Realism After the Linguistic-Pragmatic Turn

Realismo após a Reviravolta Lingüístico-Pragmática

Theresa Calvet de Magalhães
Philosophy Department, Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG)
thcalvet@terra.com.br

Abstract: Reading *Warheit und Rechtfertigung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999) and more specifically what Jürgen Habermas writes in the "Introduction" to his recent book (not yet published in English), I will try to explain his answer to the epistemological problem of realism: how can we conciliate both the postulate of a world that is independent of our descriptions, a single objective world, and the philosophy of language discovery according to which we have no direct access, non-mediated by language, to "naked" reality. What I will try to explain then is what made Habermas proceed to a revision that connects the concept of rational acceptability to a pragmatic conception of truth, but without assimilating here "truth" to an "ideal assertibility". I will simply reconstruct what Habermas had alredy said, in 1996, in his essay on Rorty's neopragmatism ("Rorty's pragmatische Wende", *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, nº 44, p. 715-741), reprinted in chapter 5 of *Warheit und Rechtfertigung* (the Englsh version of this essay was published in HABERMAS, *On the Pragmatics of Communication* [edited by Maeve COOKE], Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, p. 343-382).

Rorty's naturalistic strategy, insists here Habermas, "leads to a categorical leveling of distinctions of such a kind that our descriptions lose their sensitivity for differences that, in practice, do make a difference."

Key-word: Habermas; (anti-)realism; Linguistic-Pragmatic Turn; truth; Rorty

Resumo: *Partindo da obra* Warheit und Rechtfertigung *(Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999) de J. Habermas, e mais especificamente das explicitações dadas em sua "Introdução", explicito a resposta dada por Habermas à questão epistemológica do realismo: como conciliar ao mesmo tempo o postulado de um mundo independente de nossas descrições, e idêntico para todos os observadores, e a descoberta da filosofia da linguagem, segundo a qual não temos um acesso direto, não mediatizado pela linguagem, à realidade "nua". Ou seja, explicito como ele foi conduzido a proceder a uma* revisão *que liga agora o conceito de aceitabilidade racional a um conceito pragmatista de verdade, mas sem assimilar assim a "verdade" a uma "asseverabilidade ideal". Trata-se, portanto, de explicitar o que Habermas já tinha elaborado em 1996, no seu ensaio sobre o neopramatismo de Richard Rorty ("Rorty's pragmatische Wende",* Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie, *nº 44, p. 715-741), reimpresso aqui (capítulo 5 de* Warheit und Rechtfertigung) *e que foi publicado, em 1998, em sua tradução inglesa ["Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn"], na coletânea de textos de HABERMAS, editada por Maeve COOKE,* On the Pragmatics of Communication *(Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press), p. 343-382.*

> *A estratégia naturalista de Rorty, conclui Habermas, "conduz a um nivelamento das categorias de tal modo que as nossas descrições tornam-se insensíveis a certas diferenças que, na prática, fazem uma diferença".*

Palavras-chave: *Habermas; (anti-)realismo; reviravolta lingüístico-pragmática; verdade; Rorty*

I really am very grateful to Professor Ivo Assad Ibri for having not only invited me but insisted that I participate this year in the *5th International Meeting on Pragmatism* and for this unique opportunity after living for the last 25 years in this wonderful country to return to Peirce. It is also for me a great pleasure to be able to meet now not only the members of the Center for Studies on Pragmatism of this University but all the Brazilian and American Peircean scholars who are attending this Meeting. But I am not going to talk about Peirce. I chose perhaps a sort of strange path to return to Peirce, reading Habermas and Searle. I certainly hope to have better luck now than I had back in the 1970's when I began, quite innocently, to study Peirce after reading one citation on symbols in Derrida and Kristeva, and then wrote my PhD dissertation *Sign or Symbol* which was published some years later.[1]

Reading *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung* (1999) and more specifically what Jürgen Habermas writes in the "Introduction" to his recent book, not yet published in English[2], I will try to explain his answer to the epistemological problem of realism: how can we conciliate both the postulate of a world that is independent of our descriptions, a single objective world, and the philosophy of language discovery according to which we have no direct access, non-mediated by language, to "naked" reality. Habermas wants to hold onto the moment of *unconditionality* that is part of the correspondence idea of truth, while retaining an *internal relation* between truth and justifiability: his aim is to work out a theory of truth that is inherently *pragmatic* yet retains the idea of an unconditional truth claim. In light of Habermas's recent criticism of Richard Rorty's pragmatic turn[3], his early treatment of a pragmatic theory of truth is important. What Searle tries to show in 1995, in *The Construction of Social Reality,* is that "external realism" is presupposed by the use of large sections of a public language: for a large class of utterances, *each* individual utterance requires for its *intelligibility* a publicly accessible reality that he characterized as representation independent. There is nothing epistemic about realism

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1   Th. Calvet de Magalhães, *Signe ou Symbole. Introduction à la Théorie Sémiotique de C. S. Peirce*, Louvain-la-Neuve / Madrid, Cabay, 1981.

2   J. Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung. Philosophische Aufsätze,* Frankfurt-am-Main, Suhrkamp, 1999; *Vérité et Justification.* Translated by Rainer Rochlitz, Paris, Gallimard, 2001; *Verità e giustificazione*, translated by Mario Carpitella Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2001. The English translation will be published in 2003.

3   J. Habermas, "Rorty's pragmatische Wende", *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, nº 44 (1996) p. 715-741 (reprinted as chapter 5 of *Warheit und Rechtfertigung*); the English version of this essay ("Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn") was published in J. Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication* (edited by Maeve Cooke), Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1998, p. 343-382.

so construed. External realism is not epistemic: realism is the claim that *reality* is radically nonepistemic. Searle is not saying here "that in order *to know the truth* of our claims we have to presuppose realism". His argument is "completely independent of questions of knowledge or even of truth". The claim, according to him, "is about conditions *of intelligibility*, not about conditions of *knowledge*."[4] The presupposition of realism is not just one claim among others, but is, he insists, "a condition of possibility of my being able to make publicly accessible *claims* at all". *Metaphysical realism* and *conceptual relativism* are then perfectly consistent: conceptual relativism as Searle formulates it – *our conception of reality, our conception of how it is, is always made relative to our constitution* - is meant, he says, "to be a trivial truth to the effect that we only form concepts that we are able to form"[5].

Does the pragmatic turn require an anti-realist understanding of knowledge?

The *Christian Gauss Lectures* that Habermas delivered at Princeton in 1971 – "Reflections on the Linguistic Foundations of Sociology" [*Vorlesungen zu einer spachtheoretischen Grundlegung der Soziologie*][6] – contain the first formulation of his "formal pragmatics"[7] and also mark the beginning of his appropriation of speech-act theory. Taking generative grammar as a *model* for developing *universal pragmatics*, we should be able, he writes, "to discover and reconstruct the rule systems according to which we generate contexts of interactions, that is, the symbolic reality of society" (p. 65). Habermas characterizes the level at which a universal pragmatics has to be developed by comparing it with the theory of grammar originated by Noam Chomsky (p. 68-76), and this sort of facilitates his treatment of the two most important theoretical components of a universal pragmatics: one dealing with the *cognitive use of language* (p. 78-82), the other with its *communicative use* (p. 82-84). Habermas makes it clear that these two uses of language

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[4]   J. R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York, The Free Press, 1995, p. 195.

[5]   E. Lapore and R. Van Gulick (eds.), *John Searle and his critics*, Cambridge, Mass. / Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1991, p. 190.

[6]   J. Habermas, Reflections on the Linguistic Foundations of Sociology, *in*: *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction. Preliminary Studies in the Theory of Communicative Action*, translated by Barbara Fultner, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2001, p. 1-103.

[7]   Cf. the fourth lecture: "Universal Pragmatics: Reflections on a Theory of Communicative Competence" (p. 67-84). In a footnote to the 1979 English translation of his essay "What is Universal Pragmatics" [*Was heisst Universalpragmatik?*] (1976), Habermas expresses dissatisfaction with the label "universal" and a preference for the term "formal pragmatics": "Hitherto the term "pragmatics" has been employed to refer to the analysis of particular contexts of language use and not to the reconstruction of universal features of using language (or of employing sentences in utterances). To mark this contrast, I introduced a distinction between "empirical" and "universal" pragmatics. I am no longer happy with this terminology; the term "formal pragmatics" – as an extension of "formal semantics" – would serve better. "*Formalpragmatik*" is the term preferred by F. Schütze, *Sprache Soziologisch Gesehen*, 2 vols, (Munich, 1975)." (J. Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. Translated and with an Introduction by Thomas McCarthy, Boston, Beacon Press, 1979, p. 208).

are *interdependent*. The task of what Habermas called first *universal* and later *formal pragmatics* is to identity and reconstruct universal conditions of possible mutual understanding [*Verständigung*]. Reaching mutual understanding requires a speaker and hearer to operate not only at the level of intersubjectivity on which they speak with one another but also at the level of objects or states of affairs about which they communicate with one another.

The key phenomenon that a universal pragmatics must explain is the *self-explicating capacity* of language: a natural language, writes Habermas, "has no metalanguage that is not dependent in turn on an interpretation in that (or another) natural language" (p. 73). The *illocutionary acts* analyzed by Searle after Austin[8] – the illocutionary act is considered here by Habermas as the elementary unit of speech [*elementare Einheit der Rede*] – are paradigmatic for this peculiar reflexivity of natural languages. The double structure of illocutionary acts – and Habermas following here Searle[9] represents the structure of illocutionary acts as "*Mp*" where *M* stands for mode of communication [*Modus der Kommunikation*] or for the different modes of language use (the main clause used in an utterance in order to establish an intersubjective relation between speakers and hearers) and *p* for propositional content (the dependent clause with propositional *content* used in an utterance in order to communicate about objects

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[8]   For Habermas, Searle's conception of language as a rule-governed intentional behavior in *Speech Acts* (1969) - speaking a language is performing acts according to rules: the semantic structure of a language is regarded here as a conventional realization of a series of sets of underlying constitutive rules - has the advantage of avoiding what he calls the false alternative between a study of the meaning of sentences, on the one hand, and a study of speech acts, on the other hand: "It still might seem that my approach is simply, in Saussurian terms, a study of "parole" rather than "langue". I am arguing however, that an adequate study of speech acts is a study of *langue*. There is an important reason why this is true which goes beyond the claim that communication necessarily involves speech acts. I take it to be an analytic truth about language that whatever can be meant can be said (…) There are, therefore, not two irreducible distinct semantic studies, one a study of meanings of sentences and one a study of the performances of speech acts. For just as it is part of our notion of the meaning of a sentence that a literal utterance of that sentence with that meaning in a certain context would be the performance of a particular speech act, so it is part of our notion of a speech act that there is a possible sentence (or sentences) the utterance of which in a certain context would in virtue of its (or their) meaning constitute a performance of that speech act. The speech act or acts performed in the utterance of a sentence are in general a function of the meaning of the sentence." (J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 17-18). For Habermas, what really is of interest here is that *there are constitute rules underlying speech acts*: "Different human languages, to the extent they are inter-translatable, can be regarded as different conventional realizations of the same underlying rules. The fact that in French one can make a promise by saying "je promets" and in English one can make it by saying "I promise" is a matter of convention. But the fact that an utterance of a promising device (under appropriate conditions) counts as the undertaking of an obligation is a matter of rules and not a matter of the conventions of French or English." (J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts*, p. 39-40).

[9]   Cf. J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts*, p. 31-33.

or states of affairs) – is considered by Habermas as the foundation of the inherent reflexivity of natural languages. The elementary connection of the illocutionary component and the propositional component of speech acts illustrates the double structure of ordinary language communication:

> Communication about objects (or states of affairs) takes place only on condition of simultaneous metacommunication about the meaning of the use of the dependent clause. A situation where it is possible to reach a mutual understanding requires that at least two speakers-hearers simultaneously establish communication at *both* levels: at the level of intersubjectivity, where the subjects talk with one another, and at the level of the objects (or state of affairs) *about* which they communicate. Universal pragmatics aims at the reconstruction of the rule system that a competent speaker must know if she is to be able to fulfill this postulate of the simultaneity of communication and metacommunication. I should like to reserve the term *communicative competence* for this qualification. (p. 74)[10]

Communicative competence is crucial for Habermas's social theory.[11] A *communicative theory of society* - a theory of society that accepts abstract systems of rules for generating *intersubjective relations* in which subjects themselves are formed – must, insists Habermas, "do justice to the double cognitive-communicative structure of speech" (p. 64).

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[10] To delineate more sharply his concept of *communicative competence*, and to delimit universal pragmatics, Habermas proposes here a didactically plausible series of steps of *abstractions*: "The abstractions begin with concrete utterances [*konkreten Äusserungen*]. I call an utterance "concrete" if it is made within a complete determining context. The first step is *sociolinguistic abstraction*. It prescinds from all those boundary conditions of linguistic rule systems that vary contingently and are specific only to individual speakers-hearers, and retains "utterances in generalized contexts". The second step is *universal-pragmatic abstraction*. It prescinds from all spatio-temporally and socially circumscribed contexts and retains only "situated utterances in general". In this way we arrive at the elementary units of speech [*elementaren Einheiten der Rede*]. The third abstraction is *linguistic abstraction*, which prescinds from the performance of speech acts and retains only "linguistic expressions" or sentences [*Sätze*]. In this way we arrive at the elementary units of language. The fourth step is *logical abstraction*, which disregards all performatively relevant linguistic expressions and retains "assertoric propositions" [*Aussagen*]. In this way we arrive at the elementary units for rendering states of affairs. Utterances in generalized social contexts are the object of sociolinguistics: It takes the form of a theory of pragmatic competence. (…) Situated utterances in general that are not specific to a given context are the object of universal pragmatics: It takes the form of a theory of communicative competence. Its task is reconstructing the rule system according to which competent speakers transpose linguistic expressions into utterances. Linguistic expressions (or string of symbols) are the object of linguistics: It takes the form of a theory of syntactic competence. (…) Finally assertoric propositions [*Aussagen*] are the object of logic" (p. 74-75).

[11] Habermas's *linguistic turn*, writes Barbara Fultner in her "Introduction" to these *Preliminary Studies in the Theory of Communicative Action*, "was initially motivated by the conviction that a critical social theory required a sound methodological and epistemological foundation: hence the project of providing a linguistic grounding for sociology" ("Translator's Introduction", *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction*, p. xxii).

The distinction between the *cognitive* and the *communicative* (or *interactive*) uses of language captures what Austin had in mind with his (later abandoned) distinction between *constative* and *perfomative* utterances[12]:

> I call the use of constative acts […] *cognitive*, because the performatively established interpersonal relation between speaker and hearer serves the purpose of reaching an understanding about objects (or states of affairs). By contrast, I call *communicative* the use of language where reaching an understanding about objects (and states of affairs) occurs for the purpose of establishing an interpersonal relationship. The level of communication that is the end in one case is made into a means in the other. In cognitive language use propositional contents are the topic; they are what the communication is about. But communicative use mentions propositional contents only in order to establish performatively an intersubjective relation between speaker-hearers. (p. 76)

Without a propositional content "-that p", which is expressed in cognitive language use in the form of a *declarative sentence* [*Aussagesatz*] "p", the communicative use of language would be impossible. In *cognitive* language use "we initiate communication with the goal of communicating something about an objectified reality". In *communicative* language use "we refer to something in the world in order to produce specific interpersonal relations" (p. 64). All speech acts have a cognitive and a communicative dimension. The *meaning* of a speech act consists of its propositional content *and* of the sense of the mode of mutual understanding that is sought. For Habermas, this illocutionary element determines the meaning of the *validity* that we claim for an utterance:

> The meaning of an assertion qua assertion is that the asserted state of affairs is the case. […] the meaning of a promise qua promise is that the speaker will in fact keep an obligation to which she has committed herself. Similarly, it is the meaning of a command qua command that the speaker wants to have her demand fulfilled. These validity claims that a speaker raises by performing speech acts ground intersubjective relations, that is, the facticity of social facts. (p. 63)

These claims converge in the single claim to rationality [*Vernunfttigkeit*]. *Truth* claims enjoy paradigmatic status as validity claims:

> The paradigm of all claims to validity is propositional *truth*. Even the communicative use of language must presuppose cognitive language use with its truth claims, since standard speech acts always contain propositional contents. (p. 86)

When we raise a truth claim, we use language cognitively. Habermas's few brief remarks on the *pragmatics of cognitive language use* (p. 78-81) focus on questions of *reference* and *perception*:

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[12] J. L. Austin, "Performative Utterances" [1956], *in*: *Philosophical Papers* (J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock, eds.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970 (Second Edition), p. 233-252; "Performative-Constative" [1958], translated by G. J. Warnock, *in*: Charles E. Caton (ed.), *Philosophy and Ordinary Language*, Urbana, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1963, p. 22-54; *How To Do Things With Words. The William James Lectures 1955* (J. O. Urmson, ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962 (Lecture VIII-Lecture XII).

> We make two suppositions […] We suppose the existence of the object about which we make a statement; and we suppose the truth of the proposition itself, that is, of what we assert about the object. Existence and truth represent the conditions that must be fulfilled if the statement is to represent a fact. The first supposition is justified if both speakers and hearers are able to identify unequivocally the object denoted by the subject expression of a proposition. The second is justified if both speakers and hearers verify whether what is predicated of the object in the proposition asserted is in fact true. The referential expression, be it a singular term or a definite description, can be understood as specification of how an object can be identified. Together with the expression, it constitutes a proposition that is supposed to correspond to an existing state of affairs […] The pragmatics of cognitive use shows that any given object domain is structured by particular interconnections between language, cognition, and action […] Sensory experience leads to the perception of things, events or states that we ascribe to things (we see that something is in a certain state). The communicative experience based on sensory experience leads via perception to the understanding of persons, utterances, or states that we ascribe to persons (we "see", i.e., understand, that someone is in a certain state). Experiences can have informational content only because and to the extent that they are surprising – that is, to the extent that they disappoint and modify expectations about objects. This background, which acts as a foil and against which experiences stand out, consists in beliefs (or prejudgments) about objects that we have already experienced. In cognitive language use we put our beliefs in the form of propositions […] A similar connection between language, cognition and action is manifest in predication. (p. 78-82)

In his subsequent articulations of formal pragmatics, Habermas no longer emphasizes perception and reference. In light of Cristina Lafont's criticisms to the effect that he needs a theory of reference to avoid some form of linguistic idealism[13] and of Herbert Schnädelbach objection to his privileging of the discursive rationality embodied in argumentative practices[14], Habermas's discussion of cognitive language use in the *Christian Gauss Lectures* is therefore important.

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[13] C. Lafont, *The Linguistic Turn in Hermeneutic Philosophy* [1994], Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1999 (chs. 5-6).

[14] H. Schänelbach, *Zur Rehabiliterung des animal rationale*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1992. In "Some Further Clarifications of the Concept of Communicative Rationality" [1996], Habermas accepts Schänelbach's point of criticism and he assumes that "we use the predicate "rational" in the first instance to refer to beliefs, actions, and linguistic utterances because, in the propositional structure of knowledge, in the teleological structure of action, and in the communicative structure of speech, we come upon *various roots of rationality*. These do not for their part appear to have common roots, at least not in the discursive structure of justificatory practices, nor in the reflexive structure of the self-relation of a subject participating in discourses. It is more probably the case that the structure of discourse establishes an interrelation among the entwined structures of rationality (the structures of knowledge, action, and speech) by, in a sense, *bringing together* the propositional, teleological, and communicative roots. According to such a model of *intermeshed* core structures, discursive rationality owes its special position not

It is also important because it contains an early treatment of the so-called *consensus theory of truth*, which emerges from his account of the *meaning of truth*. According to Habermas, the *meaning of truth* implicit in the pragmatics of assertions is explicated by specifying the conditions under which validity claims can or *could* be redeemed. This is the task, he says, of the *consensus theory of truth*:

> ...the truth that we claim propositions to have by asserting them, depends on two conditions. First, it must be grounded in experience; that is the statement may not conflict with dissonant experience. Second, it must be discursively redeemable; that is the statement must be able to hold up against all counterarguments and command the assent of all potential participants in a discourse. The first condition must be satisfied to make credible that the second condition *could* be satisfied as required. […] The truth condition of propositions is the potential assent of *all* others. Everyone else should be able to convince him- or herself that I am justified in predicating the attribute *p* of object *x* and should then be able to agree with me. The universal-pragmatic meaning of truth, therefore, is determined in terms of the demand of reaching a rational consensus. The concept of the discursive redemption of validity claims leads to the concept of rational consensus. (p. 89)

We can of course say that the interest of such a theory of truth lies more in what it says about how we reach agreement on claims to truth, and that it is not so much a theory of *truth* as a theory of *justification*. However, in light of Habermas's recent criticism of Richard Rorty's pragmatic turn, his early treatment of a pragmatic theory of truth is important.

Habermas sees speech-act theory as an attempt to bridge the gap between formal semantics and use-oriented theories of meaning. Austin's and Searle's account of meaning recognize both the dimension of *saying* something – on which, from Frege through the early Wittgenstein to Dummett, *formal semantics* focuses – and the dimension of *doing* something – on which the *use-oriented theories of meaning* deriving from the later Wittgenstein concentrate. A pragmatic reintrepretation of the problem of validity requires a reevaluation of what was originally meant by the illocutionary force of a speech act. What a speaker does in performing a speech act is enter into a relationship

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to its foundational but to its integrative role." (J. Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, p. 308-309). Habermas makes now a distinction between *two sorts of communicative action*: "I will speak of communicative action in a *weak sense* whenever reaching understanding applies to facts and to actor-relative reasons for one-sided expressions of will; I will speak of communicative action in a *strong sense* as soon as reaching understanding extends to normative reasons for the selection of the goals themselves. In the latter case, the participants refer to intersubjectively shared value orientations that – going beyond their personal preferences – *bind* their wills. In weak communicative action the actors are oriented solely toward claims to truth and truthfulness; in strong communicative action they are oriented toward intersubjectively recognized rightness claims as well; (…). Underlying communicative action in the weak sense is the presupposition of an objective world that is the same for all; in strong communicative action the participants over and above this count on a social world that is shared by them intersubjectively" (J. Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, p. 326-328).

of *obligation* with the hearer: "With the illocutionary force of an utterance, a speaker can motivate a hearer to accept the offer contained in her speech act and thereby enter into a rationally motivating binding and bonding relationship". This conception of the illocutionary force as a binding force presupposes not only that acting and speaking subjects can relate to more than only one world, but also that when they come to an understanding with one another about something in one world, they base their communication on a commonly shared system of worlds[15].

But does the pragmatic turn require an anti-realist understanding of knowledge? Habermas criticizes Rorty for drawing the wrong conclusions from his critique of the philosophy of language. According to Habermas, Rorty rightly emphasizes "that nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept", but the conclusion he draws from this – "that there is no way to get outside our beliefs and our language so as to find some test other than coherence" – is wrong. Certainly, Habermas responds, "within the linguistic paradigm, the truth of a proposition can no longer be conceived as correspondence with something in the world, for otherwise we would have to be able to "get outside of language" while using language". Nonetheless, he insists that "the correspondence idea of truth was able to take account of a fundamental aspect of the meaning of the truth predicate". This aspect – the notion of unconditional validity – "is swept under the carpet if the truth of a proposition is conceived as coherence with other propositions or as justified assertibility within an interconnected system of assertions"[16]. Habermas wants to hold onto the moment of *unconditionality* that is part of the correspondence idea of truth, while retaining an *internal relation* between truth and justifiability:

> In everyday practices, we cannot use language without *acting*. Speech itself is effected in the mode of speech acts that for their part are embedded in contexts of interaction and entwined with instrumental action. As actors, that is, as interacting and intervening subjects, we are always already in contact with things about which we can make statements […] For this reason, the question as to the internal connection between justification and truth – a connection that explains why we may, in light of the evidence available to us, raise an unconditional truth claim that aims beyond what is justified – is not an epistemological question. It is not a matter of being or appearance. What is at stake is not the correct representation of reality but everyday practices that must not fall apart […]

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[15] For Habermas, the insights of speech-act theory must be connected up with the communication-theoretic approach expounded by the German psychologist Karl Bühler in *Sprachtheorie* (1934). This approach suggests a fruitful line of inquiry for investigations into language as a mechanism of social coordination. Bühler's schema of language functions that places the linguistic expression in relation to the speaker, the world, and the hearer can be described as a radicalization of the paradigm change in the philosophy of language introduced by speech-act theory (Cf. J. Habermas, "Social Action, Purposive Activity, and Communication" [1981], and "Toward a Critique of the Theory of Meaning" [1988], *in*: *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, p. 105-181, and p. 278-305).

[16] J. Habermas, "Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn" [1996], *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, p. 357-358.

> Reaching understanding cannot function unless the participants refer to a single objective world, thereby stabilizing the intersubjectively shared public space with which everything that is merely subjective can be contrasted. This *supposition* of an objective world that is independent of our descriptions fulfills a functional requirement of our processes of cooperation and communication. Without this supposition, everyday practices, which rest on the (in a certain sense) Platonic distinction between believing and knowing unreservedly, would come apart at the seams. ("Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn", *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, p. 359)

Are there not, asks Habermas, "plausible explanations for the fact that a justification successful in our justificatory context points in favor of the context-independent truth of the justified proposition?". His aim, then, is to work out a theory of truth that is inherently *pragmatic* yet retains the idea of an unconditional truth claim:

> In the lifeworld actors depend on behavioral certainties. They have to cope with a world presumed to be objective and, for this reason, operate with the distinction between believing and knowing. There is a *practical* necessity to rely on what is unconditionally held-to-be- true. This mode of unconditionally holding-to-be-true is reflected on the discursive level in the connotations of truth claims that point beyond the given contexts of justification and require the supposition of ideal justificatory conditions – with a resulting decentering of the justification community. For this reason, the process of justification can be guided by a notion of truth that *transcends justification although it is always already operatively effective in the realm of action.* The function of the validity of statements in everyday practices explains why the discursive redemption of validity claims may at the same time be interpreted as the satisfaction of a pragmatic need for justification. This need for justification, which sets in train the transformation of shaken-up behavioral certainties into problematized validity claims, can be satisfied only by a translation of discursively justified beliefs back into behavioral truths. ("Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn", *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, p. 372)

It is this intertwining of truth in rational discourses and truth in action-contexts that favours the context-independent truth of the belief in question. For Habermas, the critical question for today's rationality debates is whether communicating subjects are from start to finish *imprisoned* in epochal interpretations of the world, discourses, and language games. His conclusion is that Rorty's strategy - his naturalization of linguistified reason - "leads to a categorical level-ing of distinctions of such a kind that our descriptions lose their sensitivity for differences that do make a difference in every day practices."[17]

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[17] Ibidem, p. 377.

Realism as a Background Condition of Intelligibility

In 1991, replying to one of his critics, John Searle offers a sketch of a "transcendental" argument for what he calls *metaphysical* (and later *external*) *realism* - the view that the world (or alternatively, reality or the universe) exists independently of our representations of it[18] :

> metaphysical realism is the condition of possibility of there being public discourse at all. In order that I should address you and say, e.g., "the cat is on the mat" I must presuppose an independently existing world of publicly accessible objects to which expressions like "the cat' and the "the mat" are used to refer. A public language presupposes a public world. And when I address you in what I presuppose is a public language, a language which you can understand in the same way that I understand it, I also presuppose that there exist public objects of reference. In normal discourse none of these "presuppositions" takes the forms of beliefs or even, strictly speaking, "presuppositions". They are part of what I call the Background; in the normal functioning of the Background such elements form the conditions of intelligible representation but are not themselves representations. (*John Searle and his critics,* p. 190)

According to Searle, and he had already said this in 1983, in *Intentionality*[19] , "realism" is not a hypothesis, belief, or philosophical thesis, but the *precondition of having hypothese*s:

> Realism is part of the Background in the following sense. My commitment to "realism" is exhibited by the fact that I live the way that I do, I drive my car, drink my beer, write my articles, give my lectures, and ski my mountains. Now in addition to all these activities […] there isn't a further 'hypothesis' that the real world exists. My commitment to the existence of the real world is manifested whenever I do pretty much anything. It is a mistake to treat that commitment as if it were a hypothesis […] Once we misconstrue the functioning of the Background in this way […] it immediately becomes problematic. It seems I could never show or demonstrate that there existed a real world independent of my representation of it. But of course I could never show or demonstrate that, since any *showing* or *demonstrating* presupposes the Background, and the Background is the embodiment of my commitment to realism. […] the very having of representations can only exist against a Background which gives representations the character of "representing something". This is not to say that realism is a true hypothesis, rather it is to say that it is not a hypothesis at all, but the precondition of having hypotheses." (*Intentionality*, p. 158-159)

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[18] E. Lapore and R. Van Gulick (eds.), *John Searle and his critics*, p. 190-191; see also J. R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, p. 149-197.
[19] J. R. Searle, *Intentionality: An essay in the philosophy of mind*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

The presupposition of realism is not just one claim among others, but it is, according to Searle, "a condition of possibility of my being able to make publicly accessible *claims* at all"[20]. *Metaphysical realism* and *conceptual relativism* are then perfectly consistent: conceptual relativism as Searle formulates it – *our conception of reality, our conception of how it is, is always made relative to our constitution* - is meant, he says, "to be a trivial truth to the effect that we only form concepts that we are able to form"[21]. Searle considers the argument that Hilary Putnam uses in *The Many Faces of Realism*[22] against "metaphysical realism", and to defend a view he calls "internal realism", simply bad argument:

> Putnam thinks that because we can only *state* the fact that iron oxidizes relative to a vocabulary and conceptual system, that therefore the fact only *exists* relative to a vocabulary and conceptual system. So, on his view if conceptual relativism is true, then metaphysical realism is false. But the premise of his argument does not entail the conclusion. It is, indeed, trivially true that all statements are made within a conceptual apparatus for making statements. Without a language we cannot talk. It does, indeed, follow from this that given alternative conceptual apparatuses there will be alternative descriptions of reality […] But it simply does not follow that *the fact* that iron oxidizes is in any way language-dependent or relative to a system of concepts or anything of the sort. Long after we are all dead and there are no statements of any kind, iron will still oxidize; and this is just another way of saying that the fact that iron oxidizes does not depend in any way on the fact that we can state that iron oxidizes. (Does anyone really, seriously, doubt this?)[23]

Searle defends, then, both the view that reality exists independently of our representations of it or the view "that the world exists independently not only of language but also of thought, perception, belief, etc."[24] – "external realism" –, and the view that all representations of reality are made relative to some more or less arbitrarily selected set of concepts – "conceptual relativity". Carefully stated, external realism is for Searle "the thesis that there is a way that things are that is independent of all representations of how things are". This thesis identifies *not how things are in fact*, he says, but rather a *space of possibilities* for a very large number of statements[25]. Our ordinary linguistic practices *presuppose* external realism: by making certain sorts of utterances in a public language, we do in fact attempt to communicate with each other, and unless we take external realism for granted, we cannot understand utterances the way we normally do. The assumption Searle is making here is "that there is a normal way of understanding utterances, and that when performing speech acts in a public language, speakers typically attempt to achieve normal understanding"[26]. What Searle tries to show in 1995, in *The Construction of Social Reality,* is that external realism is presupposed by the use of large sections of a public language:

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[20] E. Lapore and R. Van Gulick (eds.), *John Searle and his critics*, p. 190.
[21] Ibidem.
[22] H. Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism* , La Salle, Ill., Open Court, 1987.
[23] E. Lapore and R. Van Gulick (eds.), *John Searle and his critics*, p. 191.
[24] J. R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, p. 153.
[25] Ibidem, p. 182. So construed, external realism is for Searle a *purely formal constraint.*
[26] J. R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, p. 184.

if you take yourself to be communicating with others in the normal way in the sort of speech acts I have given as examples, you are committed to external realism. I have not shown that there is a real world but only that you are committed to its existence when you talk to me or to anyone else.[27]

For a large class of utterances, *each* individual utterance requires for its *intelligibility*, according to Searle, a publicly accessible reality that he has characterized as representation independent. There is nothing epistemic about realism so construed. External realism is not epistemic: realism is the claim that *reality* is radically nonepistemic. Searle is not saying "that in order *to know the truth* of our claims we have to presuppose realism". His argument, he insists, "is completely independent of questions of knowledge or even of truth. The claim is about conditions *of intelligibility*, not about conditions of *knowledge.*"[28]

External realism is not identical with the correspondence theory of truth. For Searle, realism *is not a theory of truth* and it does not imply any theory of truth:

> Strictly speaking, realism is consistent with any theory of truth because it is a theory of ontology and not of the meaning of "true"[it says that there exists a reality totally independent of our representations]. It is not a semantic theory at all. It is thus possible to hold ER [External Realism] and deny the correspondence theory. On a normal interpretation, the correspondence theory implies realism since it implies that there is a reality to which statements correspond if they are true; but realism does not by itself imply the correspondence theory, since it does not imply that "truth" is the name of a relation of correspondence between statements and reality. (*The Construction of Social Reality*, p. 154)

But Searle does offer us a modest version of a correspondence theory of truth in *The Construction of Social Reality*[29]. We need words for assessing success and failure in achieving fit for representations that have the word-to-world direction of fit, and those words are "true" and "false".[30] Truth is just a special class of *satisfaction*: truth is satisfaction of representations with the word-to-world direction of fit.**[31]** Searle represents the structure of illocutionary acts – the illocutionary act is the minimal complete unit of human linguistic communication – as *F(p)* where *F* stands for illocutionary force (the *type* of illocutionary act it is) and *p* for propositional content (the *content* of an illocutionary act). The general notion of *satisfaction* is based, according to Vanderveken, on the notion of *correspondence*:

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[27] Ibidem, p. 194.
[28] J. R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, p. 195.
[29] Ibidem, p. 199-226.
[30] Austin had already said, in the *William James Lectures* that he delivered at Harvard University in 1955, that "truth and falsity are (except by an artificial abstraction which is always possible and legitimate for certain purposes) not names for relations, qualities, or what not, but for a *dimension of assessment* – how the words stand in respect of satisfactoriness to the facts, events, situations, &c., to which they refer." (J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, p. 149).
[31] For the semantic concepts of success and satisfaction, see Daniel Vanderveken, *Meaning and Speech Acts*, Vol. I: *Principles of Language Use*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 129-136.

Elementary illocutionary acts with a propositional content […] are *directed* at objects and states of affairs in the world. They are satisfied *only if* their propositional content represents correctly how things are […] in the world […] the existence of a correspondence between the propositional content of an utterance and the world is a necessary, but not always a sufficient, condition for the satisfaction of that utterance. Indeed, in order that a speech act be satisfied, the correspondence between its propositional content and the world must be established following the proper direction of fit of its illocutionary force. Thus, the *conditions of satisfaction* of an elementary illocutionary act of the form *F(p)* are a function of both the *truth conditions* of its propositional content, and of the *direction of fit* of its illocutionary force.

First, when an illocutionary act has only the word-to-world direction of fit, it is *satisfied* in a context of utterance […] if and only if its propositional content is *true* in that context […] Indeed, in such a case, the success of fit between language and the world is achieved by the fact that the propositional content corresponds to a state of affairs existing (in general) independently in the world. Thus the conditions of satisfaction of assertive illocutionary acts are identical with the truth conditions of their propositional content […] Second, when an illocutionary act has the world-to-word direction of fit, it is *satisfied* in a context of utterance […] if and only if the speaker or hearer *makes* its propositional content *true* in that context *in order* to satisfy that illocutionary act. Unlike assertive utterances, the commissive and directive utterances have *self-referential* conditions of satisfaction that are not independent of these utterances. An assertion is true if and only if its propositional content corresponds to a state of affairs that exists in the world, no matter how that state of affairs got into existence. But, strictly speaking, a promise is *kept* or a request is *granted* only if the speaker or hearer carries out in the world a future course of action because of the promise or the request […] Thus, one speaks of requests which are granted or refused, and of promises which are kept or broken, and not of true or false requests and promises.[32]

The illocutionary point of assertive speech acts is to commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition. In one of his most recent works, *Rationality in Action*, Searle says that there is no way to explain what a statement is (what an assertive speech act is) without explaining that the commitment to truth is *internal* to statement making:

Whenever I make a statement I have a reason to speak truthfully. Why? Because a statement simply *is* a commitment to the truth of the expressed proposition. There is no gap at all between making a statement and committing oneself to its truth. That is, there are not two independent features of the speech act, first the making of the statement and second committing myself to its truth; there is only making the statement, which is *eo ipso* a commitment to truth […] But why is the commitment to truth internal to statement making? […] What is the big deal about commitment? Well in a sense you can perform speech acts without their normal commitments. That is what happens in works of fiction. In works of fiction nobody holds the author responsible for the truth of the utterances that she makes in the text. We understand those cases as derivative from, and parasitic

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[32] D. Vanderveken, *Meaning and Speech Acts*, Vol. I: *Principles of Language Use*, p. 132-133.

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on, the more fundamental forms, where the commitments are to the truth conditions of the actual utterance. So, to repeat the question, why? And the answer follows from the nature of meaning itself[33]. The reason why I am committed to the truth of the claim that it is raining when I say that it is raining is that, in making the utterance that it is raining, I have intentionally imposed certain conditions of satisfaction on that utterance […] when I seriously assert that it is raining, I am committed to the truth of the proposition, because I have intentionally imposed the commitment to that truth on the utterance when I intentionally imposed the conditions of satisfaction that it be raining on the conditions of satisfaction of my intention-in-action that that intention-in-action should produce the sounds, "It is raining". And, to repeat, what makes it possible for me to do that in a publicly accessible manner is the fact that I am a participant in the human institution of language and speech acts.[34]

In every genuine *assertion*, the assuming of responsibility must be present: in making an assertion, says Searle, "we take *responsibility* for truth, sincerity, and evidence", and these responsibilities are met only, he insists, "if the world is such that the utterance is true, the speaker is sincere, and the speaker has evidence for the assertion."[35]

For Searle, all intentionality has a *normative structure*, but what is special about human animals, he says, is not normativity, but rather the human ability to create, through the use of language, a *public* set of commitments. Humans typically do this by performing public speech acts where the speaker intentionally imposes conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction. These speech acts are made possible by the existence of institutional structures that the speaker

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[33] Cf. J. R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World*, New York, Basic Books, 1998, p. 139-144.

[34] J. R. Searle, *Rationality in Action*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2001, p. 184-186.

[35] Ibidem, p. 176. According to Charles S. Peirce, an assertion is an *act* in which a speaker addresses a listener and *assumes responsibility* for its truth: "What is the nature of assertion? We have no magnifying-glass that can enlarge its features, and render them more discernible; but in default of such an instrument we can select for examination a very formal assertion, the features of which have purposely been rendered very prominent, in order to emphasize its solemnity. If a man desires to assert anything very solemnly, he takes such steps as will enable him to go before a magistrate or notary and take a binding oath to it. Taking an oath is not mainly an even of the nature of a setting forth, *Vorstellung*, or representing. It is not mere saying, but is *doing*. The law, I believe, calls it an "act". At any rate, it would be followed by very real effects, in case the substance of what is asserted should be proved untrue. This ingredient, the assuming of responsibility, which is so prominent in solemn assertion, must be present in every genuine assertion." (*Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* [CP], ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, Cambridge, Mass., The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965, 5.547 [c. 1908]). Cf. J. Brock, "An Introduction to Peirce's Theory of Speech Acts", Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society, 17 (1981), p. 319-326; Ch. Chauviré, *Peirce et la signification. Introduction à la logique du vague*, Paris, PUF, 1995, p. 142-152; Th. Calvet de Magalhães, *Signe ou Symbole. Introduction à la Théorie Sémiotique de C. S. Peirce*, p. 83-87, and p. 197-200.

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uses to perform meaningful speech acts and to communicate them to other speakers/hearers.Using this apparatus the speaker can undertake commitments when he imposes conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction. Indeed there is no way to avoid undertaking commitments. The speech act of asserting is a commitment to truth, the speech act of promising is a commitment to a future action. Both arise from the fact that the speaker imposes conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction. Speech acts commit the speaker to the second set of conditions of satisfaction. In the case of an assertion, he is committed to the truth of the assertion, in the case of a promise, he is committed to carrying out the act that he has promised to perform.[36]

But, because promising has the maker of the promise as the subject of the propositional content, it is peculiar among speech acts. Promising has a *self-referential* component imposed on the conditions of satisfaction:

> the conditions of satisfaction of the promise are not only that the speaker do something, but that he do it because he made a promise to do it. There is, therefore, a self-referential component in promising, and this self referential component does not exist in certain other sorts of speech acts. For example, it does not exist in assertions."[37]

"Philosophy in the Real World," the subtitle of *Mind, Language, and Society* (1998), captures two important aspects of Searle's work First, Searle believes that good philosophical inquiry begins by paying close attention to everyday experiences. Second, Searle believes that there exists a reality totally independent of our representations, that the world is not a mere construct of texts and word games, and that we can understand that real world – a position known as "metaphysical realism". His refutation of the arguments against external realism and his defense of external realism as a presupposition of large areas of discourse are, he says, the first step in combating "the attacks on epistemic objectivity, rationality, and intelligence in contemporary intellectual life". What difference does it really make whether or not one says that one is a "realist" or an "anti-realist"? Searle actually thinks that philosophical theories make a difference to every aspect of our lives.

These brief remarks on Habermas and Searle show that we have to recover our innocence. The tension between the independence of reality and the accessibility of reality to our knowledge is perhaps not so severe. It may be altogether superable if our understanding of 'independence' is modest enough and our understanding of 'accessibility' fallibilist enough. This is the view of innocent realism[38]. And it might be my way back to Peirce.

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[36] J. R. Searle, *Rationality in Action*, p. 183.
[37] Ibidem, p. 213.
[38] Cf. S. Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays.* Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 156-164.