Philosophy of Language.¹ This book, first published in 1976, can be considered the swansong of the old orthodoxy, defending a non-externalist and basically non-properly-causalist program that was gradually forgotten during the next decades under the ever-growing influence of the new causal-externalist orthodoxy. Tugendhat's strategy in developing this program can be understood in its core as a semantic analysis of the fundamental singular predicative statement. This statement is not only epistemically fundamental, it is also the indispensable basis for building our first-order truth-functional language. In summary, given a statement of the form *Fa*, he suggested that:

- 1) The meaning of the singular term *a* should be its *identification rule* (*Identifikationsregel*),
 - 2) the meaning of the general term *F* should be its *application rule* (*Verwendungsregel*), which I also call a *characterization* or (preferably) an *ascription* rule,
 - 3) the meaning of the complete singular predicative statement *Fa* should be its *verifiability rule* (*Verifikationsregel*), which results from the collaborative application of the first two rules.
- (Cf. Tugendhat & Wolf 1983: 235-6; Tugendhat 1976: 259, 484, 487-8).

In this case, the verifiability rule is obtained by the sequential application of the first two rules in such a way that the identification rule of the singular term must be applied first, in order to then apply the general term's ascription rule. Thus, for instance, Yuri Gagarin, the first man to orbit the Earth from above its atmosphere, gazed out of his space capsule and exclaimed: 'The Earth is blue!' In order to make this a true statement, he should first have identified the Earth by applying the identification rule of the proper name 'Earth.' Then, based on the result of this application, he would have been able to apply the ascription rule of the predicative expression '...is blue.' In this form of combined application, these two rules work as a kind of verifiability rule for the statement 'The Earth is blue.' That is: if these rules can be conjunctively applied, then the statement is true, otherwise, it is false. Tugendhat saw this not only as a form of verificationism, but also as a kind of correspondence theory of truth – a conclusion that I find correct, although rejected by some of his readers.²

¹ Original German title: *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die sprachanalytische Philosophie*.

² An antecedent of this is J. L. Austin's correspondence view, according to which an indexical statement (e.g., 'This rose is red') is said to be true when the historical

In order to test Tugendhat's view, we can critically ask if it is not possible that we really first apply the ascription rule of a predicative expression. For example, suppose that one night you see something burning at a distance without knowing what is on fire. Only after approaching it do you see that it is an old, abandoned factory. It may seem that in this example you first applied the ascription rule and later the identification rule. However, in suggesting this you forget that to see the fire one must first direct one's eyes at a certain spatiotemporal spot, thereby localizing the individualized place where something is on fire. Hence, a primitive identification rule for a place at a certain time needed to be first generated and applied.

That is, initially the statement will not be: 'That old building is on fire,' but simply 'Over there... is fire.' Later on, when you are closer to the building, you can make a more precise statement. Thus, in this same way, while looking out of his space capsule's porthole, Gagarin could think, 'Out there below the porthole it is blue,' before saying 'The Earth is blue.' But even in this case, the ascription rule cannot be applied without the earlier application of some identification rule, even if it is one that is only able to identify a vague spatiotemporal region from the already identified porthole. To expand on the objection, one could consider a statement like 'It is all white fog.' Notwithstanding, even here, 'It is all...' expresses an identification rule (of my whole visual field covering the place where I am right now) for the singular term, while '...white fog' expresses the ascription rule that can afterward be applied to the whole place where I am. Even if there is no real property, as when I state 'It is all darkness,' what I mean can be translated into the true statement 'Here and now there is no light.' And from this statement, it is clear that I first apply the indexical identification rule for the here and now and afterward see the inapplicability of the ascription rule for lightness expressed by the negation '...there is no light' corresponding to the predicative expression '...is all darkness.'

Tugendhat reached his conclusions through purely speculative considerations, without analyzing the structure of these rules and without answering the many obvious external criticisms of the program, like the numerous well-known objections already made against verificationism.

fact correlated with its demonstrative convention (here represented by the demonstrative 'this') is of the type established by the sentence's descriptive convention (the red rose type) (Austin 1950: 122). This was a first approximation of conventionalist strategies later employed by Dummett in his interpretation of Frege (*Cf.* 1981: 194, 229) and still later more cogently explored by Tugendhat under some Husserlian influence.

But what is extraordinary is that he was arguably right, since the present book will make it hard to contest his main views.³

2. The virtue of comprehensiveness

Our methodological strategies will also be different from those used in the more formalistically oriented approaches criticized in this book, insofar as they follow a positivist-scientistic kind of ideal language philosophy that often hypostasizes form in ways that lead them to ignore or distort empirical truisms. By contrast, I am more influenced by what could be broadly called the *natural language* tradition, thus being inclined to assign a fair amount of heuristic value to common sense and critical examination of the natural language intuitions, often seeking support in a more careful examination of concrete examples of how linguistic expressions are effectively employed in adequately chosen conversational contexts.⁴ Consequently, my approach is primarily oriented by the communicative and social roles of language, which are regarded as the fundamental units

³ Tugendhat's thesis crosses over peculiarities of linguistic interaction. Consider a conversational implicature: – 'Do you know how to cook?' – 'I am French,' which implicates the statement 'I know how to cook.' (Recanati 2004: 5) Obviously, this does not effect Tugendhat's thesis, for the proper and implied meanings posed by the statement 'I am French' would then be established by means of verifiability rules.

⁴ The ideal language tradition (steered by the logical analysis of language) and the natural language tradition (steered by the real work of natural language) represent opposed (though arguably also complementary) views. The first was founded by Frege, Russell and the early Wittgenstein. It was also later strongly associated with philosophers of logical positivism, particularly Rudolf Carnap. With the rise of Nazism in Europe, most philosophers associated with logical positivism fled to the USA, where they strongly influenced American analytic philosophy. The philosophies of W. V-O. Quine, Donald Davidson, and later Saul Kripke, Hilary Putnam and David Kaplan, along with the present mainstream philosophy of language, with its metaphysics of reference, are in indirect ways later American developments of ideal language philosophy. What I prefer to call the natural language tradition was represented after the Second World War in Oxford by the sometimes dogmatically restrictive 'ordinary language philosophy.' Its main theorists were J. L. Austin, Gilbert Ryle, and P. F. Strawson, although it had an antecedent in the less restrictive natural language philosophy of the later Wittgenstein and, still earlier, in G. E. Moore's commonsense approach. Natural language philosophy also affected American philosophy through relatively isolated figures like Paul Grice and John Searle, whose academic influence has foreseeably not been as great... For the initial historical background, see J. O. Urmson (1956).

of analysis. It must be so because I assume that the most properly philosophical approach should be as comprehensive as possible and that an all-inclusive understanding of language and meaning must fairly contemplate its unavoidable involvement in overall societal life.

Finally, my approach is systematic, which means that coherence belongs to it heuristically. The chapters of this book are so interconnected that the plausibility of each is usually better supported when regarded in its relation to arguments developed in the preceding chapters and their often critical appendices. Even if complementary, these appendices (particularly the Appendix of the present introduction) are sometimes an indispensable counterpoint to the chapters, aiming to better justify the expressed views, if not to add something relevant to them.

The whole inquiry strives in the direction of comprehensiveness, aiming to reintegrate theoretical philosophy under the recognition that there is no philosophical question completely independent of all the others.⁵ In this way, it shows itself to be an attempt to analyze linguistically approximated concepts like meaning, reference, existence, and truth, insofar as they are internally associated with one another and, unavoidably, with a cluster of some main metaphysical and epistemological framework concepts constitutive of our understanding of the world.

⁵ After his broad exposition of contemporary philosophy, K. A. Appiah concluded: 'The subject is not a collection of separate problems that can be addressed independently. Issues in epistemology and the philosophy of language reappear in the discussions of philosophy of mind, morals, politics, law, science, and religion... What is the root of the philosophical style is a desire to give a *general* and *systematic* account of our thought and experience, one that is developed critically, in the light of evidence and arguments.' (2003: 377-378) Because of this, the hardest task for those committed to comprehensive coherence is to reach a position that enables the evaluation of the slightest associations among issues belonging to the most diverse domains of our conceptual network (*Cf.* Kenny 1993: 9).

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER I

HOW DO PROPER NAMES REALLY WORK? (CUTTING THE GORDIAN KNOT)

Once fashion comes in, objectivity goes.

—*D. M. Armstrong*

As Wittgenstein once said, our aim in teaching philosophy should not be to give people the food they enjoy, but rather to offer them new and different food in order to improve their tastes. This is my intention here. I am firmly convinced that I have a much more elucidative explanation for the mechanisms of reference that characterize proper names, but the really difficult task seems to be that of convincing others. This difficulty is even greater because I am swimming against the present mainstream – in this case, the externalist-causalist and basically anti-cognitivist views regarding the meaning and reference of proper names.

There is a further reason why the neodescriptivist theory of proper names that I intend to summarize here is particularly hard to accept. This is because the question of how proper names refer has always been the touchstone for theories of reference. More than forty years ago, when Saul Kripke, Keith Donnellan, and others rejected descriptivism for proper names, they also opened the door for externalist, causalist, and potentially non-cognitivist views concerning the reference of indexicals, natural kind terms, and statements. Now, if I achieve my goal, which is to re-establish descriptivism concerning proper names in a considerably more developed and refined way, the doors will again be open to re-establishing descriptivist-internalist-cognitivist views about other terms and language in general. This means that we will once again have to survey the whole topography of our philosophy of language. However, since the new orthodoxy is already well-entrenched – it has led a good life for the past forty years – and a myriad of good and bad arguments have been developed in its favor, the challenge is naturally huge. If I limited myself to answering just the most relevant arguments, I would still need to write an entire book to make a persuasive case for a neodescriptivist approach to proper names. But when I consider the potential disorder that advanced

neo-descriptivism could cause in all these ‘well-established’ views about reference, even a thousand-page book defending the descriptivist-internalist-cognitivist understanding of terms and answering all the relevant arguments still seems insufficient. And the reason is clear: most specialists are now working within the externalist-causalist paradigm, and many do not wish to be convinced. Taking into consideration that I am not writing for readers with unshakable theoretical commitments, in what follows I dare to offer a summarized version of my own view on proper names.¹

1. A meta-descriptive rule for proper names

According to descriptivism, proper names are *abbreviations* of definite descriptions. The most explicit formulation of descriptivism for proper names – the *bundle theory* as presented in the work of John Searle – states that a proper name abbreviates a bundle of definite and even indefinite descriptions that constitute its whole content (1958; 1967). This means that definite descriptions have no function other than to be *carriers of information* that can be more or less helpful for the identification of their bearers. As Susan Haack wrote, summarizing Searle’s view:

The different senses we can give a proper name that we use result from our having in mind some not previously determined sub-bundle from a whole bundle of co-referential descriptions. (*Cf.* Haack 1978: 58)

Thus, as Frege already saw, one speaker can use the name ‘Aristotle’ to mean ‘the greatest disciple of Plato and the tutor of Alexander,’ while another can use it to mean ‘the tutor of Alexander who was born in Stagira’ (1892: 29). And in the usual case, both speakers can know they are referring to the same person, insofar as they know that they share at least one description (Frege 1918: 65).

In my view, the problem with this formulation of bundle theory is not that it is wrong, since in one way or another most objections to it can be answered (*Cf.* Searle 1983, Ch. 9). The problem is that this theory is too vague, for this reason lacking explanatory power. The descriptions belonging to the bundles are treated as if they were completely *disordered*. How important this is becomes apparent when we remember that the descriptions belonging to these bundles can be seen as what Wittgenstein called ‘expressions of rules’ (*Regelausdrücke*): *description-rules* that

¹ This appendix is to some extent a summarized version of a more detailed text entitled ‘Outline of a Theory of Proper Names’ (Costa 2014, Ch. 2).

could possibly aid us to identify the bearer of a proper name. Usually, there are numerous descriptions that could be associated with any proper name, many of them obviously irrelevant. Unfortunately, bundle theory has no method for deciding which description-rules belonging to a bundle have more relevance for the identification of a name's bearer. It thus appears that the lack of such a method is the most serious flaw in traditional bundle theory.

Accordingly, my working hypothesis is that speakers of our language implicitly appeal to some kind of general *meta-descriptive rule* when using a proper name. This rule should tell us the conditions under which satisfaction of descriptions belonging to a bundle of descriptions abbreviated by a proper name makes this name applicable to its bearer. Thus, I intend to show that such an additional rule can be discovered as part of the pre-existing tools of our natural language and that its full explanation would greatly enhance the bundle theory of proper names.

The first move in this direction should be to find the most relevant descriptions. My proposal is inspired by J. L. Austin's method of quasi-lexicographical examination of ordinary language as a philosophical starting point. He recommended beginning with the *Oxford Dictionary*. Since dictionaries aren't the best places to find the meanings of proper names, I suggest first looking at encyclopedia entries for proper names. By doing this we can clearly distinguish two general kinds of description-rules that can help identify the bearer of a proper name. I call them *auxiliary* and *fundamental* descriptions. Fundamental descriptions are usually placed at the start of encyclopedia articles.

I begin with less relevant auxiliary descriptions. These can be characterized as ones only *accidentally* associated with proper names. Regarding the name 'Aristotle,' typical examples are (i) *metaphorical descriptions* like Dante's 'the master of those who know.' Other examples of auxiliary descriptions are 'the greatest disciple of Plato,' 'the tutor of Alexander,' 'the founder of the Lyceum' and 'the man called "Aristotle."' These are what we may call (ii) *accidental, but well-known descriptions*. There are also (iii) *accidental and little-known descriptions* associated with the name 'Aristotle,' such as 'the lover of Herphyllis' and 'the grandson of Achaeon.' Finally, there are (iv) contextually dependent *adventitious descriptions*, like 'the philosopher mentioned by the professor in the last class,' or 'the blonde woman who spoke with us at the party.' An adventitious description is often very transitory, as it is closely associated with an event that in most cases will soon be forgotten.

Descriptivist philosophers like Frege and Wittgenstein have often used auxiliary descriptions to exemplify parts of a bundle. However, this can be

very misleading, since ultimately they are of negligible semantic relevance. An indication of this secondary role is found in encyclopedias and biographies. Biographies and autobiographies offer a wide range of auxiliary descriptions, mostly irrelevant for identification purposes. Encyclopedias seldom begin articles with auxiliary descriptions. Instead, they begin with what I call *fundamental descriptions*: non-accidental descriptions that usually tell us the ‘when’ the ‘where’ and the ‘why’ of proper-name bearers. Following this path, I define fundamental descriptions as being of the following two types:

- (A) *Localizing description-rule*: a description that localizes an object in space and time, often singling out its spatiotemporal career.
- (B) *Characterizing description-rule*: a description that indicates what we regard as the most important properties related to the object, exposing our reasons for applying the proper name to it.

Indeed, as a rule, encyclopedias first state a spatiotemporal location and then the main reasons we use a proper name; only after that do they give a more detailed exposition containing most of the auxiliary descriptions. One example is the reference to Aristotle in my short *Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, which begins:

Aristotle (384-322 BC) born in Stagira, north of Greece, he produced the major philosophical system of Antiquity...

What we first see here are in synoptic form the localizing and characterizing descriptions.

Having discovered the two most fundamental kinds of description-rules, and after considering several different alternatives that I cannot go into here, I offer the following meta-descriptive rule to establish conditions of application for most if not all proper names. Using the term *world-circumstance* to designate any possible world, including the actual world, not only as we think it is, but also as it could be discovered to be,² I can present the meta-descriptive rule as follows:

² With the label ‘world-circumstance’ I wish to make explicit the possibility of discovering errors in our information about the actual world, as in the improbable cases in which we discover that Aristotle was in fact not called ‘Aristotle’ or in which we discover he was in fact not born in Stagira, etc.

MD-rule for the application of proper names:

In any world-circumstance where a proper name called ‘N’ has a bearer, this bearer must:

- (i) belong to some most proximally relevant class C, so that it
- (ii) sufficiently and
- (iii) more than any other referent satisfies
- (iv) the conditions set by at least (A) its localizing description-rules and/or (B) its characterizing description-rules.
- (v) We may add to this, as helpful indicative elements, a variety of auxiliary descriptions.

I illustrate my proposal with the name ‘Aristotle.’ The (i) most proximally relevant class C to which Aristotle belongs is that of human beings (C serves for practical aims to narrow the scope of referents to be considered, e.g., it excludes celestial bodies or computers). To be more precise, C must be the nearest most relevant class that does not merge with the characterizing description. This is why for the name Aristotle C must be the condition of being a *human being* and not of being a *philosopher*. The condition of type (A) for Aristotle can be summarized by the definite description ‘the person born in Stagira in 384 BC, son of the court physician Nicomachus, who spent the most productive part of his life in Athens, visited Lesbos and was exiled to Chalcis, where he died in 322 BC...’ The condition of type (B) for Aristotle can be summarized in the definite description ‘the philosopher who developed the relevant ideas of the Aristotelian opus...’ (That these two conditions are the most basic is supported by major encyclopedias).

Now, by applying the general meta-descriptive rule to the bundle of descriptions abbreviated by the name ‘Aristotle,’ I finally arrive at what I call its specific *identification rule*, the IR-Aristotle.³ Summarizing the descriptions, here is the identification rule for Aristotle:

IR-Aristotle: In any world-circumstance where there is a bearer of the proper name ‘Aristotle,’⁴ this bearer must be: (i) the human being who

³ We can also read the MD-rule simply as the *form* that any IR-rule for a proper name needs in order to establish its referential condition. (Cf. Ch. IV, sec. 15)

⁴ I do not identify the name with its symbolic form, but with the identification rule combined with *some* symbolic form. Hence, I place the proper name in quotation marks to indicate that it must be possible to be misleading about the true symbolic form of a proper name. Imagine a possible world where only one philosopher satisfies the fundamental conditions for being our Aristotle, but who is called ‘Pitacus.’ We would after all still identify him with our Aristotle! Indeed, even in