Special Issue

The Non-dualizing Philosophy of Josef Mitterer

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DESCRIPTION

Constructivist Foundations (CF) is an independent academic peer-reviewed e-journal without commercial interests. Its aim is to promote scientific foundations and applications of constructivist sciences, to weed out pseudoscientific claims and to base constructivist sciences on sound scientific foundations, which do not equal the scientific method with objectivist claims. The journal is concerned with the interdisciplinary study of all forms of constructivist sciences, such as radical constructivism, biology of cognition, cybersemiotics, enactive cognitive science, epistemic structuring of experience, non-dualizing philosophy, second order cybernetics, and theory of autopoietic systems.

AIM AND SCOPE

The basic motivation behind the journal is to make peer-reviewed constructivist papers available to the academic audience free of charge. The constructive character of the journal refers to the fact that the journal publishes actual work in constructivist sciences rather than work that argues for the importance or need for constructivism. The journal is open to (provocative) new ideas that fall within the scope of constructivist approaches and encourages critical academic submissions to help sharpen the position of constructivist sciences. The common denominator of constructivist approaches can be summarized as follows.

• Constructivist approaches question the Cartesian separation between objective world and subjective experience;
• Consequently, they demand the inclusion of the observer in scientific explanations;
• Representationalism is rejected; knowledge is a system-related cognitive process rather than a mapping of an objective world onto subjective cognitive structures;
• According to constructivist approaches, it is futile to claim that knowledge approaches reality; reality is brought forth by the subject rather than passively received;
• Constructivist approaches entertain an agnostic relationship with reality, which is considered beyond our cognitive horizon; any reference to it should be refrained from;
• Therefore, the focus of research moves from the world that consists of matter to the world that consists of what matters;
• Constructivist approaches focus on self-referential and organizationally closed systems; such systems strive for control over their inputs rather than their outputs;
• With regard to scientific explanations, constructivist approaches favor a process-oriented approach rather than a substance-based perspective, e.g., living systems are defined by processes whereby they constitute and maintain their own organization;
• Constructivist approaches emphasize the “individual as personal scientist” approach; sociality is defined as accommodating within the framework of social interaction;
• Finally, constructivist approaches ask for an open and less dogmatic approach to science in order to generate the flexibility that is needed to cope with today’s scientific frontier.

Submissions are continuously received Send all material to Alexander Riegler, ariegler@vub.ac.be
The Non-dualizing Philosophy of Josef Mitterer
Edited by Alexander Riegler and Stefan Weber

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Non-dualizing from Now On?
Editorial to the Special Issue on the Non-dualizing Philosophy of Josef Mitterer

Alexander Riegler ◇ Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Katholieke Universiteit Leuven <ariegler@vub.ac.be>
Stefan Weber ◇ University of Applied Arts, Vienna <webermediaresearch@t-online.de>

“With the first edition of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason (1781) the seeds for the ouster of metaphysics were sown, an ouster that was vigorously pushed along by logical positivism in the last century. Josef Mitterer is the proponent of a third conceptual revision that, if carried out, would thoroughly change the method and the goals of philosophical investigation.” Ernst von Glasersfeld, this issue, p. 123

The philosopher

When the Austrian philosopher Josef Mitterer handed out his dissertation Sprache und Wirklichkeit. Eine erkenntnistheoretische Abhandlung [Language and Reality: An Epistemological Treatise] to some colleagues for feedback in the late 1970s, the reactions varied between incomprehension, friendly rejection and a straight “he must be joking.” Disappointed by some rather hostile receptions (some even called it a “danger to academic philosophy”) he turned his back on academia. Mitterer followed the suggestion of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who wrote in Vermischte Be- merkungen, “The greeting among philosophers should be ‘Take your time’,” and did not publish the book version of his dissertation until 1992, under the title Das Jenseits der Philosophie: Wieder das dualistische Erkenntnispriinzip [The Beyond of Philosophy: Against the dualistic Principle of Cognition]. In 100 theses he developed a non-dualizing epistemology, which forges the categorical distinction between language and reality beyond language. This book was to become the first in a series of three. The second volume, Die Flucht aus der Beliebigkeit [The Escape from Arbitrariness], published in 2001, is a critical assessment of the traditional goal of philosophy, i.e., truth. The last volume, Die Richtung des Denkens [The Direction of Thinking] is in preparation and will deal with a critique of the object-orientation of epistemological thought.

Josef Mitterer was born in 1948 in the small Tyrolean village of Westendorf, Austria, which is better known for skiing and tourism. He studied psychology, sociology and philosophy in Innsbruck, Linz, and Graz, and spent some time at the London School of Economics, Heidelberg University and the Inter-university Centre Dubrovnik. In 1976 he went to study with Paul Feyerabend at the University of California at Berkeley where he continued to develop his philosophical ideas. In 1978 he obtained a doctoral degree from the University of Graz with a dissertation he wrote with Rudolf Haller, entitled Sprache und Wirklichkeit [Language and Reality]. After his studies – and due to the reasons mentioned above – Mitterer turned to an entirely different domain, namely tourism, and worked as a professional tour guide in Europe and Asia and later as a management consultant for tour operators in the United States and Canada. He condensed his experiences in the travel world into the essay Der König von Frankreich lebt oder die Wirklichkeit auf Reisen [The King of France is Alive or the Reality of Travel], which was re-published as The Reality of Travel (cf. the contribution of Ernst von Glasersfeld and slowly introduced non-dualistic philosophy to constructivists. Mitterer’s main thesis in the paper was the idea that descriptions in debate do not fail when confront-ed with objects, but rather fail against new descriptions. Constructivists felt addressed. But Mitterer irritated them when he included in his 1992 book a sharp criticism of the neuro-biological foundations of constructivism, especially of Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela and Gerhard Roth. Since then, the scientific community has seemed to be uncertain as to whether Mitterer should be labelled a constructivist or a critic of constructivism. In this special issue we would like to clarify this point, among others.

According to Mitterer’s own philosophy, we, the editors, did not exert any pressure on the authors to streamline their contributions and terminology to a single “true” translation. Therefore the reader should not be surprised to find a variety of terms referring to Mitterer’s philosophy. Should “nicht-dualisierende Redeweise” be translated as “non-dualizing mode of speaking,” “non-dualistic way of talking,” or simply as “non-dualism”? We left it to the authors to find the terminology that fits their intentions best, the intention being to honor but also critically evaluate Mitterer’s philosophy across the disciplines.

The contributions

Is Josef Mitterer’s non-dualizing philosophy yet another philosophical flavor, of which there are so many in the academic world? Yet another philosophical trinket that arouses the short-lived attention of some people and disappears quickly thereafter? Yet another dalliance without implications either for philosophy or for science? We are convinced of the contrary. For many years Mitterer has steadily built up a reputation as an innovative but at the same time also very careful thinker. His
claims have been discussed in various circles, but, unfortunately, this has so far happened in German- and Polish-speaking countries only. Meanwhile “take your time” has taken time and Mitterer celebrated his 60th birthday in July 2008, an opportunity we used to gather connoisseurs of his work to discuss, for the first time in the English language, his achievements and impact. The result is in no relation to the limited spread of his ideas so far. We have collected some 22 contributions covering a large variety of intellectual terrain and pointing out the potential impact of his philosophy from now on.

Reconstructing Philosophical Dualisms

In the first section three authors try to identify traces of non-dualistic thinking in the history of philosophy.

The conceptual analysis of Ernst von Glasersfeld scrutinizes the notion of dichotomy, which is Mitterer’s main task as well. The author discusses Ogden’s work on dichotomy and concludes with the claim that non-dualizing philosophy is an excellent example of how to counter the tradition of realism.

Christian Meierhofer aims to reproduce the development of non-dualism by drawing similarities and associations between Mitterer’s work, and cultural theories and philosophies prior to Mitterer. In particular he points out that there are some interesting analogies between Mitterer and the work of James, Rickert, Weber, Neurath, Mannheim, and Ceccato.

Peter Weibel puts Mitterer’s philosophy into the historical context of the Austrian philosophy of language around 1900 – especially that of the work of Stöhr, Wahl, Mauthner, and Wittgenstein. He gives reasons for his thesis that “Josef Mitterer took the Viennese tradition of language critique as an epistemological principle to its intellectual conclusion” and describes how the “tertium non datur” could be invalidated by non-dualism.

The Description and the Object in Non-dualizing Philosophy

In this section three authors are concerned with the key arguments of non-dualizing philosophy and its possible flaws.

Stefan Weber discusses the core arguments of non-dualism developed step by step in The Beyond of Philosophy: the object of description is the description of the object so far. The claim of a priority of an object compared to the indication of the object is only possible after the indication of the object. This means that we cannot claim that there are objects beyond claims. Otherwise we get trapped in an infinite regress.

Franz Ofner starts with the observation that Mitterer has not developed a non-dualistic concept of action. He suggests that George Herbert Mead’s theory, in his opinion containing a non-dualistic nucleus, may be a way to implement this missing link.

Volker Gadenne intends to reconcile realism and constructivism and proposes a cautious or “fallibilistic” version of realism by taking constructivist criticism seriously and treating knowledge as a constructive process. He argues that non-dualism is wrong when it says that a thesis does not fail by means of the object, but by means of a new thesis. Gadenne reminds us that there is experience between a thesis and its failure.

Non-dualizing Philosophy and (Radical) Constructivism

Mitterer’s philosophy has always been said to have close ties with (radical) constructivism despite Mitterer’s attempts to keep equidistance to both realism and constructivism (cf. the brief remark in his text in this special issue). Four authors in this section explore this alleged relationship.

The section starts with one of Josef Mitterer’s texts, translated into English for the first time. Mitterer argues that there are more similarities than differences between realism and constructivism and that constructivism should fully abandon the notion of “reality” to become more consistent.

Siegfried J. Schmidt explores Mitterer’s criticism of dualistic elements in various forms of radical constructivism. Schmidt argues for a non-dualistic form of constructivism by drawing on Mitterer’s arguments, but developing his own terminology inspired by Hegel.

What are the implications of non-dualizing philosophy for empirical research from a constructivist perspective? Armin Scholl develops a striking argumentation for reconciling radical constructivism and non-dualism. He considers both to be similar with regard to the relationship between theory and empirical research.

With the help of cognitive maps Karl H. Müller charts various flavors of the (radical) constructivist approach and how they relate to each other, and shows the importance of Mitterer’s philosophy for radical constructivist (RC) research. He considers Mitterer’s work as a radical critique of the semantic turn. The relevance of non-dualism varies according to the use of the term “radical constructivism.” Its relevance is significant if RC is viewed as a new epistemology but left marginal if RC is a label for a group of empirical research programs.

Non-dualizing Philosophy and Actor-Network Theory

In Poland, a group of young philosophers has worked out the links between Mitterer’s philosophy and the actor-network theory (ANT) of Bruno Latour et al. Two of them present the details of their work in this section.

Krzysztof Abriszewski compares Mitterer’s non-dualizing way of speaking (NDS) with Latour’s ANT. Despite their different respective backgrounds – ANT is a continuation of social studies of science situated in the field of sociology of knowledge while NDS belongs to the domain of philosophy of language and epistemology – the author shows that there is a certain degree of convergence between them.

The paper by Ewa Binczyk embraces Mitterer’s criticism of dualistic ways of thinking and speaking. Starting with Rorty’s neopragmatism and the so-called strong program of sociology of knowledge – both of which are shown to entail dualistic inconsistencies – the author makes a strong case for an NDS-inspired anti-essentialism. As in Abriszewski’s paper, Latour’s constructivism is presented as a kin theory to NDS that can be fruitfully applied to empirical research programs.

Non-dualizing Philosophy in Feminism and Policy Making

What are the implications of non-dualizing philosophy for society and politics? In this section two authors elaborate on gender and political aspects.

Aleksandra Derra attends to the problem of female subjectivity. By drawing on Mitterer and Latour the author seeks to overcome essentialist ascriptions that block further progress in the feminist movement. According to the author, only in a non-dualistic ap-
proach is emancipation able to focus on the situation of women rather than getting stuck in essentialist definitions.

Mathis Danelzik addresses a so far completely neglected topic: What are the political implications of non-dualistic philosophy? The author discusses to what extent the imperative to tolerance follows from a non-dualistic framework. Finally, he sheds light on the question of power and social dynamics.

The Potential of Non-dualizing Philosophy in the Humanities

This section features the work of six authors ranging from philosophy to media theory, from pedagogics to the science of art.

Sven Grampp compares Mitterer’s position with Wittgenstein’s On Certainty on issues such as knowledge, doubt, and norms. He argues that Wittgenstein’s pragmatic investigations of certainty point toward a dualistic worldview “without being a dualist.” Grampp therefore remains skeptical as to whether Mitterer’s view is compatible with Wittgenstein’s.

The paper by Matthias Kross reminds us of a not well known but highly original paper by Josef Mitterer, The Reality of Travel. Kross’ contribution links the philosopher’s theories to the philosopher’s life. It characterizes the role of the philosopher, and even more, the epistemologist, as a “passenger,” deeply embedded in what Arnold van Gennep called “rites de passage.”

Martin Staudt attempts a formal-logical reconstruction of non-dualizing philosophy combined with the logic of distinction of George Spencer Brown. Furthermore he aims at linking the notion of description, central in Mitterer’s work, to the sociological and semantic notion of meaning. Finally he presents a non-dualistic interpretation of the semiotic triangle.

Theo Hug investigates the notion of truth in education. By focusing on possible translations of a central statement of Mitterer’s, Hug explores the relationship between non-dualism and contemporary philosophy of education. He arrives at the conclusion that Mitterer’s philosophy sets apart a new field of pedagogical discourse.

Roland Graf’s contribution deals with media theory and media philosophy. For him, some media philosophers have already adopted principles of non-dualism without a consistent framework. Therefore, Mitterer’s philosophy seems appropriate to offering new insights into the way that consensus or dissent is manufactured in a world of more and more mediated descriptions.

Starting with the claim that speaking is a process of embodied experience, the objective of Sibylle Moser is to explore Mitterer’s non-dualizing philosophy via Laurie Anderson’s performance art in general, and more particularly with reference to her treatment of language as an “embodied process.” Together with Mitterer, Moser challenges the traditional truth-functional views of language and thought exemplified by a work of art.

The Beyond of Non-dualizing Philosophy

In this special concluding section two leading Austrian intellectuals present their ways of talking about non-dualism: the philosopher Peter Strasser has delivered a paper that is metaphysical as well as ironic and the renowned Austrian theologian Adolf Holl talks about the “beyond of the theologians” that we never can talk about.

Peter Strasser takes the reader on a fairly satirical ride seeking similarities and differences comparing the non-dualizing philosophy of Josef Mitterer, the idealistic position of Bishop Berkeley and famous passages in the gospel according to St. John. Finally he criticizes Mitterer’s position by introducing the “It” as the blind spot of non-dualism, and, as the author calls it, its “nightmare” (allusions to Sigmund Freud and Stephen King, however, are purely coincidental...).

Adolf Holl, finally, known for being a critical voice in the Catholic world, is concerned about the “beyond of the theologians,” which is alluded to by Mitterer in his paper from 1988.

The impact

This special issue of Constructivist Foundations features 22 contributions from eight scientific disciplines: philosophy, psychology, cognitive science, sociology, media science, pedagogics, science of art, and theology. It shows that there is an enormous potential to discuss critically the non-dualistic ideas of Josef Mitterer in cultural as well as natural sciences. But it also demonstrates that the critical reception of the work of Mitterer has only just begun. So of course there are blind spots in this publication – things you can imagine today, but that have not happened so far. Two dialogues especially are desiderata:

- Non-dualizing philosophy and (quantum) physics. There are realist and constructivist interpretations of quantum effects, but so far there is no adaptation of the key arguments of non-dualism in approaching or interpreting quantum physics. What would be the role of the observer of quantum processes in the unity of object and description in non-dualism?
- Non-dualizing philosophy and the history of Austrian epistemology: Does Mitterer mark a categorical break with logical empiricism and Wittgenstein, or are there any points of reference?

So will we all be non-dualizing from now on? We strongly believe that Mitterer’s work contains enough “philosophical dynamite” to shake the foundations not only of philosophical disciplines but also of the humanities, of natural sciences, and possibly beyond that: in everyday conversation situations whenever we refer to a reality or something that is said to be happening “in fact.”

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It would have been impossible to realize this special issue without the help of numerous reviewers who provided constructive criticism that helped the respective authors to sharpen their arguments. We would like to thank the following external referees: Marian Adolf, Michael L. Anderson, Stefan Artmann, Stefanie Averbeck-Dietz, Dirk Baecker, Berit Brogaard, Richard Creath, Werner DePauli-Schimanovich, Johanna Dorer, Christian Fuchs, Alexander Görke, Gerhard Grössing, Mark L. Johnson, Matthias Kohring, David J. Krieger, Elisabeth List, Oliver Marchart, Andrzej W. Nowak, Ana Pasztor, Alois Pichler, Otto E. Rössler, Wolf-Michael Roth, Franc Rottiers, Leslie Steffe, Thomas Steinmaurer, Rainer Thurnher, Gertrudis Van de Vijver, and Jutta Weber. Our thanks also go to WISDOM for printing a limited edition of this special issue and to the Viennese artist Herbert Sterak who provided us with the cover art, “Die Erde ist eine Scheibe” [the Earth is a disc].
Can Dichotomies Be Tamed?

Ernst von Glasersfeld ◇ University of Massachusetts <evonglas@hughes.net>

Dualistic presuppositions

In the course of history there have been several purges – quiet rather than violent, to be sure – in the kingdom of philosophy. Theology was slowly pushed out after the Middle Ages, and with the first edition of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) the seeds for the ousting of metaphysics were sown, an ousting that was vigorously pushed along by logical positivism in the last century. Josef Mitterer is the proponent of a third conceptual revision that, if carried out, would thoroughly change the method and the goals of philosophical investigation.

There is nothing stealthy about Mitterer’s attack. It aims at the very foundations of Western philosophy.

“At the beginning of philosophy there are not problems but unquestioned presuppositions. These presuppositions are dichotomous distinctions (in the theory of knowledge and the philosophy of language, for instance, the dichotomies of Language–World, Description–Object, Utterance–Referent, Being–Consciousness, Subject–Object, and others).

The attempt to clarify the relationship between the members of these dichotomies leads to the problems of philosophy – the problems of objectivity, reference, identity, external world, and above all to the problem of truth” (Mitterer 1992, p. 11).

He has set his sights on what he calls “dualistic argumentation,” and that is any discourse based on dichotomies that are accepted as unquestionable presuppositions and limit, at the outset, the possible outcomes of any discussion.

In the Foreword to his most recent book, *Die Flucht aus der Beliebigkeit*, he writes:

“The dualistic presuppositions steer the path of thinking towards the domain of objects and establish concordance with them as the goal of thought. The argumentation technique of dualistic philosophy is able to produce this concordance for any conception whatsoever. I try to (re)construct how the separation of the two levels arose as argumentative posits that are taken for granted prior to any discourse… I am interested in the construction of that relationship which, as a dichotomous presupposition, forms the *paradigma* of dualistic philosophy. This may explain why I do not take part in the interdualistic discussion (in which my sympathies tend to be on the side of constructivism) and also why those who see or make no difference between constructivism and non-dualism consider me a constructivist” (2001, pp. 8–9).

Among the dichotomies of dualistic philosophy, Mitterer lists what I consider two groups. On the one hand are those that have reality as one of their terms, on the other, all forms of distinction between language and its meanings.

Mitterer’s definition of the term “dualistic” is clearly a wide one. My encyclopedia of philosophy tells me that the term was first used for the separation of the principles of Good and Evil in the Manichean religion and that it was adopted by Christian Wolff in the 18th century for the Cartesian split between Mind and Matter. This second meaning is the general one today. But a lot of other dichotomies are customary in our descriptions of our world.

Ogden’s oppositions

C. K. Ogden, who wrote a fascinating little book entitled *On Opposition* (1967), collected several dozen of them and analyzed 25 to find the different ways in which two elements were opposed to one another. Adopting some of his ideas, I have developed my own criteria for sorting dichotomies (see my “sampler of dichotomies” in Table 1). In his “Historical Introduction” Ogden draws freely on Ludwigs Fischer’s (1931) survey of what in German is called *Naturphilosophie*; some of what he gathered from that author may be pertinent to Mitterer’s approach.

“For Schelling … it is the opposition of ‘nature’ and ‘spirit’ which is axiomatic. He later dwelt on the poles of the prime opposition (Thought–Being, Ideal–Real, Subjective–Objective), and introduced the notion of the *indifference* of these objects, the “total indifference” of Subjective and Objective being “absolute reason” (Ogden 1967, p. 28).

Ogden then moves to Hegel and explains that, although dialectical thinking begins with the opposition of Thesis and Antithesis, it leads to Synthesis, which eliminates the initial dichotomy and produces a higher and more comprehensive concept.
Having known Mitterer for some twenty years, I do not believe that Hegel had much to do with the development of his notion of non-dualistic discourse. But Ogden’s account of Schelling’s suggestion of “indifference” as a rational gambit is perhaps a useful hint: by “indifference” Schelling intended that the absolute, a reality prior to being experienced, was not articulated and wholly undifferentiated.

The prime form of dichotomous relation, Ogden concludes, is “an opposition, the members of which are each the condition of the other and at the same time are resolved into a single datum” (Ogden 1967, p. 32). I found this distinction useful and characterized it by saying that the opposed concepts entail one another (see Table 1). Among this kind of opposition, Ogden included “I/Not-I” and “Mind/Body,” and this is an assignation I do not agree with. Unfortunately Ogden did not include these items in the group of two dozen that he analyzed in detail, specifying different kinds of opposition. Although he does not say so, I believe he skipped them because the dichotomies suggested by the “prime forms” are not really an opposition, but rather a separation across which there is no link on the level on which the concepts themselves have been conceived.

Table 1: Sampler of dichotomies.

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Mathematical paradoxes

In his recent book *How Mathematicians Think*, William Byers deals at great length with the fact that mathematicians have developed and very successfully use concepts that contain a seemingly ineradicable opposition. He proposes a theory that reconciles paradoxical oppositions by a form of conceptual fusion on a higher level of abstraction. He does not regard this as a form of synthesis, but rather as a deliberate “indifference”.

Among the “impossible” concepts are “zero,” an entity that consists of nothing, “infinity,” an item supposed to be endless but treated as a closed unit, and the “infinitesimals” of calculus, which involve the irrational transition from very little to a still discrete nothing. The intellectual perturbation that these irreducible oppositions generate may trigger an “act of extraordinary creativity” from which “great ideas” are born. “What these leaps of creativity have accomplished goes against the intuition of the culture out of which they arose. This accounts for the resistance the ideas initially encounter” (Byers 2007, p. 297).

Byers summarizes his notion of “great Ideas” by saying:

“Mathematics is continuously forcing mathematicians outside their initial frames of reference. It is the problematic aspects of mathematics that demand a creative resolution — one that is often completely unexpected and yet, in retrospect can be seen to be inevitable. These jumps to a higher viewpoint are not predictable. They cannot be programmed” (Byers 2007, p. 301).

It seems to me there is a parallel to this “jump to a higher viewpoint” in the physicists’ metaphor of “Schrödinger’s cat,” which had to be thought of as being both alive and dead — a baffling metaphor introduced to show the absurdity of interpreting micro-experimental findings in terms of everyday experiences. Now, however, it may have come closer the literal description of a phenomenon. Two research teams, one at the National Institute of Standards and Technology in Boulder, Colorado, the other at the University of Innsbruck, have been able to catch ions in a electromagnetic trap and to show that they actually seemed to be in such a cat-like state of “superposition” (Naica-Loebell 2005; Häffner et al. 2005).²

Ontological agnosticism: A possible answer

Facing a paradox, it is not easy to jump to a higher viewpoint in order to resolve it. When non-Euclidean geometry was first invented, mathematicians fought against it because they found it hard to give up the idea that Euclidean geometry describes space in a real world. The notion that there could be several geometries seemed unacceptable. Like the paradox of a particle spinning in two opposite directions at the same time, the possibility of more than one geometry can be overcome only if one accepts the idea that mathematical and physical theories do not portray an independent reality but are attempts to order and systematize our experience of a world that is under no obligation to be logical.

As Niels Bohr put it: “We meet here in a new light the old truth that in our description of nature the purpose is not to disclose the real essence of the phenomena but only to track down, so far as possible, relations between the manifold aspects of our experience” (Bohr 1987, p.18)

Giving up the quest for a veridical description/representation of a real world makes it possible to rise to a level of understanding where the notion of complementarity can detoxify irreducible paradoxes of human experience. It enabled Bohr to overcome the traditional Subject/Object dichotomy: “… no sharp separation between object and subject can be maintained, since the perceiving subject also belongs to our mental content” (Bohr 1987, p. 96).

From this, he says, it follows that “the relative meaning of every concept, or rather of every word,” depends “on our arbitrary choice of view point” (Bohr 1987, p. 96). Bohr, unlike the contemporary philosophers of language, realized that the notion of reference to objects of a presumed observer-independent reality was no longer tenable. This has monumental consequences for the theory of knowledge. If the meaning of words cannot be ontologically grounded, the traditional question of Truth and Falsehood can no longer be asked. As Mitterer puts it, the function of these two opposed terms is reduced to distinguishing beliefs we share from those we do not share (Mitterer 2001, p. 105).

This, of course, raises the question of why one should ever hold on to a belief. For conventional thinkers the reason is usually that they consider the belief to be true. They have split the perceptual situation in the very way that Berkeley warned against. As Mitterer explains, the very notion of reference as function of language (implied by the dichotomies of his second group) is a hoax:

“A distinction is introduced (the dualist would say, presupposed) between the object of the discourse and the discourse about the object… This distinction is to enable us to indicate the beyond of the discourse, a beyond where the question regarding the truth or falsehood of our beliefs can be decided” (Mitterer 2001, p. 93).

The non-dualist does not make such a split. He has realized that there is no way out of discourse, no way of getting beyond or under it. A chunk of discourse can be replaced only by another chunk of discourse; it cannot be checked against the reality the dualist claims to be talking about. The radical constructivist, too, has relinquished the dogmatic belief that language refers to things, events, and relations of a real world. But words, sentences, and texts do refer to something — if they didn’t, speaking would be less musical, but essentially not unlike the twittering of birds. This constructivist is happy to agree with Wittgenstein’s metaphor of the Vorstellungsklaviers, a keyboard, the keys of which are words that call forth re-presentations of experiences that the speaking or receiving individual remembers (Wittgenstein 1953, p. 4).

Conclusion

The non-dualistic way of arguing, as I understand it, will proceed without resorting to explicit or implicit suggestions of access to an experience-independent reality. On the one hand, the traditional dualistic view that one or both items of the dichotomies “Subjective/ Objective,” “I/not-I,” “Mind/Body” and “Experience/Reality” are anchored in a world that “exists” prior to being experienced, has to be eradicated. On the other hand, the second term of “Denote/Connote” and “Sign/Signification” must no longer be understood as referring to “things in themselves.” It does not, I hope, imply that we cannot talk about ideas we want to use to domesticate our experience.

²This, of course, raises the question of why one should ever hold on to a belief. For conventional thinkers the reason is usually that they consider the belief to be true. They have split the perceptual situation in the very way that Berkeley warned against. As Mitterer explains, the very notion of reference as function of language (implied by the dichotomies of his second group) is a hoax:

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Mitterer is not the first to claim that there can be no rational exit from the domain of our experience; but the way he justifies the claim by a minute analysis of the dualistic method of argumentation is a new approach and is clearly shaking the philosophical establishment.

Notes

1. The quotations from Mitterer are given in my translation.
2. I have recently had the opportunity to speak with one of the physicists involved in the experiments with captive ions and, as I interpret him, he said that an ion assumes a specific state only when it is submitted to the measuring procedure. If this is the case, it would fit well with Schelling’s notion of indifference and with the principles of constructivism.

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Continuing Discourses
On the References of Mitterer’s Non-dualistic Concept

Christian Meierhofer ◊ University of Bremen (Germany) <ch-meierhofer@web.de>

Purpose – To show the connections and differences between Mitterer’s concept, cultural theory, and sociology of knowledge in order to reproduce the development of non-dualizing philosophy. Purpose – Mitterer’s non-dualizing philosophy explicitly places emphasis on the continuation and coherence of discourses. Consequently, it grants an epistemological option that does not focus on the object as the end of cognition and description, but rather as the beginning. This perspective not only helps to overcome fundamental philosophical problems; it also concedes that the whole concept of non-dualizing philosophy refers theoretical descriptions, on the one hand, to the status of “to far” and, on the other hand, can be described as “from now on.” Purpose – It seems necessary to exemplify obvious and hidden connections to cultural theories, especially those of the early 20th century (i.e., Karl Mannheim, Heinrich Rickert, Max Weber, William James), which predominantly concentrate on the relations between language and object, experience and world. The illustration of those relations should bring out Mitterer’s arguments, as well as how his argumentation can be applied to itself. Benefits – To explain and avoid the epistemological problems of realism, as well as of constructivism, which emerge within a dualistic perspective.

Key words – subject–object relation, cultural theory, epistemology.

1. Introductory note

A pursuit of truth usually is the result of a tacit consent to its dichotomic preconditions, namely the correlations between subject and object, language and world, assertion and reality. However, these dichotomies permit only limited leeway for epistemological argumentation. The object either originates from the subject’s imagination or perception, or it exists without any other influences. The first case produces an intersubjective discourse and viable consensus between the different cognitions; the second merely allows for “real” correspondence between cognition and object. This is the main difference between relativism (or constructivism) and realism.

In his Structural Analysis of Epistemology Karl Mannheim discerns three basic terms in order to deal with these correlations more precisely:

“This is how the triadic relation of epistemology comes about, i.e., the knower – the known (the cognition or knowledge) – the to-be-known [...] Of the three, it is the middle term that changes most conspicuously, in logistic epistemology it is called objectivity (the totality of valid propositions), in a psychologistic theory, consciousness (the totality of possible experiences)” (Mannheim 1953, pp. 58f).

Without the known, the relation between the knower and the to-be-known would only match the ontological subject–object correlation. With his triad, Mannheim describes those two philosophically essential positions:

“Consciousness and being, the self and reality, can stand in the categorical relations of correspondence and causality, or of inherence and identity. [...] The categorical real relation is already specified by way of formulating the problem, and it determines at the same time the distance between the correlate terms. Strictly speaking, the attempt to solve the epistemological problem only begins at the point where we try actually to bridge the distance in this fashion” (Mannheim 1953, p. 61).

Non-dualizing philosophy brings such an attempt out of the traditional, ontological setting, and shows the difficulties of both realism and constructivism.

2. Traces from cultural theory

Some important details on the non-dualistic line of argumentation can already be found in Heinrich Rickert’s cultural theory. Culture or cultural processes are not only observable and classified by valuations, but even instantiated. Only the description or valuation of cultural processes forms cultural truth:

“Die Kulturvorgänge werden wirklich nicht nur mit Rücksicht auf einen Wert, sondern zugleich auch immer mit Rückblick auf ein psychisches Wesen, das sie wertet, betrachtet werden müssen, weil Werte nur von psychischen Wesen gewertet werden [...]” [The cultural procedures really have to be examined, not only with regard to a certain value but, at the same time, with regard to a conscious individual who values them because values are only valued by conscious individuals]” (Rickert 1926, pp. 25f).

Rickert points out that the valuation of cultural processes is triggered by a subject, a conscious individual. But the crucial argument here is that a cultural process and its valuation cannot be separated. Culture has true meaning as long as the subject is of the opinion that this meaning is true. And only if this meaning is challenged or doubted, will its coherence and validity be interrupted:

“Der Wert kann erstens an einem Objekte so ‘haftend’, daß er es dadurch zum Gute macht, und er kann außerdem mit dem...
The quality of a cultural process, however, cannot be found somewhere beyond the description but is determined by the preliminary features ascribed to it. This is the core of non-dualistic thinking, and here, Max Weber places emphasis on it as well: “Die Qualität eines Vorgangs als ‘sozialökonomischer’ Erscheinung ist nun nicht etwas, was ihm als solchem ‘objektiv’ anhaftet. Sie ist vielmehr bedingt durch die Richtung unseres Erkenntnisinteresses, wie sie sich aus der spezifischen Kulturbe deutung ergibt, die wir dem betreffenden Vorgange im einzelnen Fall beilegen. [The character of a process as a ‘socio-economic’ appearance is not ‘objectively’ linked to it. Instead, it is limited by the direction of our cognitive interest as it arises from the specific cultural meaning that we assign case-by-case by means of the process mentioned.]” (Weber 2002, p. 92)

The appearance of a process, in this case as socio-economic, is the result of a unanimous decision. It is the cognitive interest that allocates meaning and quality to a process, and that decides whether or not a process is deemed cultural. At the same time, it is impossible to make such a decision without referring to previous settings, experiences, and expectations. Every new assessment or description of culture is moulded and schematized by former assessments and descriptions: “Wer auf dem Standpunkt steht, daß die Erkenntnis der historischen Wirklichkeit ‘voraussetzunglos’ Abbildung ‘objektiv’er Tatsachen seinolle oder könne,wird Ihnen jeden Wertabsprechen.[…] Und in der Tat: ob es sich um reines Gedankenspiel oder um eine wissenschaftlich fruchtbar Begriffsbildung handelt, kann a priori niemals entschieden werden: es gibt auch hier nur einen Maßstab: den des Erfolges für die Erkenntnis konkreter Kulturerscheinungen in ihrem Zusammenhang, ihrer ursächlichen Bedingung und ihrer Bedeutung. [Whoever holds the view that the knowledge of historic reality should or could be a depiction of ‘objective’ actualities without presuppositions will deny its worth. […] And indeed: one can never decide a priori if the issue is a purely intellectual game or a scientifically productive conception. Here, there is also only one benchmark: the success of concrete cultural appearances within their relation, their causal relativity, and their meaning[2]” (Weber 2002, p. 128).

The success of an assessment and of the awareness of cultural appearances does not depend on their objective validity, but on the cultural benchmark: “Today the success of a procedure often counts as a sign of its objective validity. But the evaluation of successes and failures depends on the culture in which these events are taking place” (Feyerabend 1987, p. 87).

Furthermore, the reciprocal reference between former description and instantaneous describing completely abstains from realistic dualism. Thus, a process is launched that still influences the present cultural and epistemological theory: “Setzungen und Voraussetzungen bilden einen autokonstitutiven Zusammenhang, der seine spezifische ‘Wirklichkeit’ durch die Wirksamkeit der Bezugnahmen für Akteure und nicht durch Rückgriff auf ein spezifisches ontologisches Arrangement in ‘der Realität.’ [Suppositions and presuppositions form an auto-constitutive nexus, which develops its specific ‘actuality’ through the effectiveness of references for agents and not by using a specific ontological arrangement in ‘the reality’]” (Schmidt 2003, p. 33; also cf. Meierhofer 2006, pp. 49f).

Finally, those two references – between object and description and between former description (Voraussetzung) and instantaneous describing (Setzung) – constitute Mit terer’s non-dualistic thinking.

3. Non-dualizing philosophy and its basics

One of the first concepts that paved the way for non-dualistic thinking was William James’s pragmatism. Because the generation of truthful meaning only takes place within a social process, it is mandatory to adhere to certain rules of discourse and stick to certain meanings that guarantee consensus: “All human thinking gets discursified; we exchange ideas; we lend and borrow verifications, get them from one another by means of social intercourse. All truth thus
arguing: unregarded decision as the basis of dualistic dent of language. Mitterer detects this kind of tion does not correspond to a reality indepen-
dent of language. Mitterer detects this kind of decision does not correspond to a reality independent of language. Mitterer detects this kind of unregarded decision as the basis of dualistic arguing:

“Damit wird die Grundlage geschaffen, um Verfahren zu suchen und zu finden, durch die eine oder einige der damit erst möglich gewordenen verschiedenen Beschreibungen derselben Objekte von den übrigen Beschreibungen ausgezeichnet werden können, – als ‘wahr,’ ‘adäquat,’ ‘richtig,’ ‘zutreffend,’ etc. [The basis is thereby established to search for and find methods that allow for the marking of the sole or some of the several descriptions of the same objects which have now been made possible and can now be differenti-
ated as ‘true,’ ‘adequate,’ ‘right,’ ‘appropriate,’ etc.]” (Mitterer 1992, p. 50).

From a non-dualistic standpoint, integrating a new description or assertion into (scientific) discourse means checking whether its combination with previous descriptions can be accomplished or not. Neurath explains this procedure as follows:

“Wenn eine Aussage gemacht wird, wird sie mit der Gesamtheit der vorhandenen Aussagen konfrontiert. Wenn sie mit ihnen übereinstimmt, wird sie ihnen angeschlossen, wenn sie nicht übereinstimmt, wird sie als ‘unwahr’ bezeichnet und fallengelassen oder aber der bisherige Aussagenkomplex der Wissenschaft abgeändert, so daß die neue Aussage eingegliedert werden kann; zu letzterem entschließt man sich meist schwer. […] Die Sprache ist für die Wissenschaft wesentlich, innerhalb der Sprache spielen sich alle Umformungen der Wissenschaft ab, nicht durch Gegenüberstellung der Sprache und einer ‘Welt’, einer Gesamtheit von ‘Dingen’, deren Mannigfaltigkeit die Sprache abbilden soll. Das versuchen wäre Metaphysik. Die eine wissenschaftliche Sprache kann über sich selbst sprechen, ein Teil der Sprache über den anderen; hinter die Sprache kann man nicht zurück. [If a proposition is made, it will be confronted with the entirety of present propositions. If it corresponds to them, it will be affiliated. If it does not correspond, it will be described as ‘untrue’ and be abandoned, or, the previous complex of scientific propositions will be changed so that the new proposition can be integrated. One often decides hardly ever for the latter. […] Language is essential for science; all transformations of science happen within language, not by confronting language with a ‘world,’ i.e., an entirety of ‘things’ whose diversity language should represent. Trying this would be metaphysics. The one scientific language can talk about itself, one part of language about the other; one cannot go behind language]” (Neurath 1981, p. 419).

Whether a description is accepted or abolished depends on how conveniently it relates to the entire complex of propositions. A fundamental change of this complex is rather uncommon. In any case, each description and assessment takes place – as an act of language – within discourse, even if there is a disparity between those statements. By confronting a description with the world, with nature, or simply with reality, or in other words, by adopting a dualistic position, one attempts to resolve that conflict:

“Wenn eine gütliche Einigung nicht möglich ist – etwa durch Überredung, Überzeugung, durch den üblichen Aus- tausch und Abtausch von Argumenten –, erfolgt eine mögliche Entscheidung zwischen den konkurrierenden Auffassungen mit Hilfe von Instanzen oder Kriterien oder zumindest durch Berufung auf sie. […] Solche Instanzen können je nach Art des Konflikts sein: die Natur, die Wirklich-
keit, Sachverhalte, die Geschichte oder Gesetze. [If an amicable settlement is not feasible – e.g., by convincing, persuading, by the usual exchange and transfer of argu-
ments –, a feasible decision between the competing opinions will follow by dint of instances or criteria or, at least, with refer-
ence to them. […] Such instances, depending on the conflict, can include: nature, reality, circumstances, history, or laws]” (Mitterer 2001a, p. 70).

From a non-dualistic perspective, such a conflict is unnecessary simply because the plane of reference has changed. Instead of relying on entities or authorities outside the discourse, truth and reality are merely a cur-
tent complex of assertions and propositions:

“‘In einem nichtdualistischen ‘pursuit of truth’ werden Auffassungen nicht ver-
treten, weil sie wahr sind. Auffassungen sind wahr, weil und solange sie vertreten werden und sie sind falsch, weil und solange sie nicht vertreten werden. Die Funktion von Begriffen wie Wahrheit und Falschheit beschränkt sich auf die Abgren-
zung zwischen Auffassungen, die wir vertreten und Auffassungen, die wir nicht vertreten. [Within a non-dualistic ‘pursuit of truth,’ views are not maintained because they are true. Views are true both because and so long as they are maintained, and they are wrong both because and so long as they are not maintained. The function of terms like truth and falseness is limited to the distinction between views we hold and views we do not hold.]” (Mitterer 1988, p. 28)

gets verbally built out, stored up, and made available for everyone. Hence, we must talk consistently just as we must think consistently: for both in talk and thought we deal with kinds. Names are arbitrary, but once understood they must be kept on. We mustn’t now call Abel ‘Cain’ or Cain ‘Abel.’ If we do, we ungear ourselves from the whole book of Genesis, and from all its connexions with the universe of speech and fact down to the present time. We throw ourselves out of whatever truth that entire system of speech and fact may embody” (James 1975a, pp. 102f).
As long as certain arguments are maintained and certain views are held, their truth remains undoubted.

The validity and meaning of those arguments and propositions is determined by their use. So, Mitterer follows Wittgenstein’s anti-metaphysical concept, namely, that the meaning of words and language always involves their everyday usage: “Wir führen die Wörter von ihrer metaphysischen, wieder auf ihre alltägliche Verwendung zurück. [We bring the words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use again]” (Wittgenstein 1984, p. 300). Although this proposal is quite close to Mitterer’s initial point, he criticizes some dualistic remains in Wittgenstein’s argumentation. Mitterer, therefore, focuses on the example of a triangle. Wittgenstein argues that a single triangle can offer several interpretations, e.g., “als dreieckiges Loch, als Körper, als geometrische Zeichnung: auf seiner Grundlinie stehend, an seiner Spitze aufgehängt; als Berg, als Keil, als Pfeil oder Zeiger; als ein umgefallener Körper, der (z. B.) auf der kürzeren Kathete stehen sollte, als ein halbes Parallelogramm, und verschiedenes anderes. [as a triangular hole, as a solid, as a geometrical drawing; as standing on its base, as hanging from its apex; as a mountain, as a wedge, as an arrow or pointer; as an overturned object that (e.g.) is meant to stand on the shorter leg of the right angle, as a half parallelogram and as various other things]” (Wittgenstein 1984, p. 530).

At the same time, Wittgenstein is convinced that the different interpretations have no influence on the triangle itself. All interpretations correspond to the triangle, but each of them does so only with regard to one single aspect of it. Independently of the chosen aspect, each quality remains one single part of the ‘complete’ object. This argumentation, however, is still related to a correspondence theory that Mitterer consistently tries to avoid:

“Eine korrespondenztheoretische Vorgangsweise kann schon deshalb nicht zielführend sein, weil sich Erfahrungen immer nur mit Erfahrungen, Beschreibungen immer nur mit Beschreibungen vergleichen lassen und nicht mit einer erfahrungs- und beschreibungseitigen Realität. [An approach based on correspondence theory cannot yield results because experiences can always only be compared with experiences, descriptions always with descriptions, and not with a reality beyond experience and description]” (Mitterer 1998, p. 114).

And according to this non-dualistic perspective, Mitterer does not concentrate on the triangle as an uninterpreted object or on the relation between the different interpretations of the triangle, but on the fact that even “triangle” is already an interpretation of the object:

“Wenn wir aber immer nur eine Deutung einer anderen Deutung gemäß sehen, dann müssen wir auch bereit sein, darauf zu verzichten, als Ausgangspunkt für die Aspekte etwas, vielleicht ein Ding, anzunehmen, das selbst nicht ein Aspekt ist, das etwas Ungedeutetes ist. [But if we always see an interpretation only in accordance with another, we have to be prepared to abstain from presuming something, maybe one thing, as the origin of aspects, which is not an aspect itself, but which is something uninterpreted]” (Mitterer 1992, p. 25).

A similar discrepancy between object and interpretation, world and experience can be found in Kuhn’s relativistic concept as well. At first, Kuhn argues that a (revolutionary) change of paradigm also changes the world or the realms of experience, at least within a scientific community. Outside the laboratory, however, everyday life continues notwithstanding:

“Exchanging the record of past research from the vantage of contemporary historiography, the historian of science may be tempted to proclaim that when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them. […] It is rather as if the professional community had been suddenly transported to another planet where familiar objects are seen in a different light and are joined by unfamiliar ones as well. Of course, nothing of quite that sort does occur: there is no geographical transplantation; outside the laboratory everyday affairs usually continue as before. Nevertheless, paradigm changes do cause scientists to see the world of their research-engagement differently. In so far as their only recourse to that world is through what they see and do, we may want to say that after a revolution scientists are responding to a different world” (Kuhn 1996, p. 111).

A new (scientific) paradigm constitutes a new (scientific) world by establishing a new mode of description. But still, there is an objective world left respectively there remain the realms of experience, which are specific to a research community, outside of these descriptions. The new description differs from the old indeed. Yet, every description handles the stimuli emanating from the objective world. Mitterer criticizes hereupon:

“Die Reize gehören zur Welt-2, die Reaktionen darauf, die Daten, zu denen sie verarbeitet werden, konstituieren die entsprechend verschiedenen Welten. […] Das traditionelle erkenntnistheoretische Paradigma einer Unterscheidung und Trennung zwischen dem Objekt der Beschreibung und der Beschreibung des Objekts wird somit in abgeänderter Form aufrecht erhalten: die Welt, die beschrieben wird, ist die (objektive) Welt-2 und die Beschreibung der Welt macht die (Wahrnehmungs-)Welt-1 aus. Die Fakten und die Beobachtungen, die in der von Kuhn kritisierten Auffassung noch zur ‘objektiven’ Welt gehört haben, sind jetzt auf die Wahrnehmungs- bzw. Lebenswelt übertragen worden. [The stimuli belong to world-2; accordingly, the reactions hereupon and the data which are made from them construct the various worlds-1. […] ‘The traditional epistemic paradigm of a distinction and separation between the object of description and the description of the object is thus perpetuated in a modified form: the world being described is the (objective) world-2, and the description of the world accounts for the (perceptive) world-1. Those facts and observations, which were hitherto attributed to the ‘objective’ world and therefore criticized by Kuhn, have now been transferred to the world of perception and life.”] (Mitterer 1992, pp. 39f).

The scientist, in this respect, only substitutes one way of treatment or interpretation for another so that different paradigms or different versions of one objective world are created: “Faktisch wird er eine Weise der Datenverarbeitung durch eine andere ersetzen. [Actually, he will substitute one way of handling data by another]” (Kuhn 1977, p.
410). By criticizing those dualistic reminiscences, Mitterer also offers his epistemological alternative: “Wir gelangen somit zu einem Verzicht auf theorien- und ‘sprachverschiedene’ Interpretations- und Bezugsbasen und damit auf Referenzbeziehungen überhaupt. Die Unterscheidung zwischen Theorie/Sprache und Wirklichkeit/Welt verliert ihren Sinn. [Thus, we reach an abandonment of bases for interpretation and points of reference differing from theory and language. The differentiation between theory/language and reality/world loses its meaning.]” (Mitterer 1992, pp. 42f.)

To waive all external reference bases is, then, both the beginning and the core of non-dualistic thinking.

One basic announcement of non-dualizing philosophy, therefore, is the mechanism of presupposition and supposition, or Voraussetzung and Setzung: “Wir sehen Tische und reden über Tische als Tische, das heißt unter Bezugnahme auf die Sinnorientierungsvoraussetzungen, die wir in den situationalsspezifischen Setzungen […] voraussetzen. [We see tables and talk about tables as tables, i.e., in reference to the presuppositions we presuppose […] while making context-specific suppositions]” (Schmidt 2005, p. 80).

A new description or interpretation (Setzung) always refers to previous descriptions or interpretations (Voraussetzung). For such a non-dualistic concept, a reality or substance apart from the process of updated describing is completely irrelevant. Or, as Schapp puts it:

“When man bei der Auffassung davon ausgeht, daß eine Wirklichkeit aufgefaßt wird und daß man mit der Auffassung immer näher an die Wirklichkeit heran- zukommen versucht, bis man eines Tages die Wirklichkeit erreicht hat, so wäre es schwer mit dem Einwand fertig zu wer- den, jedenfalls wenn die Wirklichkeit, die dieser Auffassung zugrunde liegt, etwas anderes sein sollte als die Wirklichkeit der Geschichten, in die wir verstrickt sind, oder was wohl dasselbe wäre, als unsere Verstricktheit in Geschichten. [If one acts on the assumption that a reality can be conceived of, and that with that assumption, one attempts to approach reality more and more closely until, one day, it has been reached, it would be difficult to cope with any objections; at least, if the reality at the core of this assumption were something different from the reality of those histories we have been ensnared into, or, what would possibly be the same, from our state of being ensnared into histories]” (Schapp 1965, p. 111).

The “ensnaring-into-histories” bars truth or reality from reaching beyond those histories or contexts.

To delineate the circular mechanism of condition and precondition, Mitterer henceforth uses the terms “speech so far” and “from now on.” He argues:

“Nichtdualisierendes ‘Reden über’ ist nicht mehr auf das Objekt der Rede gerichtet, sondern geht vom Objekt der Rede aus. Über ein Objekt reden heißt die Rede so far in einer Rede from now on fortführen. Ein Objekt beschreiben heißt, die Beschreibung so far / ein Objekt / fortführen und damit das Objekt in ein neues Objekt weiterer Beschreibungen zu ändern. Das Objekt der Beschreibung verhält sich zur Beschreibung des Objekts wie die Beschreibung so far zur Beschreibung from now on. [Non-dualistic ‘talking about’ is no longer focused on the object of speech, but comes from the object of speech. Talking about an object means to continue the speech so far by a speech from now on. Describing an object means to continue the speech so far/an object/ and, thus, to change the object into a new object of further descriptions. The object of description relates to the description of the object, in the same manner as the description so far does to the description from now on’]” (Mitterer 2001a, p.107).

The most important precondition for a new description, then, is the determination of language, or rather, the determination of the semantic relations. The proceeding of semanticity actually brings, as Ceccato argues, objects into existence:

“Prima delle operazioni della semanticità, dunque, né essere o esistere, né cosa, cioè parlare di essere. Ma per la mancanza di consapevolezza di queste operazioni si è partiti dai risultati del taglio già effettuato e ci se è arrestati a questi non quindi come a correlati, ma come a dati di per sé. [Before the operations of semanticity, then, there is neither being nor existing, nor thing, i.e., speaking of being. But because of the lack of awareness of these operations, one has started from the results of the already accomplished cut, and therefore one has retained them, not as correlatives, but as data for themselves.]” (Ceccato 1949, p. 242. Translation by Ernst von Glasersfeld, which was published together with Ceccato’s article.)

Speech acts geared towards the common determinations of being produce the existence of objects. Reality and appearance, correctness and falseness: these concepts, as categories of assessment, emerge out of the fixation of semantic relations and also from the analysis of such a determination:

“Realtà e apparenza, correttezza ed errone- neità nascono con la determinazione dei rapporti semantici e con l’analisi della determinatezza. Nessuna cosa porta scritto sopra di sé o si dichiara ‘realtà’ o ‘apparenza.’ Anche il solo linguaggio non porterebbe a parlarne. [Reality and appearance, correctness and erroneousness originate with the determination of the semantical relations and with the analysis of the determinacy. No thing has it written on itself or declares itself to be ‘reality’ of ‘appearance.’ Nor would language (linguaggio) alone bring one to speak of them]” (Ceccato 1949, p. 244; also cf. Weber 2005, p. 99).

Thus, for Ceccato as well, reality, or the correct description of it, is bound to a process of ascribing. The mechanism of supposition and presupposition, Setzung and Voraussetz-

zung, now, governs this process, to the extent that current judgments or descriptions displace previous decisions: “Gegenwärtige Urteile setzen vergangene Urteile außer Kraft und nicht umgekehrt. [Current judgments abrogate previous judgments and not the opposite way around]” (Mitterer 2000a, p. 245). This also implies, as Feyerabend points out, that a non-dualistic process of perception, cognition, and description constantly evokes several, sometimes competing, solutions and alternatives persisting side by side:

“Knowledge so conceived is not a series of self-consistent theories that converge towards an ideal view; it is not a gradual approach to the truth. It is rather an ever increasing ocean of mutually incompatible (and perhaps even incommensurable) alternatives” (Feyerabend 1975, p. 30).
The beginning of a successful description, however, is marked by a consensus; and unless there is no incompatible description clash, there is no reason to measure the truth or consistency of the current discourse. On the other hand, truth acts as an indicator for a discursive conflict:

“Wahrheitsansprüche und Irrtumsvorwürfe werden erst dann explizit erhoben, wenn im Diskurs Konflikte auftreten, das heißt auch: wenn der Konsens zusammenbricht, der bis dahin bestanden hat. Diskurse beginnen nicht mit einem Konflikt, sie beginnen mit einem Konsens. [Truth claims and error reproaches are raised only when conflicts occur within discourse, which also means: only when the hitherto existing consensus collapses. Discourses do not begin with a conflict, they begin with a consensus]” (Mitterer 1999, p. 494).

An important argument in such conflicts is the appropriate distance between observer and object, judgment and reality. Though there is no overall criterion for that kind of distance, the insistence on the correctness of one's own distance is typically the only way out of this dilemma: “Es bleibt uns aber die Möglichkeit, eine objektive Distanz zwischen dem Objekt und unserem Urteil über den Umweg einer Kritik an Auffassungen zu argumentieren, die das gleiche Objekt beurteilen. [But there remains the possibility for us to argue for an objective distance between the object and our judgment by making a detour to critique other opinions that judge the same object]” (Mitterer 2001b, p. 31). Finally, every (philosophical) problem – as well as every (alleged) solution to it – is self-made. The success of a description, an assessment, or even a scientific ideology, as Feyerabend calls it, is due to certain rules, a certain arguing within discourse:

“Such ideology is 'successful' not because it agrees so well with the facts; it is successful because no facts have been specified that could constitute a test, and because some such facts have been removed. Its 'success' is entirely man-made” (Feyerabend 1975, p. 44).

A non-dualistic perspective, however, offers an alternate solution by depicting both the conditions and the traditional, ontological customs of epistemology.

4. Conclusion

There are certainly traces from cultural theory that help to reconstruct the genesis of non-dualizing philosophy. The argument that the description of culture needs a culture of description and vice versa launches a circular process independent from an ulterior reality. At the same time, with this cohesive and incessant movement, as Hayek expounds, it is impossible to revise the whole foundation of values at once because the fundament itself is indispensable for such a reorganization:

“Wir können die Wertgrundlagen unserer Zivilisation nie von Grund auf neu aufbauen, sondern immer nur von innen heraus entwickeln. Auch das führt zu ununterbrochener Bewegung, ja vielleicht im Lauf der Zeit sogar zu einer Änderung des Ganzen. Aber eine völlige Neukonstruktion ist in keiner Etappe des Prozesses möglich, weil wir stets das Material verwenden müssen, das uns zur Verfügung steht und das selbst das Produkt eines Entwicklungsprozesses ist. [We will never be able to rebuild the value foundations of our civilisation fundamentally, but can only ever develop them from within. This also leads to continuous movement, maybe even, in the course of time, to an alteration of the whole. But a totally new construction is not possible in any portion of the process because we must always use the material available, which is itself the product of a developmental process]” (Mitterer 1975, p. 23).

Especially against the background of cultural theory, Mitterer’s concept reveals itself, so to speak, as an application of itself. It deals with several argumentations as its presuppositions, its Voraussetzungen; it ties in with apt perspectives, and it declines others. Thus, non-dualizing philosophy functions in accordance with the results of its own observations and findings. It deals with several approaches, which have been outlined in this paper and must be explored in greater depth elsewhere. Although some references are not explicitly mentioned by Mitterer – namely those to cultural theory, pragmatism, or the sociology of knowledge – the theory reveals itself as a development of earlier standpoints. It is not only embedded into a context of previous and current descriptions, but congruously offers an epistemic description from now on. But mostly, the criticism developed thereby unveils the difficulties of some common understandings, most notably those of realism and (biologistic) constructivism:

“Beide Denkmodelle – das realistische wie das konstruktivistische – sind Manifestationen einer Argumentationstechnik, mit deren Hilfe beliebige Auffassungen als wahr, falsch oder gescheitert im realistischen Fall und zumindest als nichtviable, gescheitert oder widerlegt im konstruktivistischen Fall ausgewiesen werden können, je nachdem, ob sie vertreten oder abgelehnt werden. Dies geschickt unter Benutzung auf eine ‘unabhängige Realität’ oder andere Instanzen, die durch die Realisierung und Universalisierung von theoretischen Konstruktionen aus der Biologie oder anderen Bereichen erzeugt werden. [Both models of thinking – the realistic and constructivist – are manifestations of an argumentation technique, with the help of which any opinions can be revealed as true, false, or failed in the case of realism, or, at least as nonviable, failed, or refuted in the case of constructivism, depending on whether the opinion is held or refused. This happens with reference to an ‘independent reality’ or to other instances that are created by the realisation and universalization of theoretic constructs from biology or other domains]” (Mitterer 2000b, pp. 63f).

The non-dualistic idea, in contrast, clearly abstains from a reality or any other universal explanations beyond discourse. As a result, it helps to detect argumentative weaknesses in traditional epistemology as well as in constructivism. Mitterer points to the dualistic implications in each case. Realists assume one independent world whereas constructivists first have to create their world, either individually or collectively. Both perspectives, however, lose sight of these starting conditions. Conflicting aims, ideas, or interests thereby become unavoidable. The criteria for those discussions, then, assume right, objective, or valid standards. Mitterer’s non-dualistic concept, on the other hand, argues that observations or descriptions only occur within discourse and that an ulterior reality is not necessary for their success. And although Mitterer does not actually define the term discourse more closely – it is supposed to indicate a rather unspecific, general sphere of..."
philosophical–epistemological
CONCEPTS

non-dualizing philosophy

communication – his concept provides, as a Setzung made from now on, a favourable resolution of all those grey epistemological hindrances.

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THE AUTHOR

Christian Meierhofer is a postgraduate in German literature studies at the University of Bremen. His research interests include literary and cultural theory, epistemology, and sociology of knowledge as well as early modern literature.

Recent publication: Nihil ex Nihilo (2006).
Tertium Datur

Historical Preconditions and Ways to Mitterer’s Non-dualizing Philosophy

Peter Weibel ◇ Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe (Germany) <weibel@zkm.de>

1. There is no tertium non datur; or more precisely, there exists no general validity for tertium non datur

One of the most important principles of epistemology is the following assumption: any and every statement is either true or false. Contending that statements are arbitrary, statements cannot be called to account, statements have no content or that statements are meaningless seems to offer an escape from the rigorous dictum that any and every statement is true or false. This escape valve immediately narrows, however, when we realize that these very contentions regarding the nature of statements are themselves statements, i.e., statements about other statements. In order to moor oneself within this maze of statements on statements, epistemology turns for help to mathematical logic, which has produced a famous principle, the principle of the excluded middle. In order to prove a statement’s freedom from contradiction, it is not necessary to move beyond language itself; for a statement A is “false” when it leads to a contradiction. In order to prove these statements, however, we require the tertium non datur, and the tertium non datur must itself be proven. The mathematician David Hilbert provided this “proof of the tertium non datur” in 1931: “Each and every statement is either true or false. In order to prove this sentence, we require the tertium non datur. From the tertium non datur, we conclude: a true formula cannot also be false. If A is false, then ¬A is true. For A v¬A is always true. In addition, the following is also true: if A is true, ¬A is false. For A & ¬A is always false” (Hilbert 1931, p. 123).

The critical moment of Hilbert’s proof comes at the juncture between the statement “A true formula cannot also be false” and the statement “If A is false, ¬A is then true” – for what we see here constitutes the infamous “indirect proof,” even though the argument “For A v¬A is always true” is convincing. According to identity of indiscernibles, a true statement cannot be also false. Through the negation of the true statement A there arises a false statement ¬A. It is self-evident that the statement A or ¬A is always true, for only A or ¬A can be valid. However, it is discomforting when this forms the basis for the tertium non datur, or when this prohibition is used as an indirect proof. It is clear that we can say “Hans is blond” or “Hans is not blond.” But we cannot deduce from the statement “Hans is not blond” that “Hans is brown-haired,” since he could also have white hair. Here the proponent of logical intuitionism, Jan Brouwer, intervened and showed mathematical areas where the tertium non datur cannot be valid, e.g., for statements concerning infinity or concerning certain fixed sets (Brouwer 1918). For statements concerning objects that are not completely disjunct, the inclusive disjunction “Hans is blond or it is not the case that Hans is blond” of course makes little sense. For this reason, Brouwer particularly criticized statements of the form “If not-A(x) is not valid for any x, then for every x A(x) is valid,” which are derivable from the principle of the excluded third. The combination of tertium non datur and indirect proof does not
signify finite certainty in mathematics. This doctrine of intuitionism cannot be refuted, in spite of Hilbert’s later “proof” in 1931.

The principle of the excluded middle is apparently only valid in systems determined from the outset by the principle of bivalence—a principle that, however, is not valid for all systems in mathematics, e.g., the continuum hypothesis in set theory. In set theory with its reflexivity (Is the set of all sets itself a set? Is the set of all sets contained in itself?), we can see particularly clearly that statements concerning statements require the separation between the level of object and the meta-level, and between object language and meta-language. The problem of tertium non datur must be distinguished from the principle of bivalence, which states that every statement A is either true or false. A true statement is free from contradiction within its system, a false statement leads to contradictions in the system. We see that the principle of the excluded middle, the principle of bivalence and the principle of consistency are logically related, in spite of the “discomfort” mentioned that hovers about this particular logical process of derivation. If I should wish to trace a given hypothesis through to a contradiction and then—employing the excluded middle—indirectly prove it to be false and the negated hypothesis to be true, I require the principle of freedom from contradiction, embedded in a bivalent logical system. This admixture is what Brouwer first criticized. Since then, many thinkers have followed him in his criticism, especially as numerous indications of the incompleteness and undecidability of mathematical statements have come to light since then—most notably, the two famous theorems of the mathematician Kurt Gödel from 1931.

The first theorem of Gödel is: Every formalized and axiomatic theory free of contradiction in the realm of arithmetic is incomplete, i.e., there always exists a statement in this theory that is true in content but cannot be derived from the axioms of the theory. The second theorem of Gödel is: It is not possible to prove the freedom from contradiction of a formalized and axiomatic theory (one that is free of contradiction), encompassed by arithmetic, using means or tools formalized within this theory. In this way, Hilbert’s program of an axiomatic, formal foundation for mathematics, one that would be free of contradiction, was ruined—for there were suddenly undecidable mathematical sentences and theorems whose formal unprovability was formally proven.

2. What sort of difference exists between object language and meta-language, between world and language?

Gödel achieved his two famous proofs of the undecidability and incompleteness of the Principia Mathematica and related systems with the help of the method now known as Gödelization. In Gödelization statements concerning mathematics are assigned a Gödel-number, with these numbers then seen as statements in number theory. In other words, he built a bridge between object language and meta-language. This process of pinning down differences (or the lack thereof) between object language—statements concerning objects in mathematics or in the world—and meta-language—statements concerning these statements—had its origins in the language philosophy and epistemology of Vienna around 1900, origins that we shall now discuss through examining the language philosophies of Stöhr, Wahle and Mauthner.

2.1 The beginning of language critique in Vienna around 1900:
Stöhr, Wahle, Mauthner

In fin-de-siécle Vienna, transcendental analysis came to be replaced by epistemological analysis and interpretation of scientific statements, expressions and methods (Mach and Boltzmann), also incorporating nominalistic logic (the school of Brentano). This epistemological and epistemological-critical analysis naturally also had an effect on philosophy, which shifted towards logical analysis of language and language critique. The language philosophers of the turn of the century were the first to define the boundaries of knowledge as boundaries of language, an approach later popularized by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. They first analyzed (and debunked) the entanglements of philosophy as problems in language, and ultimately dealt with problems of existence as problems in language, separating out statements concerning existence from logical statements.

Adolf Stöhr (1855–1921) belongs along with Richard Wahle and Fritz Mauthner to the founders of language-critical epistemology. Stöhr saw himself as a student of Ernst Mach and was an opponent of Franz Brentano. His anti-metaphysical position, taken over from Mach, had strong language-critical elements. In his essay *Ist Metaphysik möglich? [Is Metaphysics Possible?]* (1916) he denies perception any possibility of a path to metaphysics: “Three paths lead to metaphysics. The path of creative fantasy, the path of the suffering heart, and the path of the unfolding (“rollendes, literally “rolling”) word. A fourth path, the path of epistemology, has proven uninhabitable...the metaphysics of the rolling word is the most commonly used path.” According to Stöhr, the metaphysician of the rolling word confuses an object with its name, rendering metaphor and concept concrete. Stöhr discusses the difference between object language and meta-language, but he does so via the essential problem of the relationship between world and language. In his bridging of this difference, Stöhr goes so far as to say that he no longer allows the existence of the outer world as an object for rational statements—for him, the world is at best an object for the exercise of belief. “Where we speak of an outer world, metaphysics begins. Anyone wishing to avoid solipsism is already a positive metaphysician—even if he is convinced of the contrary.” It is not surprising that the Catholic Stöhr nevertheless found an escape from this bind—by allowing metaphysics to function as a path of belief. “There is no inductive proof and also no deductive proof either for or against any given belief.”

In his *Umriss einer Theorie der Namen [Outline of a Theory of Names*, 1899], Stöhr argued that a differentiation between subject and object should be attributed more to language than to experience. For him, only the world of language existed. Accordingly, the difference between world and language is also attributable to language, as is the difference between subject and object. Meta-language and object language are therefore elements only of language itself and cannot be used to construct statements concerning existence in the world.
No less radical than Mauthner and Wittgenstein, Stöhr attacks philosophy for confusing forms of language with forms of thought. "Non-sense can only be spoken, not thought. We never say 'Don't think nonsense!' , but only 'Don't talk nonsense!' Nonsense is only possible through language." Or, "In fact, the history of logic and a greater part of the history of philosophy is the history of a struggle with gnosomorphy and metaphors, the history of a battle between nascent thought and established speech" (Stöhr 1910, p. 409). Stöhr here clearly expresses his view that our thought is dependent on language, and that the enslavement of thought occurs through language.

For this reason, he also attempted in his *Algebra of Grammar. A Contribution to Morphology and Syntax* (1898) to build the bases of a purified formal language, anticipating Carnap's *Logical Syntax of Language* (1934). "The algebra of the grammar is thereby also agreed, the denotatum of the Banne of the unwesentlichen and zufälligen in den Sprachformen to befree. The theoretical Hauptnutzen einer Algebra der Grammatik dürfte aber darin bestehen, dass dieselbe die Grundlage einer philosophisch geklärten Darstellung der Formenlehre und Syntax einer bestimmten Sprache abzugeben vermag.

[The algebra of grammar is thus also suitable for freeing thought from the limitations of unessential and chance elements in language forms. The chief theoretical uses of an algebra of grammar should, however, be that they also can supply the basis for a philosophically clarified morphology, and the syntax of a particular language]" (Mauthner 1898, p. 140).

In his essay *Outline of a Theory of Names* (1899), Stöhr examined the connection between word and meaning. "...how it is possible, with respect to the psychology of association, that a word comes to be associated with one meaning. This is relevant both for the historical or phylogenetic side of name-giving and for the ontogenetic aspect, relevant for the learning of names by the child and for the use of those names after they have been learned." We can see that Stöhr made a distinction between *langue* and *langage*, between language and language competency. The algebra of grammar assumes all problems of the theory of names to be somehow already solved.

"Sie behandelt alle Wortstämme ganz gleich als ein algebraisches $a$ mit verschiedenen Indices. Die Stämme mögen nun Dinge, Personen, Stoffe, Vorgänge, Zustände, Eigenschaften, Relationen oder was immer sonst bedeuten. Für die Algebra der Grammatik ist der Inhalt der Bedeutung von $a$ so gleichgültig, wie die Beschaffenheit der gezählten Gegenstände für die Technik der Addition und Multiplikation [...]. Es sei z.B. 'd a' die allgemeine Bezeichnung für einen abgeleiteten Ausdruck, ungefähr so wie man $f(x)$ schreibt. Mit der Ableitungsoperation ist die Tätigkeit der Grammatik nicht erschöpft. Die Ausdrücke müssen, ob sie nun abgeleitet sind oder ursprünglich bleiben, zu Sätzen aneinandergestellt werden. Die Algebra der Grammatik vermag nun die Operation des Satzbau derart zum Ausdruck zu bringen, dass sie dabei von den Eigenarten des Baustiles absieht.

[It treats all word roots equally as an algebraic $a$ with various indexes. The roots may now signify things, persons, materials, actions, states, properties, relations or anything else. For the algebra of grammar, the content of the meaning is as arbitrary as the content of counted things for the techniques of addition and multiplication [...]. For instance, we can posit 'd $a$' as the general term for a derived expression, somewhat as we use $f(x)$. But the function of grammar is not exhausted by this derivative operation. Expressions, whether derived or original, must be formed together into sentences. The algebra of grammar may now describe the operation of constructing sentences in such a way that it can ignore the peculiarities of construction style]" (Stöhr 1899, pp. 2–3).

Thus, if $a$ signifies the minimum unit of acoustic expression to which a meaning is connected, several as will be required in the construction of the algebraic expression of a sentence, in which case the separate meanings of these $a$ must be distinct. The variety of meanings is denoted by indexes such as $a, a', a''$ or $a(0), a(1), a(2),$ and $a(3)$.

"Man denke sich nun alle $a$-Ausdrücke einer Sprache alphabetisch geordnet, und jeden Ausdruck mit einer konstant zugewiesenen Zahl versehen. Zwei verschieden lautende Ausdrücke $a'$ und $a''$, welche ein identische Bedeutung haben, erhalten gleiche Zahlen zugewiesen. Ein $a$, welches mehrere Bedeutungen hat, erhält so viele Zahlen als Bedeutungen unterschieden werden. Wenn $x$ diejenige größte Zahl ist, welche in diesem $a$-Lexikon der Sprache $A$ derzeit erreicht wird, dann ist der algebraische Ausdruck für ein $a$ mit bestimmter Bedeutung einer der Ausdrücker zwischen $a(1)$ und $a(x).$ Man denke sich nun ein alphabetisches $a$-Lexikon in einer zweiten Sprache $B$ angelegt. Dasjenige $a$ der $B$-Sprache, dessen Bedeutung sich mit der Bedeutung von $a$ in der $A$-Sprache deckt, wird gleichfalls die Zahl $n$ erhalten. [We shall suppose all $a$-terms in a language to be ordered alphabetically, and each term will be given a fixed number. Two differing terms $a'$ and $a''$, which have an identical meaning, are assigned identical numbers. An $a$ with a variety of different meanings is assigned as many numbers as it has meanings. If $x$ is the greatest number reached in this $a$-lexicon of language $A$ so far, then the algebraic term for an $a$ with one particular meaning is included in the terms between $a(1)$ and $a(x).$ We now suppose an alphabetical $a$-lexicon for a second language, language $B$. The term $a$ in language $B$ whose meaning coincides with the meaning of $a$ in language $A$ will also receive the number $n^o$ (p. 8).

We see that Stöhr advocated a finite standpoint, a standpoint claiming to be capable of supplying all terms in a language and of building all combinations or derivations. In this context, Stöhr’s assignment of numbers to names or terms is significant, and is most probably derived from Leibniz, embodying as well a rudimentary process of Godelization – it was used, in fact, by Gödel in the proof of his first Theorem of Incompleteness in 1931. The practical applications for translation are also evident, since it should be possible to change from one language to another with the help of numbers. Stöhr here already takes on a theme W. V. O. Quine later would formulate into his famous thesis of the “Indeterminacy of Translation” in *Word and Object* (1960). As unsuitable as Stöhr’s technique may be, the idea of a formal language – in fact, an truly artificial language analogous to mathematics and formal logic (e.g., a $(p(1) a(1) f(1) e(1)$ $t(3) = "I shall not do it\)" – is formulated systematically and thoroughly, with ground-breaking significance (cf. Carnap and the
consequences thereof: Kripke 1980, Harris 1960 and his student Chomsky 1957.

The Vienna Circle provided another forerunner (albeit a relatively unsystematic one) to the demasking of metaphysical language and the denunciation of all forms of metaphysics as illusory in another student of Mach, Richard Wahle (1857–1935). Wahle, too, saw language as a limit set on experience and as a wall blocking the path to reality. He also shared with Stöhr and Mauthner a rejection of metaphor and metaphysics. He accused philosophy in a language-critical context of “not distinguishing between the full word and empty word, and propagating every kind of inexactitude, mistake, lie, and cunning phrase through the form of abstraction.”

A non-academic thinker who nevertheless far outdistanced Stöhr and Wahle in his accomplishments, significance and influence, Fritz Mauthner (1849–1923), another admirer of Mach, also fell victim to a comparable agnosticism as result of his language-analytic philosophy. Mauthner was perhaps the first thinker in the 20th century who placed language criticism at the forefront of epistemology and analysis and radically negated the epistemological function of language. One consequence of this was that Mauthner, based on his merciless analysis of language in the wake of Mach (whose lectures he attended in Prague 1872), threw metaphysics and philosophy overboard, considering them mere superstition of words.

Mauthner’s main achievement actually lies in his subjecting language, as a medium of knowledge, to a precise nominalistic analysis for the first time. In this capacity, he contributed to the founding of linguistics as an independent science. He casts the general applications and validity of language into doubt, proceeding from the standpoint that “die Individualsprache eines Menschen nie-mals der irgend eines anderen Menschen vollkommen gleich ist, und dass ein und der-selbe Mensch in verschiedenen Lebensaltern nicht die gleiche Sprache redet [the individual language of one human being is never completely identical to that of another human being, and one and the same human being does not speak the same language in different stages of life]” (Mauthner 1901–1902, Volume 1, p. 6). The concept of the individual language was further pursued in the 1920s and 30s – and also in the 50s and 60s – as a subject of separate inquiry; Even the most abstract, generalized language of concepts cannot deny its perspicuity or its basis in concrete individual experience: the language of metaphysics, for example, is already embedded in the language of metaphor even before it is uttered. In this sense, language is not merely a depiction of something, but also a shaper of something – an image of the world compelling us to certain trains of thought without our knowing it. This also sets limits on conceptual language in the service of conveying knowledge. Accordingly, it can be argued that the structure of thought is essentially determined through language. Mauthner’s investigations in language philosophy show to what extent the forms of language are also forms of thought in the areas of concept formation and the categorical structure of consciousness. “Language and reason exist between human beings, they are social phenomena. Perhaps only in the sense of the rules of a game. A critique of reason must become a critique of language. All critical philosophy is a critique of language.” Mauthner’s critique of language consists of two parallel but contradictory lines: (a) the characteristics of language (its a posteriori, its transformations) counteract the communication of experience and thoughts; (b) at the time a thought occurs, is already pre-formed by the characteristics of language. Thus, Mauthner urges thinkers to silence. Language conceals reality, experience and thought. “Language is a tool incapable of grasping reality.”

This doubting of language is not only characteristic of philosophers at the beginning of our century, but also of poetic thought. Mauthner’s doubts have had a large, albeit largely hidden effect on the development of poetry in our century. Mauthner himself could not achieve an integration of language scepticism and poetry, aside from his Märchenbuch der Wahrheit [Fairy Tale Book of Truth]. However, the influence of his Contributions to a Critique of Language (originally published 1901–1902) was all the stronger on poets contemplating the insufficiency of expression through language. Passages marked in Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s copy of Mauthner’s Critique of Language, as well as his letters to Mauthner, imply that his Letter of Lord Chandos, an early poetic expression of scepticism regarding language and silence, was influenced by Mauthner, as well as by Ernst Mach, whose lectures he had attended.

Hugo Ball became familiar with Mauthner’s philosophy of language through two works of Gustav Landauer (Skepticism and Mysticism in 1903, and Revolution in 1907), who was actually a student of Mauthner. Both of these works take on Mauthner’s language critique as a basis for a new course of action, the revolution. In Tegel prison, the Soviet republican and utopian socialist Landauer came to know Mauthner’s work, later coming into contact with him and even putting himself at Mauthner’s disposal as a secretary during the writing of the three volumes of the Critique of Language when Mauthner was threatened by blindness.

The world-famous topologist and set theoretician, Felix Hausdorff, also exchanged correspondence with Mauthner and Landauer. Hausdorff, under the pseudonym Paul Mongré, attempted to forge a link between poetry and philosophy – in works such as Sant’ Ilario (1897) and The Chaos in Cosmic Assortment (1898), where he denies the existence of absolute knowledge and claims the wholly arbitrary nature of our view of the world. The last work Hausdorff published under the pseudonym of Mongré before he finally turned his full attention to mathematics was most probably his glowing review of Mauthner’s Critique of Language.

In Hausdorff, Landauer and Ball, we can already recognize a consequence of Mauthner’s critique of language that Mauthner himself was not prepared to follow: if knowledge of reality is impossible through language, if language hinders access to thought and to experience, then scepticism of language need not be a dead end – instead, the arbitrariness our world view has thus acquired could lend us the intellectual freedom to posit reality as we wish, to transform it, to create it anew. Thus, the critique of language is the beginning of modern constructivism.

2.2 Mauthner as a Forerunner of Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein must have known Mauthner’s works better than he let on. Undeniably, Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language, through its formal-logical basis, its scientific
and mathematical methods, its analytic depth and system, has had the greater weight and effect over time. Yet there are a surprising number of similarities between the thinking of both philosophers, and Mauthner formulated many points before Wittgenstein did. For one thing, Wittgenstein adopted the program “every critical philosophy is a critique of language” from Mauthner — his slogan, so to speak — even though he fashioned something new from it: “All philosophy is ‘Critique of language’” (Tractatus 4.0031; “but not at all in Mauthner’s sense”). The well-known ladder image at the end of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus — “My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)” (6.54) – has its origins in Mauthner: “Should I wish to scale the heights of language critique, the most important occupation of thinking man, I must destroy each rung of the ladder by climbing on it. If another wishes to follow me, he must then build the rungs anew, in order to destroy them yet again.” Wittgenstein’s later philosophy also has its roots in Mauthner — for instance, Wittgenstein’s theory of language game is anticipated in Mauthner: “Language, however, is not an object, it is nothing but its usage, language is the use of language. Language is merely an illusory value, like a rule in a game, that becomes more and more compelling the more players participate, but that does not seek to change or comprehend the world of reality.” (Wittgenstein later claims that the meaning of a word is its use in a language.) Wittgenstein’s mysticism – “We feel that even if all possible scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all” (6.52) and “There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical” (6.522) – was formulated thus by Mauthner: “The core of our concern has nothing to do with language and thinking” or, “That would certainly be the act of redemption, to exercise criticism in the peaceful, desperate suicide of thought or speech.” The suicide of speech as redemption, the silence in which the unsayable, the mystical, becomes manifest: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence,” as Wittgenstein wrote.

2.3 Quine’s Word and Object
The analytic philosopher, set theorist and logician W. V. O. Quine, who personally took part in the lectures and seminars of the Vienna Circle in the 1930s, tackled the distinction between analytic and synthetic sentences in his 1951 essay Two Dogmas of Empiricism. The truth of analytic sentences, as is known, results from the separate, constituent expressions found within them. The truth of synthetic sentences originates in their correspondence with reality. As Wittgenstein wrote in Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus: “A preposition is a picture of reality” (4.01). Quine showed that not individual sentences, but only theories capable of empirical verification can be true or false — and that even analytic sentences cannot completely erase the traces of their empirical contingencies. For their part, theories can never be completely verified, because the truth content of statements fluctuates along with the systems in which they are formulated. Language can only be learned in connection with experiences – hence, there can be no strict separation between language and world, between Word and Object (1960). There exists a principal empirical indeterminacy for the objects we notice and observe, and for the objects that then become words — words that in turn then determine how objects are observed and what meaning they have. For instance, I live to a certain extent from those substances to which I assign the name “proteins” on the basis of my analytic capabilities. What, then, have I ingested? Words or substances? Do these objects exist without the words? Or are objects transformed in accordance with my analytic capabilities and names? Quine posited the theses of the “indeterminacy of translation” and the “opacity of reference”: reality is essentially incapable of being investigated, and what we do know about it is a construction of language.

2.4 From Wittgenstein and Quine to Mitterer
Josef Mitterer took the Viennese tradition of language critique as an epistemological principle to its intellectual conclusion. He realized that this tradition did not actually attack the boundaries of language as boundaries of the world, but instead ran up against a hidden dualism. This dualism is the central raison d’être of classical philosophy: the ability to strictly distinguish between Word and Object, between what we speak and the things about which we speak, between meta-language and object language. The dichotomy between language and reality, between description and object, between language and world, between statement and its subject, is the real problem — not the boundary between language and reality. Classical Western philosophy is thus a dualistic philosophy, based upon a dichotomy between language and reality. Mitterer, however, does not fall into the ontological traps found in Parmenides (“Language is existence”) up through Heidegger, but attempts, in the tradition of the Vienna School of language critique, to mobilize theories of truth out of statements that in no way attempt to determine reality but rather “language-differed reality.” After we have absorbed the lesson that reality is stronger than thought, and thought stronger than language – i.e., that not everything thinkable (as truth) can also be (in a proof) formalized (Gödel) and that not all realities can be thought – after we have learned that language corrupts understanding and clouds reality, and that the world encompassed by logic is not always a world of either/or, of true or false – Mitterer arrives at his ultimate decision not to become mired in the mysticism of silence or the pragmatism of action, but rather to recognize and comprehend the transformability and constructability of the world through that very non-dualism.

“The pursuit of truth” is replaced by a “pursuit of change” (Mitterer 1992, 97f). “What reality consists of, is determined through the course of the descriptions” (98). “The ‘language-different’ reality is the beyond of discourse. The descriptions corresponding to the ‘language-different’ reality and thus describing reality as it is – are exactly those descriptions (or repetitions of exactly those descriptions) whose anticipated results form (or have formed) reality” (99).

Mitterer’s philosophy, in opposition to the dualistic epistemological principle, is a philosophy that renounces the categorical division between language and language-opposing reality, but that also renounces the agreement between language and reality. It
3. Conclusion

The methodic constructivism of Mitterer’s non-dualistic philosophy shows language and world as elements of a mutually dependent constructivity. Language and world are not separated by a chasm of difference. As meta-language is derived from object language, there exists – in the form of the subject – a bridge between language and world. Language and world overlap more than they diverge. This is why Mitterer’s philosophy is so suitable and attractive for a theory of media that views the world itself as a kind of overlap. This side of the world world becomes the beyond of philosophy when the observed and described world emerges from nothing other than these same descriptions and observations, which in turn – implemented in the form of technology – transform the world, which then further transforms descriptions, observations and technologies. It is in fact fortunate that the world is incomplete, mirroring that good fortune in the Theorem of Incompleteness. Mitterer thus belongs to that school of philosophy that may not break the world out of its magic spell, but de-defines it, because the definition of world – as the word *definisc* (Latin for “end”), embedded in the word “definition,” implies – would mean the end of the world, the definitive end, so to speak. It goes without saying that a methodical constructivist would do well to end his text here with the word “end.”

**References**

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Peter Weibel studied literature, mathematics, philosophy and film in Paris and Vienna. He wrote his doctoral thesis on modal logic. A former artistic director of Ars Electronica in Linz, he is since 1999 CEO of the Center for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe. In 2004 he received a honorary doctorate from the Helsinki University of Art and Design. He is working as a poly-artist, art and media theoretician, and exhibition curator. His publications include Das offene Werk (2007) and some eight volumes he edited with the MIT Press.

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The Object of Description Is the Description of the Object So Far: Non-dualism and Beyond

Stefan Weber ◊ University of Applied Arts, Vienna <webermediaresearch@t-online.de>

1. The dualism of seeing things and talking about things: Objects and language

The correspondence theory of truth claims that the sentence “It’s raining outside” is true when in fact it is raining outside. But it’s not only the correspondence theory of truth that makes a distinction between the sentence “It’s raining outside” and the (observable or not observable) empirical fact that it is raining outside. The realist says, “The fact that it is raining outside can be observed by us with our senses.” The constructivist says, “The fact [then in the original Latin sense of the word: factum = made by us] that it is raining outside is constructed by us in our brains, determined by socio-cultural context variables.” Both realists and constructivists share a presupposition: that the sentence “It’s raining outside,” differs from observing (= representing or constructing) rain outside. How could a sentence and an observation ever be the same? Our classical logic of perception tells us that you observe something (e.g., the rain outside), and then you to describe it (“It’s raining outside”). Evidently you cannot go beyond that or you have to leave rational discourse. This is what philosophy has taught us since its beginnings: if we forego the distinction between what is said and what is happening, we fall back into irrationality and ultimately nonsense.

You can find this primordial distinction in ontology, epistemology, and philosophy of language. The distinction has many names: language and reality, thinking and being, words and objects, names and things, signs and referents (please note that the notion of a “concept” or an “idea” in the semiotic triangle adds a third element to this dualism, but does not destruct it — triads are extensions of dyads, no more). This basic dualism can be found in various disciplines and schools, ranging from semiotics to phenomenology, from realism as well as constructivism to symbolic interactionist theory and so on. Countless examples could be given, historically ranging from the pre-Socratics (see Weber 2005, chapter 2.2, pp. 84 ff) up to contemporary philosophy. I would like to give some examples in which the distinction is very obvious — and very obviously unquestioned:

(1) C. K. Ogden presupposes the distinction in his linguistic and psychological analysis of oppositions when he writes: “In Knowledge, we experience immediately and permanently the inter-play of opposites — such as Thought and its Object, Ego and non-Ego — with a single fact such as green being divided into two opposite terms, inner—outer, subject—object” (Ogden 1967, p. 31).

This is an analysis of the oppositions that we already share and view as a basis of rational discourse, it is not a philosophical reflection on whether these oppositions are obligatory and whether there are any imaginable alternatives to them. Silvio Ceccato (1949, 1952) followed a different path when he questioned all starting dualisms in his model, beginning with the core dualism of “knower”/”observer” and “thing to be known”/”observatum” (for a detailed discussion of Ceccato’s critique of epistemological starting dualisms also related to Mitterer, see Weber 2005, pp. 77–146).
epistemological concepts

(2) W. V. O. Quine starts his reflections on Word and Object with the unquestioned distinction between “ordinary things” and “words.” He writes in §1 (“Beginning with Ordinary Things”): “Linguistically, and hence conceptually, the things in sharpest focus are the things that are public enough to talk of often, and near enough to sense to be quickly identified and learned by name; it is to these that words apply first and foremost” (Quine 1960, p. 1).

Once again the distinction is the presupposition of thought, the starting point of any following philosophical activity, but the distinction itself is not questioned (this is exactly what Silvio Ceccato has criticized in his view more radically than, for example, Ernst von Glasersfeld). I have to add in this context that Josef Mitterer also puts an end to the notion “a reference” of words to objects.

(3) F. G. Jünger reminds us of the “obvious” fact that the word and the thing usually do not have anything in common: “Offenbar ist, daß Wörter wie Rose, Hirsch, Fluß nichts abbilden, daß sie mit der Rose, dem Hirsch, dem Fluß nicht die mindeste Ähnlichkeit haben. [Obviously, words such as rose, deer, river don’t represent anything, they don’t have the slightest similarity to a rose, a deer, a river]” (Jünger 1962, p. 65).

The distinction of words and things, of language and reality or of signs and objects can also be found in textbooks for nearly every discipline. Two examples are given:

(4) From the viewpoint of phenomenology and hermeneutics, the following author reminds us of the fact that descriptions, especially those made by natural scientists, do not change the objects described: “Somit verändert die Beschreibung in der Regel ihr Objekt nicht. [Thus the description does not normally change the object]” (Weik 2005, p. 116).

(5) From the viewpoint of symbolic interactionism, the next author claims that one object (we may suppose: in reality, “out there”) may have different meanings (we may suppose: in the symbolic sphere of the mind/the observer):

“Ein Objekt kann eine unterschiedliche Bedeutung für verschiedene Individuen haben: ein Baum wird ein jeweils unterschiedliches Objekt darstellen für einen Botaniker, einen Holzfäller, einen Dichter und einen Hobby-Gärtner […]”

[An object might have different meanings for various people: a tree will at any one time represent a different object for a botanist, a tree feller, a poet and a hobby gardener…]” (Blumer 1995, p. 31).

(6) Even in the, so far, most advanced form of constructivism, in the socio-cultural logic of distinction of Siegfried J. Schmidt, the dualism between seeing things and talking about things remains: “Wir sehen Tische und reden über Tische als Tische … [We see tables and talk about tables as tables …]” (Schmidt 2002, p. 7).

The conclusion is clear that the dualism of words and objects has been and still is a presupposition of nearly every scientific discipline and philosophical school – ranging from analytical philosophy to psychology, from phenomenology to constructivism. Thinkers questioning this presupposition – such as Silvio Ceccato – quickly became philosophical outsiders.

2. An alternative epistemology: Object and description as a unity

For both realists and constructivists, it is not only clear that the sentence differs from the (represented or constructed) fact the sentence refers to. It is also unquestioned that the text differs from its interpretation(s). For realists, one text causes different interpretations, but there always exists a “master interpretation” of a text – namely that which the author really intended to say. For constructivists, there are as many different interpretations/versions of a text as there are “cognitive systems” reading it, and once again meaning is constructed on the occasion of reading a text.

Is it obligatory to make a distinction between what is said and what is happening? And is it obligatory to make a distinction between the text and its meaning? And what in each case would come first? Realists and constructivists execute their epistemological combats within these basic distinctions: “We can never say something and only therefore it will happen,” says the realist (with the exception of a binding command of course). The realist “knows” things happen in the world, and therefore they can be described – in a right or wrong way. “We always say something, and therefore it happens,” say the radical constructivist and second order cybernetician. Both play their games within these dualisms; the difference between realists and constructivists is the flipped direction of thinking (see Weber 1996). Realism says, as Heinz von Foerster once put it too, that the world comes first, and experience (as a representation of the world) is the effect. Constructivism (and second order cybernetics) says that experience comes first, and the (constructed) world is the effect. Both – realism and constructivism – are mere ways of speaking, says non-dualism.

The central theses of non-dualism (which read extremely contra-intuitively because we all bring along our dualistic world view) can be formulated in two short sentences:

(1) For non-dualistic philosophy as developed by Josef Mitterer (1992), that which is happening and that which is said to be happening constitute a unity.

(2) For non-dualistic philosophy as developed by Josef Mitterer (1992), the distinction between the text and its interpretation is only possible after the interpretation.

Explanation of thesis I

In common sense thought and in nearly all currently dominant philosophical schools, there is a categorical distinction between the description of the object and the object of description: that the word “Africa” differs from the continent below Europe seems to be so clear that hardly anybody would ever question this “fact.” Mitterer argues that this distinction is only possible when we treat our tacit knowledge making up Africa (that what has already been said, that what is already accepted knowledge) as if it is something beyond all descriptions (and therefore also beyond the word “Africa”). The notion of Africa beyond the word “Africa” in dualism (the continent you can fly to, the continent where Tangier is in the North and Cape Town in the South etc.) is the sum of what has already been contained implicitly when we activate Africa in non-dualism. But these activations are nothing other than already existing descriptions, in Mitterer’s wording, descriptions so far. To speak of Africa (in dualism) means to continue the already existing
description “Africa” (in non-dualism). ($\S 15$ in Mitterer 1992, p. 57) Whenever you say, “Africa is one of the five continents of the world,” you continue the description “Africa.” The “fact” that Africa is one of the five continents of the world is not contained in the word “Africa,” it is a following (!) description of the description “Africa,” in any case an extension (and not a verification or falsification). It is a description from now on in relation to the description so far “Africa.”

It sounds more than contra-intuitive when for the first time you are confronted with this direction of thinking, but in Mitterer’s philosophy, the description of the object and the object of description fall together — unless you carry with yourself descriptions of the object that you implicitly (and contradictorily) call the “object of description” beyond these descriptions. For example, you differ between the word “Africa” and the labeled continent you can fly to. Then you carry many implicit (already given/hidden but available) descriptions within yourself that in sum make up your object of description Africa so far. There are many things you don’t know about Africa, to speak dualistically. In dualism, each new, yet unfamiliar (but true) description would go deeper into Africa, would describe Africa more precisely. In non-dualism, each new description continues your pool of descriptions so far, each new description is additional to the already existing descriptions. These descriptions continuing /Africa/ are the descriptions from now on. One can say, “Africa currently has 900 million inhabitants.” This was unknown to you, so you must see if this description is right or wrong. You can’t do this by checking Africa beyond all descriptions; you will look for descriptions so far unknown to you continuing /Africa/. (Unfortunately, in the beginning of the third millennium you will do this by consulting a search engine such as Google and then an online encyclopedia such as Wikipedia.)

A verification of a description in dualism means in non-dualism that the description(s) so far and the new description in question make up a new object of description from now on.

A falsification of a description in dualism means in non-dualism that the description in question fails by a competing/alternative description, which becomes the new description from now on.

If you prove the description “Africa currently has 900 million inhabitants” to be verified, you will accept the new object of description: Africa as a continent that currently has 900 million inhabitants. If you prove the description “Africa currently has 900 million inhabitants” to be falsified, you will find an alternative description of the number of inhabitants of Africa; the description fails by a new one. Thus it is easy (and at the same time very elaborate) to reconstruct Popper’s terminology of “verification” and “falsification” by non-dualism. (This is developed step-by-step in theses 31–50 in Mitterer 1992, pp. 69–85 and demands extremely close reading. The most interesting point is that non-dualistic logic also works with objects that can be observed directly, e.g., with the description “this table has four legs.”)

Realists as well as constructivists might argue, “But where on earth do descriptions come from, if not from the object? They don’t fall from the sky, do they?” Critics of non-dualism might say that you see (= represent or construct) an apple in front of your eyes, and then you say “apple” (or “Apfel” in German, or a specific variety name, or you say “Klawumf” if you practice baby talk). Names are arbitrary and contingent, but the relationship between things and names is socially conditioned, says semiotics. (For non-dualism, this scenario appears to be too simple to remain unquestioned by epistemology.)

Whenever you say, “I see this green fruit here and call it apple,” you already called it “green fruit.” When you called it “green fruit,” you already also called it “it.” Whenever you go further, you end in an infinite regress if you want to prove the thing beyond names, says Mitterer. Can you ever go back to “just seeing” the apple, or playing with the apple, without ever calling or labeling it? No, you can’t, says non-dualism. “Look, I am just eating the…” — fine, dear realist or constructivist, what are you eating?

In non-dualism, the distinction between an interaction with an object and the description of an object (or the description of an interaction with an object) is only possible after the description. But do non-dualists then play with descriptions of apples instead of apples? (See §§25 and 26 in Mitterer 1992, pp. 64 ff) Yes and no, because the description “apple” and the apple form a unity. I have to repeat, they fall together unless you believe your object you call “apple” is categorically different to many already internalized (learned) descriptions that in sum make up an “apple” for you, but then you do not only speak of the description “apple,” but of many more descriptions — on an implicit level.

The logic of non-dualism can be illustrated with the help of the following two examples. You see a table. You see that the table has four legs. You say “This table has four legs.” (Remember, non-dualism says that the two latter sentences form a unity!) You continue your description, “This table already had four legs before I said ‘This table has four legs.’” In non-dualism, this is not a description of the table! The description also cannot be verified or falsified by the table, because the description “This table already had four legs before I said ‘This table has four legs.’” is compatible with the description “table.” It is a (new) description of a table with four legs, of a table which is already described as a table having four legs.

(I suggest re-reading this paragraph again with the idea in mind that the object of description and the description of the object form a unity.)

Please compare the following quote from Mitterer with Schmidt’s quote from above:

“Die Annahme und Voraussetzung eines noch unbeschriebenen Tisches, der gleichwohl vier Beine hat, stellt [...] den unmöglichen, geradezu unbeschreiblichen Versuch dar, zu sagen, daß der Tisch vier Beine hat, bevor jemals gesagt wird, daß der Tisch vier Beine hat.”

(The assumption and presupposition of a not-yet-described table that nevertheless has four legs marks the impossible, almost indescribable attempt to say that the table had four legs before it ever was said that the table has four legs)” (Mitterer 1992, p. 66).

The second example refers to a triangle discussed by Ludwig Wittgenstein when he exemplifies the specific modality of perception he calls “Aspektsehen” (“aspect seeing”). Wittgenstein (1984, p. 427) talks about the aspects of a triangle $\Delta$. (In Wittgenstein’s text, the word “triangle” appears followed by the symbol $\Delta$.) He writes that the triangle can be seen as a mountain, an arrow, or just as a geometric drawing, etc. Wittgenstein presupposes that there is an object $\Delta$ called triangle (to be more precisely: a content of
there – as well as in symbolic interac-
tionist theory as shown above. Mitterer dis-
cusses Wittgenstein's notion of "Aspektsehen" in
order to reveal the explicit dualistic think-
ing also in Wittgenstein's late philosophy (see
Mitterer comes to the following firstly contra-
intuitive conclusion:
"Natürlich ist die Versuchung stark
anzunehmen, daß da ein Ding, etwas
Unge deutetes sei, das gedeutet wird und
(dann) dieser Deutung gemäß gesehen
wird. [...] Wenn wir aber immer nur eine
Deutung einer anderen Deutung gemäß
sehen, dann müssen wir auch bereits sein,
darauf zu verzichten, als Ausgangspunkt
für die Aspekte etwas, vielleicht ein Ding,
anzunehmen, das selbst nicht ein Aspekt
ist, das etwas Ungedeutetes ist.
[Of course the temptation is great to
assume that there is a thing, something
uninterpreted] that waits to be interpreted and
is (then) seen according to this inter-
pretation. [...] But if we always see an
interpretation according to another inter-
pretation, then we must also be ready to
forgo assuming that there is a starting
point for the aspects, for example a thing
that itself is not an aspect, that itself is
something uninterpreted]“ (Mitterer

Explanation of thesis II
If you read a text, you can say afterwards, "I
understood what has been said," or you can
(in the worst case) also come to the conclu-
sion that you didn’t understand anything.
You can start a discussion about your interpreta-
tion of (or failure on) the text with others who
have made their own interpretations. Just try
to imagine where the text beyond all inter-
pretations is when you discuss different inter-
pretations of "the text"! The "naked," bare text,
not harmed by any reader or interpreter, the
"bare semiotic material," waiting to be inter-
preted – where is it? You may point at the text
in the materialistic-physical sense (printed or
online). (Note: If you have not yet read it, you
cannot talk about the text and your inter-
pretation.)

Here the central argument of Mitterer’s
philosophy is that we have to give up the idea
that the text-as-such is categorically different
from all interpretations and particularly prior
to them. On the contrary (!), we fabricate the
so-called text-as-such to differ it from (the)
already existing interpretation(s). It is not that
the interpretations follow the text, but that
the fabrication of a "text" follows the interpreta-
tion(s). Semiotic text science might now think
that non-dualism is starting to go crazy.

Realists or semiotics will argue, "But the
text was written before any interpretation,
wasn’t it?" /The text was written before any
interpretation/ is a sentence for which the idea
of an interpretation is absolutely necessary: it
is an interpretation of the text. Try to postu-
late a plain text beyond all interpretations – it
won’t work.

But once again, where do objects (now
equal to descriptions so far) come from? We
can try to answer this question in the non-
dualistic framework only after objects =
descriptions so far of questionable origin
are already introduced. So you can never answer
this question in the framework of dualistic
metaphysics: as soon as you talk about the
"reason" of the "existence" of an object, the
object is already given, and together with the
object much metaphysical ballast ("reason,
"existence") – there is no way to go behind,
back or beyond. Here, non-dualism in some
way closely relates to Schmidt’s recent post-
constructivist dialectics of supposition and
presupposition (see Schmidt 2007) as well as
to Buddhist silence on the "great mysteries."

Mitterer gives an example: You say, "The apple lies on the table." But
of course the apple did not start to lie on the table when you said the sentence. The apple
usually lay on the table already before you
said, "The apple lies on the table." This is
exactly the next description: "The apple lay
on the table before I said." The apple lies on
the table." The first description is "The apple lies
on the table." The second, following descrip-
tion is "The apple already lay on the table
before I said." The apple lies on the table." The
second description extends the first descrip-
tion that the apple lies on the table.

Whenever you try to assume that there is
an object prior to any description, you are
captured in the trap of an infinite regress: you
have to claim that there is an object without
claiming that there is an object.

"Dieser infinite Regreß wurde bislang
kaum bemerkt, weil das 'sprachver-
schiedene' Objekt beinahe allgemein als
Diskursvoraussetzung anerkannt wird.
[This infinite regress has hardly ever been
noticed because the object ‘different from
language’ is almost generally acknow-
ledged as a presupposition of any dis-
course]“ (Mitterer 1992, p. 95).

So we come to the following conclusions
so far: non-dualism provokes and unsettles
with the assumption that the distinction
between the word (and also the concept, the
notion, or the idea) on the one side and the
thing (the object, the external referent in the
"real" world) on the other side is only possi-
ble when the word is already given. Each
attempt to claim that the world outside is
given and was given before (the introduction
of) language therefore leads to an infinite
regress: we must claim that the object was
given before we ever claim that the object
was given (ibidem). Thus we have to say that
not only radical constructivism, but also
(and mainly!) semiotics turns out to be a
variant of common-sense theorization based
on an assumption that is not consistent upon
serious reflection.

This basic train of thought developed by
Mitterer in his main work, Das Jenseits der
Philosophie (The Beyond of Philosophy), in 100
theses, needs a careful and repeated reading.
Due to the reason that we have all internalized
the dualistic mode of differentiating between
the visible (or touchable...) world and sen-
tences about this world, we tend to deny the
dept that lies (hidden) in Mitterer’s work.
Many scientists still see Mitterer as a kind of
constructivist (although he clearly states that
there is a crucial difference between construc-
tivism and non-dualism) or just as somebody
criticizing dichotomies of any kind.

So the scientific discussion on Mitterer’s
The Beyond of Philosophy so far has failed to
formulate a kind of elaborated critique (of
course, according to non-dualism, I do not
argue that my following “interpretation” of
the “text” is the one and only one – I just
would like to offer new descriptions from now
on). The crucial point of an elaborated cri-
tique on Mitterer’s identification of an infinite
regress in the philosophy of language could be
the following: Mitterer argues that the dis-
tinction between the object and the indica-
tion of the object (in German: “Objektang-
abe”) is only possible after the indication of
the object. In German, “Objektangabe” is one
word written together, it can be translated badly as “object-indication.”

When we state, “The distinction between the object and the indication of the object is only possible after the indication of the object,” this sentence contains at least three further presuppositions:

1. The presupposition of a time arrow. To speak of something happening “after” another thing needs the presupposition of time flowing.

2. The presupposition of a distinction between whatever, in this special case between the object and the indication of the object.

3. (And this is the trickiest point!) The presupposition of a distinction between the “indication” and the “object” in order to speak of the “indication of the object.” This means that when the starting point (the indication of the object) contains the indication and the object, both dualism and non-dualism seem to start with an infinite regress. The infinite regress of non-dualism would start with duality (indeed not constituting a categorical difference, but it remains a duality) claiming to be a unity.

We have to read Mitterer carefully to further investigate into this. He writes:

“Eine Priorität des Objekts gegenüber der Objektangabe kann erst nach der Objektangabe behauptet werden. Eine solche Behauptung ist nichts weiter als eine Beschreibung des Objekts […] [A priority of the object vis-à-vis the indication of the object can only be claimed after the indication of the object. Such a claim is nothing other than a description of the object…]” (Mitterer 1992, p. 98).

For Mitterer, the distinction between the object and the indication of the object (as well as between the object of description and the description of the object) was already given when analysing the claim about the possible priority of the object vis-à-vis the indication of the object. So he analyses the next description: not the distinction itself, but a claim on the priority of the elements of the distinction. Is the object prior to its indication, or is the indication prior to the object? Maybe he did this to hide a problem, to escape from an own infinite regress?

Mitterer says that the object of description and the description of the object form a unity – of the kind that the object of description equals to the descriptions so far. If we transcribe this statement to the relationship between the object and the indication of the object, it would mean nothing other than the paradox that the object and the indication fall together: “The object is the indication so far.” (Maybe this is not a paradox, but the solution, which again demands Buddhist reflection/meditation.) But Mitterer seems to escape from this by opening up a new distinction: that between indication and description.

In his – in my opinion – most disturbing thesis he writes: “Zuerst wird das Objekt angegeben, dann kann es beschrieben werden. [First the object is indicated, then it can be described]” (Mitterer 1992, p. 101).

Did Mitterer replace the categorical distinction between object and description by the categorical distinction between indication and description? This point remains problematic, and I think only Mitterer himself can clarify this – or maybe he wanted to leave his interpreters alone with another fundamental riddle.

Furthermore, just as realism and constructivism can be criticized by non-dualism (and realism and constructivism are seen as variants of dualism by non-dualism as a meta-position), one can criticize dualism and non-dualism from a third meta-meta-position. Please remember the simplifications in Table 1 that illustrate the directions of thinking in major epistemological positions mentioned earlier in this paper.

A meta-position above realism and constructivism argues that the distinction between “world” and “experience” is dualistic – independent from the direction in which you model their relationship. This is what non-dualism criticizes in constructivism. But could we also think of a meta-meta-position above dualism and non-dualism? This meta-meta-position could argue that both dualism and non-dualism need the presupposition of “object” and “indication” (see Figure 1). Remember that non-dualism, too, needs the distinction between “object” and “indication” when it argues that the starting point is the “indication of the object.” In non-dualism, the distinction is not categorical (non-dualism argues that the object is strangely “inscribed” into the indication), but the distinction remains (and with the distinction, the ideas of “time” and “distinction” as such, as mentioned above).

It seems to be the great (historical) merit of non-dualism to have revealed the inconsistent dualism of description and object categorically different from description in philosophy. But non-dualism also lets our brains overheat: we will never be able to give up our desire to “go back” to a “beyond” of all discourses. And we are in constant search of a starting point, a reason, a driving force of/for behind the world (even when we understand the world as the descriptions so far).

Non-dualism drastically shows us that the description of the earth as a ball is not “closer to the truth” than the description of the earth as a disc. Was the earth already a ball when, in former times, it was described as a disc? Which earth do you mean, asks non-dualism. And the answer is, “The earth described as a ball (first description), which was already a ball when it was “interpreted” as a disc (second description).” So the earth-as-disc in non-dualism never could have been an earth-as-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Simplified directions of thinking in realism, constructivism, dualism, and non-dualism.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Realism:</strong> “The world is the cause, experience is the effect.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructivism:</strong> “Experience is the cause, the world is the effect.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dualism:</strong> “The differentiation between the object and the indication of the object is only possible after the object.” (Otherwise you deny the existence of an external world and get caught in a kind of “linguistic solipsism.”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-dualism:</strong> “The differentiation between the object and the indication of the object is only possible after the indication of the object.” (Otherwise you get caught in the infinite regress that you have to claim the existence of an object without ever making this claim.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simplified dualism:</strong> “The object is the cause, the indication of the object is the effect.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simplified non-dualism:</strong> “The indication of the object is the cause, the object is the effect.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONCEPTS**

epistemological

non-dualizing philosophy
3. Practical applications: From the riddle of the “beyond” to “truths” in Web 2.0

If you share Mitterer’s doubt about the categorical distinction between language and reality (that is between descriptions different from objects and objects) and if you are also able to share his alternative model of knowledge, you can easily imagine that non-dualism can be applied everywhere and in every situation – from everyday life to all scientific disciplines, certainly in social sciences and humanities, but also in many disciplines of natural science (for more elaborated discussions of possible applications of non-dualism see Weber (1996, 2005) as well as Fleischer (2005). Some scientists and even artists developed their kinds of non-dualistic theorisation without citing the work of Mitterer or without drawing similar radical consequences (see for example Atmanspacher (2003) for the mind–matter distinction or the writings of Franz-Josef Czernin).

The main practical recommendations Mitterer has formulated are:

- Beware of paradigms which often turn out to be “paradogmas” as Mitterer put it (Mitterer 1992, p. 18). Paradigms can be paradogmas because they often postulate that their truth is ultimate and ubiquitous (see for example realism or marxism). So Mitterer says that he does not want to establish a new paradigm, on the contrary he wants to prevent the emergence of new paradigms, which are often just fashionable philosophies that come and go.
- Beware of truth markers when you speak. Such truth markers are “in fact,” “in reality,” “really,” “actually” etc. Whenever you use such words you want to make sure that your description exactly represents a reality independent from your description. (The non-dualistic mode of speaking, as Mitterer also calls it, is a way of communicating that avoids paradigmatic claims and the usage of truth markers. If you talk with Mitterer, you soon will notice that he seems to be the only person in the world so far who is consequently able to respect these limitations in everyday conversation. For “ordinary speakers,” including the author of this paper, it is impossible to escape the dualistic discourse in everyday communication.)

Mitterer’s ideas are only discussed in some scientific disciplines so far, for example in media theory and economics. Mitterer’s non-dualism is even almost completely ignored in philosophy. This absence is astonishing. A reason might be the lack of time of the scientific community to read texts carefully; another reason might be academic socialisation from the “Matthew effect”: the more prominent a theory, the more it will be cited; the more it is cited, the more prominent it gets. New and alternative theories can quickly lose out in the age of the scientific attention economy.

When Mitterer says that the primordial distinction between language and the world outside is not how we thought about it in the last hundreds (and thousands) of years of philosophy, he opens the door to further considerations: is the apparent “natural” relationship of language and things labeled by language the one and only inconsistent presupposition of thought, or are we able – inspired by the work of Mitterer – to find more presuppositions of that kind (which are so basic that hardly anybody ever questioned them in the history of thought)? Let me mix attempts to answer this question with an outlook on possible further applications of non-dualism:

(1) One big metaphysical presupposition is the “fact” that we can only remember the past, but not the future (Peter Weibel formulated this in an “ars electronica” paper on endophysics in 1992 – thanks for that great sentence!). The future seems to be our last metaphysical secret after the death of god, as Niklas Luhmann once put it (see Luhmann 1989, p. 137). But is this imperative? Non-dualistic philosophy claims to be a philosophy of change (instead of a philosophy of truth), but – as mentioned – cannot satisfingly answer the question of why new descriptions arise at all. Non-dualists of course cannot solve this by just saying that the world outside (different from descriptions) has changed. If the world and the descriptions form a unity, the question of the motivation, the driving force of any change remains mysterious. Why don’t descriptions just stay the same? In nondualism, you cannot indicate one single exogenous cause for change (exogenous in the
sense of beyond all descriptions). The problem of the time arrow (and therefore of the unknown future) remains the same riddle. The evolution of new descriptions is strangely linked to the problem of the past (the descriptions so far) and the future (the yet-not-known descriptions from now on). The reflection of the time arrow and the apparent impossibility to “remember” what will happen tomorrow (has happened?) is an important task for non-dualism and one of its blind spots so far. The question is, “Why is the time arrow and why is change in time a presupposition of our existence?”

(2) Another classical problem of metaphysics is the question of “life after death” or each speculation about something “beyond space and time,” maybe this is even the central question of mankind. How would non-dualism deal with these topics? Which presuppositions could here be inconsistent? Just think of the following contradiction: life after death must be a life beyond known space and time, so it’s no life after death. (In the context of Luhmann’s systems theory, this problem has been brilliantly discussed by the German philosopher Günter Schulte, see Schulte 1993. This controversy should also be put on the agenda for non-dualism continuing the aspects developed in Weber’s paper of 2000).

(3) A third aspect is the process of language acquisition by small children which – in the context of non-dualism – must be rewritten in central parts. When Jean Piaget writes that children under the age of 8 do not understand the differentiation between word and thing (Piaget 1988, p. 63 – “Sie begreifen das Problem gar nicht” [“They do not understand the problem at all!”]), we have to remember that this is our problem, not theirs. The “problem” can be reformulated in non-dualistic terms: adults differentiate between word and thing. For children, the word “beating” can be “strong” because “it hurts” (ibidem – the word, not the activity of beating). This reminds us of the examples given by Mitterer: do we sit on the description of the sofa or on the sofa? Piaget’s example is: does the word “beating” hurt or the activity? The problem only arises when we have already differentiated between the word and the activity. So all we can say is that small children might be rather lucky to live in their non-dualistic stream of consciousness not spoiled by the dichotomy of language and reality.

Mitterer gives an example in The Beyond of Philosophy (also derived from Wittgenstein, but again newly interpreted, see Mitterer 1992, pp. 25ff): we cannot seriously say that the child sees the cardboard box as a house when playing. The child sees a house, and maybe later a box. An observer might say, “The child sees the box as a house.” This description marks an “apriorization” of the box-perception beyond the perceptive world of small children. Mitterer writes that in a first step we must confess: “Das Kind sieht meine Kiste als sein Haus.” [The child sees my box as his/her house]” (Mitterer 1992, p. 26).

(4) A fourth aspect is dialogue with handicapped people: how would non-dualism analyze deaf-mute people who cannot speak (with oral languages) and hear, but use sign language, see and smell? In which sensual worlds do blind people live? What can sighted people say about blindness within the framework of a unity of descriptions and objects? This sounds like a difficult and sensitive topic, but the answer so far is rather simple: if one sense is lacking, people with all the senses cannot say anything about this state (in a dualistic sense), and they are also unable to continue this state (in a non-dualistic sense) because people with all the senses cannot go back beyond “ languaging” (as Humberto R. Maturana put it) in the oral way or beyond hearing. It must become a topic of non-dualistic research as to why communication and co-orientation nevertheless work (with sign language and/or technical instruments).

(5) And finally, are there (further) limits to non-dualism, seen in practical aspects? Does non-dualism encourage contingency, chaos and the annihilation of well-established dualistic values in society (such as fact and fiction, original and plagiarism, right and wrong, good and evil, ethical and unethical, etc.)? Is non-dualism encouraging a world in which reality and truth become needless or at least highly contingent categories – as in the world of amateurism beyond truth and rumor in the current Web 2.0? Could non-dualism even serve as a new “basis theory” for the flickering and unstable realities of Google search, Wikipedia consultation and Web 2.0 publication practice? In his book The Cult of the Amateur Andrew Keen makes the criticism that Web 2.0 moves towards a world beyond truth and lie (Keen 2007). Postmodernist theories, relativism and also constructivism seem to force this problematic development. It is a task for the future to elaborate this point in non-dualistic philosophy. Mitterer’s hope that with non-dualism our discourses won’t get more contingent than they already are in the framework of the current dualistic paradigm is only a cold comfort. Meanwhile the world (in the Web) is changing dramatically. And here is the question one last time: why is there change?

4. Conclusions

This paper identified two core topics (as open questions) for further research in the context of non-dualism:

(1) The question of a priority of the indication of the object compared to the object of indication (and the open question of if the indication of the object already “contains” the object – which would at least not lead to the infinite regress of dualism, but nevertheless to a strange “mystical” situation oscillating between unity and duality whenever one tries to explore the term “indication of the object”).

(2) The question of the dynamics, of the emergence of new descriptions. Is non-dualism sufficiently able to explain change?

For both points, an anonymous reviewer of this paper suggested cursory solutions:

(1) The question between dualism and non-dualism is: Is the object prior to its indication or is the indication prior to the object? The reviewer suggested: “There is no priority (in respect of time and in respect of cognitive primacy) we can talk about. The achievement we get in form of non-disputable descriptions so far of the objects is the result of complicated and complex procedures combining various elements, including […] physical, biological, conceptual, social, psychological, historical etc. None of these elements can clearly be separated from others.” But as soon as the reviewer claims that there is no priority, he is arguing neither dualistic nor non-dualistic.

(2) Another question I discussed here was the question of (the cause of) change. The reviewer stated: “[The d]riving force of any change will not remain mysterious […] if we treat the constitution of descriptions as sophisticated processes of interactions between the elements I have mentioned [the reviewer refers to the elements cited above –
I would interpret unity in this broader understood sense as a combination of these factors.” In my opinion, this answer is not satisfying. To stimulate a further fruitful debate, let me suggest that these statements do not mark solutions, but just reformulations of the two problems identified. To speak along with Josef Mitterer, one of the major tasks from now on should not be the attempt to find a way out of these problems, but to see how we got into them. Both the question of the “beginning” of any description/indication and the question of evolving descriptions have a common name: time.

Acknowledgments

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Note

1. In the specific notation of Mitterer, he puts already given descriptions so far in execution quotes (/…/) instead of citing marks (“…”). Descriptions from now on are put in normal quotation marks (“…”).

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Stefan Weber is a media scientist from Salzburg, Austria, with more than 50 publications, including several books, on media theory and philosophy. His postdoctoral lecture qualification is from the University of Vienna, with a habilitation on non-dualism and media theory in 2005. A list of his publications is online at http://www.kfj.at/publikationsliste-stefanweber.htm
Action and Discourse

Some Thoughts Concerning a Non-dualizing Conception of Experience

Franz Ofner ◊ University of Klagenfurt <franz.ofner@uni-klu.ac.at>

Introduction:
How do new content in descriptions emerge?

Philosophical schools of thought that are based on dichotomy distinctions – distinctions such as language and world or description and object – are called “dualizing ways of speaking” by Josef Mitterer (1992, p. 49). He marks such distinctions as dogmas because they are simply presupposed without discussing the problems that arise from doing so. Mitterer characterizes his own thinking as a “non-dualizing way of speaking” (1992, p. 55); he does not presuppose a world categorically different from language. His justification for this decision is found in the “indirect” critique to which he exposes the dogma of dichotomy distinctions and in the making transparent of the procedure for establishing a dichotomy between description and object.

Mitterer shows that when there is disagreement between participants in a discourse it is impossible to reach a language-different object without getting caught up in infinite regresses. Such regressions appear when we concede that there is an object beyond the description and try to distinguish it from the description (Mitterer 1992, p. 90) as well as when we try to show that the language-different object already existed before it was indicated (p. 95). This makes it impossible to reach the other side of the dichotomy unless we ignore the infinite regresses and presuppose, ex-post, our own description as the language-different object (p. 104). This way allows us to declare our own description to be the true one.

Abstention from presupposing a world categorically different from language has the consequence that the object of a description has itself to be understood as a description. Mitterer calls it “description so far” (Mitterer 1992, p. 60), whereas a description is the continuation of a “description so far” and, therefore, becomes the “description from now on.” Mitterer’s critique of the dualizing way of speaking is convincing. However, his non-dualizing way of speaking leaves us in the dark about the origin of the new or additional contents of descriptions that continue the “description so far.”

The above problem of new contents becomes obvious when Mitterer discusses the example of two persons who decide to examine their contradictory descriptions of a table as round and square (1992, pp. 80–82). According to the non-dualistic opinion, the examination cannot be conducted on the object because the object is “neutralistic” in the sense that it allows all possible continuations, even contradictory ones. One could put it as follows: The “object so far” does not contain any conditions that restrict the freedom of further descriptions. Therefore, it is somewhat surprising when Mitterer tells us: “The examination of the table is conducted by inquiring into what shape it has – if it is shaped round or square or otherwise” (1992, p. 81; my translation). As instances of inquiring procedures he lists “’exact’ looking at it, feeling the edge of the table with one’s hands, measuring the diagonals”; he points out that “descriptions are not taken from nowhere,” but are rather “based on inquiries” (1992, pp. 81 and 82; my translation).

There arise some questions in this connection. What kind of activity is it to inquire into something? What status does action have in the non-dualizing way of speaking? What does it mean when we inquire into what shape the table has?

A possible answer could be that inquiring is an activity different from describing, that is, that we, first, run our hand over the edge of the table, feel it as round or square and, then, describe it as round or square. This means that experiences as the results of acts are transformed into contents of descriptions. Is this answer compatible with the non-dualizing way of speaking? It seems that this is a dualistic concept because inquiries and their results are conceived of as something which is beyond descriptions and is only described subsequently.

A second answer could be that feeling with hands is itself a specific kind of describing. This answer is definitely compatible with the non-dualizing way of speaking and means that we are continuing the “description so far,” /the table/, in a specific way of describing, that is, with regard to a certain characteristic of the table.
Conceiving of actions as descriptions implies that an empirical theory of experience is impossible on a non-dualistic basis because conceiving of actions as descriptions means that new descriptions are created from language. In this case we do not get an empirical theory of experience but a hermeneutical one or something similar. A non-dualistic empirical theory of experience requires acts that are different from descriptions, but not categorically different from them. A further demand is that experiences made within action can be “transformed” into descriptions. However, such a transformation must not consist in describing actions and their experiences; for in this case descriptions would refer to actions different from descriptions and we would fall back into dualism. But how can this feat be accomplished?

The central difficulty of treating the connection between description and action in a non-dualizing way is caused by the concept of description. As indirect critique, Mitterer’s non-dualizing way of speaking necessarily takes up the concept of description, that is, the one side of the dichotomy, and deprives it of its reference to objects beyond descriptions. The consequence is that, within the non-dualizing way of speaking, descriptions lose their function of describing objects and become continuations of descriptions already made, “descriptions so far.” The non-dualistic concept of description has a critical purpose towards the dualizing way of speaking and its truth claim, but with their loss of reference, descriptions lose any content and meaning. If we take references from descriptions what do we mean when we say “table” or “round”?

The non-dualizing way of speaking has the option of sticking to its negative standpoint, that is, to observe scientific research and to give researchers a rap on their knuckles when they neglect to emphasize that their research results do not tell the truth but only continue a “description so far.” In this case, the non-dualizing way of speaking does without any theory of empirical research of its own. A further, constructive option is to develop a non-dualistic conception of experience and acquiring new knowledge, that is, a conception that allows us to connect describing and acting in a non-dualizing way. To do this, however, the concept of description, which is burdened with the original sin of the dualizing way of speaking, has to be abandoned, and we have to proceed to a different understanding of language.

**On the difference between action and discourse**

When we say that inquiries are the basis of description we evidently believe that we gain experience by action, and that experience somehow enters into description. In this connection the question arises of how description and action differ and what status experiences have within the two activities of describing and practical action.

Language is the communicative or public side of discourses. Discourses have, however, an internal or private side, too; it consists in the experiences that are merged with descriptions (such as imagery, emotions, and impulses to act) and is accessible to the member of discourse only. As an example let us consider that a friend of mine tells me about his apartment, where we are not currently present and in which I have never been; when he tells me that there is a round table in the corner of the living room then I have certain mental images parallel to his telling. Images are not the objects of descriptions but their contents. We do not describe mental images, but they appear simultaneously with the descriptions. Images may be broadened or specified, though not by describing them but through descriptions with broader or more specific contents.

In the same way, practical actions are merged with experiences such as perceptions, emotions, or impulses. Perceptions made in the course of actions are not the objects of these actions; they appear simultaneously with actions or within actions.

As members of discourses and as actors we become aware of a significant difference between description and practical action as well as between the experiences that are connected with the respective activities. This difference becomes particularly apparent when description and actions take place simultaneously.

To make clearer what I mean by that difference I come back to Mitterer’s example of examining the descriptions of a certain table as round or square by inquiring what shape the table has. When someone tells me “this table is round” and I simultaneously touch the table feeling its edge with my hands, there is a difference to me between the experience I have on the basis of the linguistic description and the contact experience of my hands. Usually, mental images as experiences based on descriptions and perceptions as experiences based on actions differ in their intensities. However, the difference of intensity is not the one I am drawing upon, for on the one hand we can intensify our images and reach a great vividness and on the other hand perceptions can be slight and vague. The difference I mean is that between the sources of experience, i.e., between the kinds of activities that parallel the respective experiences. However intensive the image merged with the description of the table as round may be, I can distinguish it from the simultaneous experience I have in feeling the table with hands; and I can switch my attention from the one experience to the other. The same is the case when it is not another person but myself who is making the description, that is, when I am commenting on my own action. The difference in the sources of experience becomes particularly apparent when there is a difference with regard to the content of experience, that is, when what I perceive on the basis of my action differs from what I imagine on the basis of someone’s description.

The problem we are confronted with is whether we can find a conception that allows us to maintain the difference between practical action and description but not to conceive of it as categorical one. In what follows, I want to discuss George Herbert Mead’s theory of action and communication and ask if it can be helpful for elaborating a non-dualistic understanding of both language and practical action and of the different experiences, which merges in description and practical action. Mead’s answer may be given in a condensed form as follows: He does not understand linguistic utterances as descriptions (speaking in
Some remarks on Mead’s philosophical approach

I do not claim that the conception of Mead’s philosophy and social psychology is non-dualistic in its totality, but I think that his theory contains some important aspects regarding a non-dualistic connection of action, communication, and experience. It is these aspects I want to take up in treating the problem at hand.

Mead belonged to the circle of pragmatists around John Dewey and maintained a strongly naturalistic standpoint. The nucleus of this standpoint is that humans as parts of nature interact with nature and that experience is nothing other than a phase of that interaction process (cf. Mead 1934, pp. 347–353), but he made no endeavor to develop his theory on this basis.

The opinion Mead holds on the scientific research process is similarly undecided between dualism and non-dualism. On the one hand he thinks that it does not make sense to speak of a world independent from our experience. As long as our action works and is not inhibited, that is in the situation of immediate experience, the world and its objects are simply there and there is no distinction between external and internal; in situations, however, where our action fails or is inhibited because of contrary impulses, there arises, in our perception, a problematic area that we separate from the external world and ascribe to our subjective experience (Mead 1938, pp. 31, 33 and 41). The hypotheses scientists construct concerning the problematic area can only be tested in the world that is simply there, that is, in the world of immediate experience. Therefore Mead writes: “Thus we can never retreat behind immediate experience to analyzed elements that constitute the ultimate reality of all immediate experience, for whatever breath of reality these elements possess has been breathed into them by some unanalyzed experience” (p. 32). On the other hand, Mead takes the standpoint of an external observer when he writes that individuals and their environment are in the relationship of interaction and mutual determination and that the experiences of individuals are elements of that relationship (Mead 1934, pp. 349–350 and Mead 1938, p. 361). This is evidently a dualistic point of view.

A remark on the relation between immediate and reflexive experience may be helpful to further the understanding of the non-dualistic character of Mead’s communication theory. Immediate experience is characterized by impulsive conduct, where stimulation and reaction are a unity and there is no separation of different elements of experience (Mead 1934, p. 348). It is not until problems arise in conduct that the situation falls into different parts; there starts a process of analyzing and distinguishing different elements and of relating the different elements to each other. Thus, differentiation is a product of reflexive experience. Dewey and Mead repeatedly warn about the “psychological or historical fallacy” of introjecting, ex-post, elements that are the results of analysis as independent unities into immediate experience (Dewey 1896, pp. 376–377; Mead 1903, p. 102).

Mead’s understanding of language

In what follows I try to summarize Mead’s conception of language and communication included in the book Mind, Self, and Society (1934, especially pp. 42–134), which is based on student notes on his courses on social psychology. I want to inquire into two questions. The first question is in what way Mead’s conception of language and communication differs from the conception of description that is based on the idea of reference. The second question is whether his understanding of language opens a non-dualistic access to action and experience. I shall not repeat Mead’s phylogenetic and ontogenetic conception of the development of communication but restrict my presentation to the position language has within his theory of reflexive experience.

The crucial point of Mead’s language theory is communication rather than reference to objects; and communication is rather coordination of actions than the transmission of data or characteristics of objects. Mead’s considerations of language take gestures as the starting point. Gestures are the beginning phases of social actions; a gesture stimulates other persons to carry out a certain action. Mead characterizes this situation by different terms: gestures initiate actions, they arouse impulses to act, they elicit the readiness to act, or they stimulate taking certain attitudes. The
stimulation aspect of gestures makes up their communicative character. To Mead, linguistic symbols are also gestures, vocal gestures. Their distinctive feature consists in that they can be perceived by the person who makes them. Therefore, through speech, an individual stimulates themselves, and not only other persons, to take certain attitudes. This self-stimulation sets up the reflective nature of language.

Whoever clenches their fist at someone threatens to attack them and stimulates them to leave or to give up what they are doing. A vocal threat has the same function and, thus, is a gesture, too – a vocal gesture. Of course, the communicative aspect of gesture is not restricted to threats, though gestures always have the character of stimulation to do something specific. For instance, talking about one’s experiences had on holiday involves the stimulation of the other person to participate by activating similar experiences in themselves.

According to Mead, objects are the stimulations we respond to and we experience in the context of our actions. The specific responses to objects are their meanings. Thus, the meaning of a table consists in the socially shared use of certain things. The different sensory experiences had in actions are the perceptual (visual, acoustic, olfactory, flavorful, tactile) characteristics of objects. Thus, the use of the word “table” is a gesture that initiates in us a certain set of actions and experiences connected with those actions.

As the initial phases of social actions, gestures can fulfill their communicative function of stimulation to actions. However, communication means that the actions initiated by gestures are not carried out. The part of action that is not carried out is that which is called “mental image” or “idea”. Images or ideas come from past situations, from experiences had in past actions; the past experiences activated by a gesture are the meaning of the gesture. Thus, we can say that communication is potential action; potential actions consist in the experiences elicited by the gestures that are the initial phases of the originally complete action. It is evident that the success of a communicative act depends on participants sharing common experiences – or in other words, participants can communicate insofar as the gestures they use activate the same or similar experiences.

**Action as the basis of “description”**

If we want to maintain the term “description” within Mead’s language theory we need to say that descriptions are gestures that elicit certain impulses to act as well as certain experiences connected with that act. How does this theory allow us to connect research activities and descriptions in a non-dualizing way? How does it enable us to make inquiring activities the basis of descriptions?

The formulation of the inquiring procedure (e.g., “my hand is running along the edge of the table to feel its shape”) is, according to Mead’s language theory, a gesture initiating a special set of actions and drawing attention to a certain spectrum of sensory characteristics. In addition to that, because of its stimulation character, the gesture elicits past actions that pursued a similar goal (to find out the shape of an object by feeling with hands) and arouses, as memory images, the attached past experiences. Past experiences allow us to characterize the current perceptions (that we have, for example, when touching the edge of a table); that characterization can be provided by selecting those past actions and experiences that are similar to the current perception. That linguistic gesture which belongs to the kind of past actions selected can be used to specify the current perception, e.g., that kind which led to the experience “round.” Thus, according to the gesture theory of speech, the “description” of the table as “round” is the stimulation: “Initiate those actions that have led to the experience ‘round’!”

In this way, I think, the gesture theory of speech allows us to conceptualize actions and the experiences attached to them as the basis of what Mitterer calls descriptions or the continuation of a “description so far.” Linguistic gestures make it possible to identify current experiences with the help of past experiences or – to put it this way – let us become conscious of them, not, though, on the basis of an immaterial mind, but rather by initiating past actions and experiences. Gestures provide continuity between current and past experiences; past experiences enter into current experiences. And gestures have a communicative function insofar as they stimulate similar experiences in other persons. It is not possible to convey current experiences directly to others; we need to make the detour via common experiences in past. In tasting wine it would not be helpful to say “This wine tastes of or like itself”; therefore we normally refer to a familiar taste shared by the participants, e.g., the taste of cherries or blackcurrants; however, the wine already tasted can serve as the “reference” to identify the taste of a new wine; but only on condition that all participants have tasted the “reference” wine and reached agreement on its taste.

Past experiences and current experiences do not differ from each other in a dichotomous way. For, as experiences, they are made of the same “stuff” and are in a temporal relationship to each other, in accordance with Mitterer’s “description so far” and “description from now on.” According to Mead, a large part of our everyday practice consists of habitual actions, that is, actions based on schemata that were formed by past experiences and are applied to current situations. It is superfluous to say that there is no dichotomy difference between habitual actions and current actions.

Of special importance for gaining new experiences are situations where habitual actions are inhibited as shown in the following (cf. Mead 1938, chapter 2, pp. 22–44, and chapter 3, pp. 45–62). Such situations occur in everyday life; they characterize, however, the scientific research process in particular. Scientists are absolutely out to seek inhibitions of actions in order to resolve them. In Mead we can find three kinds of such inhibitions. Perceptual errors occur when an action already initiated or started turns out to be unsuitable at a certain point of its carrying out. For example, we see a human figure from some distance and decide to go to him to ask him the way, but then when we have come somewhat closer we realize that it is a tree. A different kind of inhibition appears when conflicting tendencies arise. Mead presents as an instance the “case of having doubt as to the identity of a person just met” so that we are not sure whether “to greet him as an acquaintance or to treat him as a simple passer-by” (Mead 1900, p. 3). A third possibility of inhibition is unsuccessful action. As an example of this kind of inhibition Mead offers the research into the causes of yellow fever; before the discovery of the parasite that is passed on to humans by mosquitoes, yellow fever was supposed to be an infection carried directly from the sick to the well; but quarantine turned out to be without effect, which stimulated the research into the genesis and...
the course of the disease. Finally, we can also consider contradictory "descriptions," as mentioned by Josef Mitterer, as a further form of inhibition. Different opinions in companies, political parties, governments, administrations etc can inhibit decision making.

According to Mead, language plays a central role in resolving action inhibitions. Our acting is not put together from separate acts closed off and independent from each other, but is embedded in a complex weave of connections. Mead presents a simple example: the impulse to seat oneself in a chair seen from a certain distance is inhibited for a moment in order to get close to it; and the sitting in the chair may be related to the intention to hold a conversation with somebody etc. Since speaking potentially is acting, its linguistic symbols, as gestures, allow us to carry out, in our imagination, a number of operations that serve to solve problems:

- With the help of gestures we can reconstruct the course of our action in imagination and determine that sequence of the complex action where the inhibition has arisen; analyzing action is breaking it down, identifying the problem and closing it off from the unproblematic action sequences. Breaking down actions does not introduce a new kind of dichotomy, the dichotomy between analyzer and what is being analyzed, because the analyzer does not analyze objects but only his/her own experiences.
- By analyzing and breaking down the complex action with the help of gestures, the opportunity is offered to make new perceptions and combine them with images of past situations and create alternative possibilities to act; this is the phase of forming hypotheses.
- Finally, hypotheses are tested by carrying out the action plans of which hypotheses consist. The problem is resolved when the inhibition has disappeared and the action can be continued.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to show that George Herbert Mead’s gesture theory of language includes the potential to develop an experience theory or, more specifically, a theory of empirical science, in a non-dualizing way. Of course, the argumentation has to be elaborated on in more detail, especially with regard to two points: the relation of immediate and reflective experience, and the status of objects within this experience theory.

Mead’s communication theory consists not in the difference between speech and action being a dichotomous one, but in their being cast in the same mould. This is the non-dualistic nucleus of his language theory. Speech is based on gestures and gestures are initiated, though not completed, acts — in Mead’s word “truncated acts” (1912, p. 402); past experience of acts is substituted for the completion. In this way speech is bound to action and, as a counter to that, action becomes reflective through speech; the consequence is that speech becomes endowed with a quasi-materialistic touch compared with a conception that conceives of language as something absolute and based on its own self.

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All books and journal articles of John Dewey and George Herbert Mead were retrieved from http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/ on 28 December 2003.


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The Construction of Realism

Volker Gadenne ◇ Johannes Kepler Universität, Linz (Austria) <volker.gadenne@ku.at>

1. Introduction

Constructivism has been developed to account for certain results in biology, cognitive science, and social science, and to overcome traditional epistemology, especially realism. But what is realism? There are now thirty or more “realisms” with specifications such as “ontological,” “scientific,” “pragmatic,” “structural,” or “direct.” Some of them involve assumptions rather similar to those of constructivists. Yet they are called “realism,” probably because those who hold these views want to emphasize that they aren’t idealists and believe in something that exists independently of humans and their minds.

The latter assumption seems to be incompatible with the idea of a “constructed world.” And this is why many philosophers still have great difficulty accepting constructivism as something anybody could seriously believe. Searle (1999, p. 18), for example, was much amused when he talked to an ethnomethodologist who claimed that the moon could be “created” by talking. Wolterstorff (1987, p. 233) wondered whether people like Good-"created" by talking. Wolterstorff (1987, p. 233) wondered whether people like Goode-"created" by talking. Wolterstorff (1987, p. 233) wondered whether people like Good

2. What is construction and what is constructed?

Let us first analyze the idea of construction in order to find out why it is deemed absurd by many realists. Everybody knows what it means to construct a bridge or a road. We can also construct sentences by combining words, and theories by joining propositions. Constructivists generalize this idea so that all human cognition becomes a “constructive” process. In addition, the concept of construction is used to express the philosophical assumption that the world we can know is our construction (Glaserfeld 1997). But let us discuss this assumption later and first concentrate on the process of cognition.

When we open our eyes, we get the impression of being in immediate contact with a world of “outside” objects of various shapes and colors. However, philosophical reflection and empirical research suggest that things cannot be as simple: if we have cognitive access to the world at all, it is at least not as direct as it seems. Mental states such as perceptions and thoughts probably depend on brain states. And brain states are not in direct contact with physical objects. When external objects cause central brain states, a lot of physical and physiological events happen in between. Furthermore, the electrochemical processes in sense organs and the central brain processes caused by them are rather dissimilar to the “external” objects. From a psychological viewpoint, cognition also appears to be a rather complex process. It has been demonstrated in psychological experiments that previous knowledge, expectations, and values influence what we perceive and remember. Of course beliefs, theories, and conceptual models, which depend on perceptual results, are also constructions. And since people do not normally form beliefs in isolation but in comparison with other people, some philosophers and social scientists speak of “social construction” (Gergen 1999). The view presented so far can be summarized by the following thesis C1:

...
C1: Cognition is a constructive process.

Note that C1 is not in itself an antirealistic assumption. Most scientists accept C1. And I think that realists should accept it too. C1 does not logically exclude the possibility that our cognitive states represent facts from an independent world. However, some people consider C1 as a good reason for accepting the following antirealistic thesis:

C2: The world we can know is a construction.

We cannot have knowledge about an independent reality, a world that exists and is structured independently of minds.

Constructivists who conceive of their position as an epistemological one hold C2. They usually do not present C1 and C2 as different assumptions. For our analysis, however, it is important to distinguish C1, which is based on empirical results of various sciences, from C2, which is a philosophical (not an empirical) hypothesis. I want to stress that many human and social scientists who consider themselves as constructivists are only interested in C1 (see, e.g., Mandler 1985).

But is C1 a sufficient reason for C2? Obviously, C1 does not logically imply C2. Though the causal chain connecting cognitive states with their physical objects may be rather long and complex, this does in no way exclude that these cognitive states present their objects exactly as they are. I want to stress this point because some people seem to think that the constructive character of cognition necessarily leads to an antirealistic view. This would be a false conclusion. Still, the question is whether our cognitive states do in fact represent real things as they are, and whether we can know this.

3. Is there an independent world?

Epistemological realism consists of two assumptions:

R1: There is an independent reality, that is, a world whose existence and structure is independent of minds.

R2: We can have knowledge about that independent reality.

The main reason in support of R1 is the fundamental experience that the world sometimes resists our attempts to describe and form it. Some of our attempts are successful while others are not. We can repeatedly experience the fact that we can pass an open door while is not possible to go straight through the wall. I can imagine things and change them in my mind. By contrast, if I look at this table in front of me I cannot, by mental effort alone, make it bigger or smaller. This experience of “resistance” suggests accepting the existence of something independent of our minds. There is something beyond consciousness, whatever it may be, that affects our cognitive efforts and actions by setting constraints. Kant therefore rejected Berkeley’s idealism and accepted that there must be, in addition to phenomena, a world of things-in-themselves.

Constructivists do not generally object to R1. However, they reject R1 if the “independent world” is taken to be a ready-made world, i.e., a world in which it is fixed which things exist and which facts obtain. According to constructivism, how the world is divided into separate objects, properties, and facts depends on our concepts. Do realists believe in a ready-made world? R1 is not attached to any special ontological categories or assumptions. Some realists are nominalists, others believe in universals (e.g. Armstrong 1989); some are materialists, some hold a dualist view. Yet realism requires that the independent world is composed or structured in some way. The aspects of this structure may be unknown to us, yet the world is assumed to have its structure independently of minds, concepts, theories, or values.

Constructivists usually object that this assumption goes too far. Consider, however, the following question: Provided we have accepted that something exists that is mind-independent, how shall we conceive of this “something”? Is it sufficient to conceive of it as a structureless being? Or would it be more convincing to take it as something that is composed or structured a certain way? In my mind, the first assumption is insufficient. A world conceived of as completely structureless or homogeneous could not be the reason for our experiencing a manifoldness of things and events, and could not explain our experience of constraints. We would then have to conclude that the manifoldness of things is completely created by the subject, as assumed by idealism. In addition, we would have to postulate a mysterious connection between spiritual subjects, in order to explain the similarities in their perceptions. In short, the idea of a structureless world leads back to idealism. Any reasonable view of the world seems to require that “things are some way,” independently of minds. Again, this is not to say that we can know the real properties of things. Whenever I turn to the apple on this table, I see green and when I turn to the book on the left side I see red. Perhaps the properties green and red do not exist beyond my mind. Yet things must be somehow if the similarities and differences in our perceptions have any real sources at all (Gadenne 2001).

There is the theory that objects do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. Concepts carve up the world into objects such as trees, apples, and stars. The world as we conceive of it depends on culture and language. Sapir and Whorf presented a lot of linguistic facts to support this view (Whorf 1984). Though the influence of language on thinking has been widely investigated, scientists still differ about how the empirical results should be interpreted (Anderson 2001). But let us assume that there were considerable differences between cultures concerning the way...

the world is divided into objects, and into categories such as individual things, properties, and facts. Would this cast doubt on the realist assumption R1? I think the opposite is true: if there is a culture-dependent selective function of language, this can best be explained with the help of R1! For in order to develop concepts and apply them to things, these things must already have some properties, similarities, and differences that we are able to grasp. For example, it may depend on human interests that we distinguish meadows from forests. We could have developed totally different concepts that do not allow for that distinction. But we could not even learn and apply the concepts “meadow” and “forest,” if the world were a structureless “something” without any observable features. Language cannot create such features, it can only influence which features we attend to and select in our perception and thinking.

4. It is possible to describe an independent world?

In his books Das Jenseits der Philosophie and Die Flucht aus der Beliebigkeit Josef Mitterer puts forward an argument against the realist assumption that we can refer, with the help of descriptions, to things as they really are. However, Mitterer not only criticizes realism but also constructivism and any “dualistic philosophy.” By the latter he means a way of thinking and talking that presupposes certain dichotomic distinctions, e.g., between language and world, or subject and object. He argues for a non-dualizing manner of thinking and speaking. One of Mitterer’s major concerns is to uncover and expose the underlying assumptions of dualistic thinking, including realism. Before exposing his criticism, he gives an intelligible introduction to realism, rich in subtle distinctions. He characterizes the central assumptions and arguments in great detail. I fully agree with this reconstruction and would like to recommend that every realist should read it in order to learn some new aspects of this view. I now want to present and discuss one of his objections, and deal with non-dualism in general in section 9.

The question at issue is whether we are able to test a hypothesis about an object in such a way that whether our hypothesis is confirmed or refuted depends on the object. For example, someone says, “This table consists of plastic” (H1), and someone else objects, “This table consists of wood” (H2). Mitterer (2001, p. 96) now goes on to assume that the first person passes her hand over the tabletop with the result that she gets a splinter in her hand. She now changes her mind, gives up H1 and accepts H2.

Interestingly, however, Mitterer does not think this change of mind was determined by the properties of the real table. Here is the central point of his argument:

“...in order to falsify the first hypothesis in the dualistic sense we have to refer to that part of reality the falsification of the first hypothesis is said to be due to. And this reference is only possible with the help of the second hypothesis which is now presupposed as true [...] It is not a table existing beyond discourse that decides about truth and falsity: one decides about the truth or falsity of the first description on the basis of the second description which is thereby presupposed as true” (p. 97).

Mitterer concludes that the distinction between an object and its description, which characterizes dualistic philosophy, necessarily fails. But isn’t a table different from its description? For example, the table may consist of wood while the description does not. Here is Mitterer’s comment:

“I can distinguish the table from the description of the table by describing it (again) and describing the description of the table. However, the object of this (these) description(s) is not the table but the table and the description of the table. We are again in a situation in which we cannot distinguish the object of the description from the description of the object” (p. 98).

Mitterer thinks that the person in his example decides about the falsification of H1 on the basis of H2, which is, for that purpose, presupposed as true. However, his example rather suggests another interpretation: the person who gives up H1 does not say something like, “H1 is false because H2 is true.” She rather argues as follows: “I just made an observation (getting a splinter) that contradicts H1 but is in accordance with H2.” That is, H1 is rejected because of an experience and not just because of a rival hypothesis that is presupposed without any empirical evidence. The person accepts H2 after having made her observation contradicting H1 and confirming H2.

Moreover, one needs neither H1 nor H2 to refer to the table in our example. People can refer to objects by pointing to them. And our perceptions are directed to objects before we learn to describe them.

I do not understand why Mitterer thinks we cannot distinguish descriptions from objects. First, we can refer to objects without using descriptions at all. Second, using a description is not the same, and does not imply, talking about a description. Let D1 be a description of a table. Assume we talk about D1, on the one hand, and the table, on the other hand, taking them as different things. We therefore use two further descriptions D3 and D4, where D3 has as its object, and D4 refers to the table. Note that we here use D3 to refer to a description, and D4 to refer to the table (not to a description).

But Mitterer somehow thinks that we are locked in descriptions: any attempt of going beyond our system of descriptions yields further descriptions. Similarly, philosophers have claimed that there is no way out of the cage of our minds, of language, or of our brain processes. Mitterer is not an idealist, and constructivists are not idealists either. Yet it seems to me that they were influenced by Berkeley’s famous argument (see his “Principles of human knowledge,” §23). This argument runs as follows: in order to conceive or think of an object, we have to have it in mind. However, what we have in mind are only ideas; outside objects are, by definition, not in our minds. Therefore, we cannot even think of outside objects. We cannot think of something unthought-of.

Though this argument is invalid, it greatly influenced Kant and generations of philosophers. The decisive point is that the expression “having something in mind” can mean two different things. It can mean, first, that a certain sensation or idea is part of a person’s mind. In this case, what we have in mind is, by definition, some mental state or event. But “having something in mind” also means that a perception or thought is directed toward an object x. And in this case x can either be a mental state or an outside object. While an idea is never itself an outside object, it may be directed toward an outside object. And in the
latter sense, we can have an outside object “in mind” though it is not part of the mind in the same way that an idea is. If these two things are confused, one may erroneously conclude that it is logically impossible even to think of, or refer to, mind-independent objects (for a more detailed analysis see Musgrave 1999, pp. 177–184).

Of course this does not prove that we can in fact think of mind-independent objects. It only proves that the view that we cannot think of things outside our minds is not an analytical truth. The opposite view, held by realists, is not an analytical truth either. The question of whether we can describe and have knowledge about an independent world cannot be answered a priori.

5. Can we have knowledge about an independent world?

R2 states that we can know real objects and facts. This is the claim mainly criticized by constructivism. And it is also a claim that has given rise to various misunderstandings. What does it mean to “know” something? According to the traditional view of knowledge, it means to have justified true belief. And justification was traditionally understood as something that gives a belief certainty (Albert 1968). Having knowledge about some real facts then amounts to knowing these facts with certainty. Now certainty about external objects and facts seems to presuppose that we have immediate cognitive access to the real things. If cognitive states are somehow mediated or constructed, there is always room for skeptical doubt. Only if our minds were in unmediated contact with reality, could we be sure that our cognitive states grasp reality as it is. Putnam called this “God’s-eye view” and many critics of realism believe that this is what realists have in mind when they claim to know how real things are. Again and again antirealists have pointed out that we cannot have knowledge in this sense, not even in science: scientific theories may be empirically most successful, yet reality might be quite different from what these theories state.

To all this realists have to agree. And they usually do. Of course knowledge is constructed in some sense, and mediated by language. And it can never reach certainty. Neither experience nor reasoning can give a guarantee that a statement is true. Fallibilism is now accepted by nearly all philosophers and scientists. It follows from this that humans cannot have knowledge at all, if knowledge implies certainty. (By the way, this holds also for beliefs about the world as experienced by us, for we can never be sure whether we remember our experiences correctly, and what experiences we will have in the next moment.) But we can have knowledge if justification is understood as something that need not guarantee truth: according to fallibilist realism a belief is justified if it has withstood serious criticism (Musgrave 1999, p. 324).

As to beliefs about real objects and facts, criticism means critical empirical testing. Most contemporary realists accept some version of the hypothetico-deductive method. For example, let H1 be the hypothesis, “The earth is round,” and H2 the former view, “The earth is flat.” There are many observational results confirming H1 and refuting H2. From a realistic viewpoint, it is, in such a case, justified to assume that H1 is true and H2 is false.

Generally, assume that some question has been raised and one or several hypotheses have been given as answers. We test these hypotheses against each other. If we succeed in demonstrating that one of these hypotheses, say, H, accounts for the empirical results quite well while all others do not, we are justified in adopting H as true. The acceptance is preliminary, since H may be refuted in further tests.

Many (but not all) realists hold to the correspondence theory of truth. A statement is true if what it states is actually the case; otherwise it is false. In other words, a statement is true if the state of affairs it describes actually obtains. Ideally, whether a statement is true or false should only depend on the facts. However, since concepts are never totally precise, it also depends on criteria related to human interests. For example, is it true that the earth is spherical? Yes, if the problem at stake is to point out the falsity of the former view that the earth is flat. No, if we are to exactly describe the shape of the earth. Many statements are only approximately true. It is approximately true that in 2007 the world population was 6.6 billion. And whether a statement is regarded as true or false depends on what deviations should count as substantial. Even in the exact sciences, we usually deal with approximate truth. Scientific theories often contain ideal models, e.g., “mass point,” “frictionless pendulum,” or “rational person.” But if, for example, planets are described as mass points moving on elliptic orbits, that cannot be exactly true since no planet is really a mass point. Yet the statement is approximately true.

What reasons are there in support of R2? The main reason is that some of our assumptions are empirically and practically successful while others are not. My belief that I can pass through an open door but cannot go directly through the wall leads to an empirically adequate prediction and successful action. It seems that this belief somehow corresponds to the properties of an independent reality.

Science elaborates and deepens ordinary knowledge. Theories such as those about atoms or genes have high explanatory power and are extremely successful in predicting new events. They even lead to the discovery of new entities and laws. Could such theories function so well if they did not (approximately) correspond to some real characteristics of the world, even if they describe the structure of things imperfectly and not in full detail? Admittedly, empirical confirmation is not a guarantee of the truth of a theory. But this is already taken into account by accepting the fallibilistic principle: hypotheses are put forward with the intention to refer to, and describe, real things, with the proviso that reference as well as description may fail. Realists think it is not necessary to give up the natural realistic attitude as long as we are aware of the uncertainty and the limits of human cognition.

Constructivism instead tries to account for the constructive character and the uncertainty of knowledge, by changing the object of our beliefs and statements: not the real world but only the world as experienced is said to be the object of cognition. This seems to be an even more radical way of dealing with the limits of human cognition than fallibilistic realism. But does it lead to a more satisfactory solution? We shall see that constructivism gets into trouble just because it is too radical. Instead of solving the problems even better than fallibilistic realism, it creates new ones.
6. Is constructivism self-refuting?

Constructivism has been accused of being self-refuting: the assumptions constructivism starts with are not consistent with the consequences accepted in the end. One starts with assumptions concerning the biological and cognitive processes of humans, and the way they construct their views. If these assumptions are to be relevant for any epistemological considerations, they have to be interpreted in a realistic way, that is, as knowledge about the real constructing systems, be they single persons, groups of persons, or brains. But constructivism denies that we can have knowledge about real things, including persons and brains. Hence constructivism contradicts itself since it presupposes realism at the beginning and rejects it in the end (see Wendel 1990).

Now there are two possibilities for avoiding a self-refutation. Constructivists can either maintain that we cannot have knowledge of the real world, not even of the agents or systems that construct the world they experience. Or they can restrict the constructivist claim to a class of things that does not include the constructing agents. It is, for example, coherent to claim that real persons construct mathematical objects, or universals, or “theoretical entities,” such as quarks.

However, constructivism as a general view of knowledge cannot solve the problem the second way. According to this view, not only are electrons and quarks constructed, but also perceptual objects such as tables, chairs, trees, people, social institutions, and brains. If we cannot have knowledge about these things as they really are, how could we have such knowledge about real persons and their constructive activities? If stones, plants, and cats are constructions, persons and brains should be constructions, too. Most people have never seen a brain, let alone the processes happening in brains. And how could we know something about real brain processes or the real social behavior of people if we didn’t know anything about the rest of the real world?

The first possible way to avoid a self-refutation does not help either since it undermines the constructivist position. If what we assume about people, their brains, and cognitive processes is not taken as knowledge in the realistic sense, it is hard to see why these assumptions should be relevant for any epistemological conclusions. The radical constructivist Gerhard Roth (1994) discussed this dilemma in great detail. According to his view, it is the brain that does the construction of the world. Roth distinguishes the real from the phenomenal brain. The brain that does the construction of the world is the real one, not the phenomenal one. The latter is itself a construction. Neuroscience can only study the phenomenal brain while the real brain is unknown to everybody.

Now Roth has to answer the question of how he can know the things just stated if we cannot know anything about the real world. Shouldn’t he have to concede that he couldn’t know it but just assumes it without justification? However, Roth wants to save some minimal justification for his theory. He says that his theory does not claim objective validity or truth, but “plausibility” and “internal consistency” (1994, p. 326). He is right that his theory is consistent. But what does it mean that it is “plausible”? It seems that Roth claims at least some minimal justification for the story told above, according to which there is a real brain that constructs the world. Then, however, Roth assumes to know something about the real brain and his view is a version of realism. As a realist, he can keep C1 but should give up C2.

As stated above, local constructivism, that is, constructivism restricted to a special class of things, does not necessarily get into trouble. But general constructivism does. As far as I see, nobody has so far given a convincing answer to this problem.

7. Does constructivism allow for more freedom?

Some constructivists seem to think that their view helps people realize that they are free to create things and change them if necessary. By contrast, realism is said to foster a passive or pessimistic attitude, according to the slogan: “Things have to stay as they are since the constraints of reality do now allow for any change.” However, if we realize that the whole world is our construction, we should become convinced that we can reconstruct it if we want to.

The social constructivist Gergen explains this with the help of some examples, and he appears to be rather optimistic: “We must suppose that everything we have learned about our world and ourselves—that gravity holds us to the earth, people cannot fly like birds, cancer kills, or that punishment deters bad behavior—could be otherwise […] we could use our language to construct alternative worlds in which there is no gravity or cancer, or in which persons and birds are equivalent, and punishment adored” (Gergen 1999, p. 47).

Realism indeed assumes that there are laws of nature, such as the law of gravity cited by Gergen. Since we cannot annihilate or modify such laws they do in fact set limits for our actions. If it is a law that A is followed by B, there will never occur an event of the form “A and non-B,” and we can by no means make such an event happen. However, the laws of nature allow for many events and changes, so that we can create or modify a lot of things, if we have the technical means to do so. We can try to create A in order to make B happen. Knowledge about laws is very helpful for that purpose. Exactly speaking, any purposive behavior presupposes some law. If we did not believe in laws, we would never use a hotplate or take a plane. Thus it is true that, in a certain sense, laws of nature restrict our freedom of action. Yet knowledge about these laws helps us to render our freedom of action as great as possible.

Moreover, when it seems that reality sets certain constraints on our actions, a realist need not consider these constraints as ultimate. Since knowledge about reality is fallible, it might turn out that some hypotheses regarded as laws are false. Or it might turn out that some empirical generalizations don’t describe laws but only regularities, holding under boundary conditions that could be changed.

If we now consider again Gergen’s examples, we can say that some of the things he announces might be possible. That cancer kills would stop to be a regularity if someone found an effective medicine. That people cannot fly was generally true before they constructed airplanes, and so on. Note however that humans have managed to do these things just because they discovered some laws of nature, and used them to change reality in accordance with their goals.

All this is possible on the basis of realism. Is there anything constructivism could con-
tribute over and above these possibilities? Gergen suggests that we use our language to construct new worlds. Of course language is helpful for social interaction and necessary for scientific research. But does Gergen think we could change the world merely by inventing new concepts? We could, for example, eliminate all concepts that refer to cancer. But would this really enhance our freedom, or help anybody? Does Gergen perhaps believe that we could construct anything? Most constructivists do not assume this.

It turns out that realism and constructivism do not differ greatly in respect to our freedom of action. They both agree that many things can be created and changed. They also agree that humans cannot do anything. And they agree that we have to find out what we can do by testing empirical hypotheses and learning by mistakes. Note also that, from the viewpoint of fallibilistic realism, we have reason to ask critically whether hypotheses so far considered are laws are really laws, in order to prevent our being restricted or misled by false assumptions.

8. Does realism serve the interests of power?

Some people suspect realism of being in alliance with the powerful. With reference to Nietzsche and French postmodernism, Gergen (1999, pp. 223f.) discusses this “dark” side of realism, coming to the conclusion that we should refuse any discourse based on the ideas of truth or reality; when we appeal to “the true” or “the real,” we eliminate competing voices from dialogue and terminate discussion. If what we say is deemed “true,” the views of the others are disqualified as “false.” Concepts like “true” and “real” are used to execute power, to enforce one’s own position, and put down other positions.

Mitterer, too, thinks there is a relation between realism and power. He concedes, however, that philosophers never intended to serve the interests of the powerful when they declared the truth to be the aim of science and philosophy. Nevertheless he believes that, in the end, those who commit themselves to truth have to appeal to authority. Since reality does not itself tell us what is true or false, the realist must try to “personalize” the view of her opponent, and “depersonalize” her own view. One does this by saying, “My statement is ‘objective’ and ‘true,’ yours is only a subjective, mistaken opinion” (Mitterer 2001, p. 91).

Now I do not doubt that people sometimes hold certain dogmatic views that serve their interests. And people have always tried to maintain their power by oppressing any criticism. There is, furthermore, persuasion, prejudice, and there is deception, even in science. However, I vehemently deny that realism has anything to do with this.

Is it possible at all to persuade or intimidate people by using predicates like “true” or “real”? Yes, it is, if these concepts are used in an antirealistic sense. Such strategies attributed to realists by Gergen can only be effective if “true” or “real” are predicates that could give a statement justification, and this is exactly what realism denies. Assume I say A, and my opponent contradicts. If I now added, “A is true,” or “A corresponds to reality,” I would not in the least enhance the justification or plausibility of A. According to realism, the statement “A is true” is exactly as justified as A itself. In order to convince someone, I would have to give reasons or evidence, e.g., some empirical results in favor of A. The concepts of truth and reality do not serve to justify statements but to make clear how certain statements are to be understood with respect to their relation to the world, namely as descriptions (and not, e.g., as fiction or joke). Again, people do sometimes try to make others believe something by saying, “I’m right,” or “What I say is true.” From a realistic viewpoint, this is persuasion without reason. It is also true that fundamentalistic schools like to declare their own doctrine as the “truth.” But this not realism. Realism is not responsible for the misuse of concepts by people who hold irrational thoughts, or who try to persuade others by misleading them.

9. Is non-dualism an alternative?

I have tried to present a version of realism that can be defended against constructivist objections. This realism is not opposed to the idea that cognition is a constructive process. According to this view, reality is something we presuppose in any attempt to attain knowledge though we can never be certain how things really are. Having knowledge then amounts to the preliminary judgment that some hypotheses seem to correspond to reality better than others. In addition, I have tried to demonstrate that a constructivist position that reduces the claim to knowledge even further does not solve the problems better but creates new ones.

The traditional problems of knowledge are deeply rooted in the idea that there are subjects whose mental states are directed towards objects. Some philosophers think there is something wrong with this idea. They have developed a new approach in order to overcome and avoid the difficulties of both realism, constructivism, and any “dualistic” thinking. With reference to Mitterer, Schmidt (2003), too, holds a non-dualizing view. I cannot deal here with this approach in detail but want to make some remarks on Mitterer’s (2000, 2001) non-dualizing philosophy.

“Dualism” here means a way of thinking and talking that presupposes certain dichotomic distinctions, e.g., between language and world, or subject and object. “In the dualistic way of speaking, descriptions are always descriptions of something, of an object, an event, a state of affairs, where the something the description refers to [...] is different from the description, that is, from language” (Mitterer 2000, p. 55). By contrast, in non-dualizing thinking things are (parts of) descriptions: “The object of description is not different from description or language, it is that part of the description that has already been performed” (p. 56).

Assume, for example, that we want to describe the table in the corner. “The table in the corner” is the description so far, the description to be continued. This description so far is followed by a description from now on, say, “The table in the corner has four legs.” We now have a new object for an even further description from now on, namely, the new description so far, “The table in the corner with four legs.” The next description might be, “The table in the corner with four legs is brown,” and so on. Any description yields a new object for further descriptions, or rather, it is that object. But the descriptions from now on never refer to the descriptions so far as their objects, they rather take them as their starting point.

Non-dualizing philosophy dispenses with a “beyond” of statements or descriptions.
Here, too, hypotheses are put forward and tested. But tests and arguments no longer refer to something different from statements or descriptions. “Views are true because and as long as we adopt them” (2001, p. 105). “Reality” is just “those views accepted at the time being” (p. 105).

Is this a plausible view? I am sure anybody can make descriptions the way Mitterer proposes: we can formulate a descriptive statement and then take it as a starting point for a further description. We may call our last description the “description so far,“ and our next one the “description from now on. “ However, Mitterer does not tell us the whole story, he leaves out an important point: in order to proceed as he proposes, we also have to refer to objects, such as tables, which are neither descriptive statements nor descriptions (in the sense of characterizations). Consider again Mitterer’s example. The description so far, “The table in the corner,” does not itself tell me that this table has four legs, or that its color is brown. Thus, in order to continue the description so far, and formulate the next description from now on, one has to attend to a non-linguistic object, and observe its properties. There is no other way a description could be performed. This is at least how people normally conceive of a description, in contrast to fiction or fantasy. And I don’t think Mitterer wants to propose that we should invent the properties we ascribe to things.

As to the “dualistic” distinction between subject and object, I think it corresponds to a fundamental feature of anybody’s experience. When I see something, it seems to me that there is an object in front of me. When I think of something, I am related to an object different from me. The mental life of people is characterized by intentional states, by states of subjects directed to objects. These objects might be conceived of as real, or phenomenal, or constructed. We cannot by decision or convention stop experiencing the world that way. There is one exception. Mystics are said to have been in states in which they experienced a unity between their own consciousness and the world. However, even mystics are not normally in such states, and they usually emphasize that such experiences could not be described in words, for the very reason that descriptive statements always presuppose the distinction between objects, and between the speaker and the world.

Of course not every philosophical theory has to deal with the intentional relation. But if a new philosophical approach suggests giving up the traditional, “dualistic” distinction between subject and object, it has to solve the problem of how to account for the intentionality of the mental. Non-dualists will probably answer that the view of the mental as intentional is itself a construction, like any other philosophical hypothesis. But constructions can be more or less convincing, and it seems to me that non-dualism is not much in accordance with the most fundamental trait of human experience.

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What Difference Does It Make?

(Radical) Constructivism –

then this holds equally well for the Realist, living, when knowledge is no more than an is 100% the world of my experiences and my is a Realist in his own right. When the world cannot allow that the Realist perceives and positions valid for realists just the same. He with others. – but interdependently and in concordance cognizable. We all construct our own world world beyond our senses and concepts is not truth, of world views cannot be stated. A correctness, let alone the constructivism explicitly as a realist episte- presuppositions. (Niklas Luhmann presents the Constructivist cannot do without realist naivrealist views there.

The main objection of the Realist is that the Constructivist cannot do without realist presuppositions. (Niklas Luhmann presents constructivism explicitly as a realist epistemology). The Constructivist is in reality a Realist – at least when he tries to put his head through a wall he will have to admit it.

The Constructivist criticizes above all the realist assumption of an, at least to some extent, cognizable reality. Our conceptions and descriptions of reality can only be compared to other conceptions and descriptions and not with reality itself. The correctness, let alone the truth, of world views cannot be stated. A world beyond our senses and concepts is not cognizable. We all construct our own world – but interdependently and in concordance with others.

In his critique the Constructivist universalizes his own principles towards presupposi- tions valid for realists just the same. He cannot allow that the Realist perceives and recognizes the world “in fact” and therefore is a Realist in his own right. When the world is 100% the world of my experiences and my living, when knowledge is no more than an internal construction of the human subject, then this holds equally well for the Realist, whether he wants to acknowledge it or not: *The Realist is in reality a Constructivist.*

Thus realism becomes a special case of constructivism, which tries to absolutize its own construction of reality by setting it equal with an independent reality. The difference between realism and constructivism is reduced from an epistemological distinction to merely a difference in (epistemological) attitude. But the idea that we all are Constructivists, whether we admit it or not, is based on certain biological, psychological or cultural presuppositions; and hence the Constructivist has to face the same objection of absolutization he raises against the Realist.

In their mutual critique, constructivism and realism presuppose each other their own respective positions. The Constructivist has his reality presupposed “realistically” by the Realist and the Realist gets reality constituted in a constructivist manner by the Constructivist. Both hold that the practice of science supports their respective side. The Realists say that scientists ultimately pro- ceed in a realist manner and Constructivists claim that science is constructivist. Realist interpretations of the practice of science are as convincing as are constructivist interpretations.

Whether scientists see themselves as Realists or rather as Constructivists depends above all on which philosophy (of science) is in fashion. There is no indication that realist-oriented scientists are more successful than constructivist scientists and it makes little difference for the results of our knowledge-efforts whether they are interpreted as inven- tions or as discoveries. According to von Glasersfeld it is only in the last century that “sci- entists have started to realize that their explanations of the world rest on concepts shaped by the human observer and which he imprints onto his experiences” (Glasersfeld 1998, p 504) But already long before this insight scientists had been doing just what they have only now realized that they are doing.

Von Glasersfeld replaces truth/correct- ness with viability and falsehood/error with non-viability. (Sometimes expressions like “irrefutable” or “undeniable” serve the purpose.) Constructivist concepts, however, carry similar problems to those they aim to replace. Viable constructions cannot be matched positively with reality. Strangely enough, a direct contact, a direct confronta- tion with an “ontic reality” becomes feasible exactly then, when our (therefore?) non-via- ble constructions fail or collapse. Admittedly, the failure of our constructions allows for a merely negative determination of reality, some kind of “Not so!”, “Reality can only be described in terms of the actions and thoughts that have proven unsuccessful” (Glasersfeld 1996, p. 193). Von Glasersfeld says that “for the Constructivist it is com- completely irrelevant how the real really is” (Glas- ersfeld 1998, p. 324). But that reality is like a wheel which turns nothing may well hold only as long our constructions are viable and do not get eliminated through “natural selec- tion.”

The inconsequence exactly then, when our constructions fail, indicates that constructivism has adopted the dualistic argumentation technique together with the pre- supposition of an at least negatively knowledge-relevant language-independent reality. But perhaps this inconsequence can be avoided? A radical constructivism could argue that our (theoretical) constructions can be checked neither positively nor nega- tively against reality. The sceptic’s argument, recalled so often, should not be restricted to views and ideas that are correct or viable.
How is failure or refutation of theoretical constructs determined? For the success of our constructions we are responsible ourselves – is nature, is reality responsible for their failure?

Who determines whether constructions are viable or not? Reality or a(nother) theory about reality? Constructivism would become more stringent if it decides for the second option. This is the option that is applied in scientific conflicts over the viability/non-viability of theoretical constructs. The failure of theories, their refutation, is always stated from other theoretical positions and as long as these positions have not failed they are presupposed to those constructions already having failed. This may explain to some extent why theoreticians are seldom impressed or irritated when their theories are declared a failure by other scientists.

Constructivists often claim that “natural selection” or even “reality” is like a filter which decides on the viability of constructions. Perhaps they would be more concise if they concede that here decisions are based on a theory of evolution mutated to a presupposition for these constructions.

For a theory to fail or to be refuted means simply that it runs counter to the theory which states its failure and refutation. There are hardly any theoretical constructs in science – except those not known outside their holders – that have not been refuted by some other theory. How often has the Theory of Relativity been declared “refuted” or “failed” or, as the refuters insist, has this theory actually been refuted. Darwinists are not impressed and shaken by the refutations of Creationists, neither are Creationists vice versa.

In various sciences the strangest views are held or have been held: that the earth is flat, that humanity is not older than a few thousand years, that all cave paintings are fakes, that AIDS is (not) caused by viruses, that the universe was created by, with or even in a big bang, that matter is preferably dark and consists of quarks and other (smallest) particles or simply of energy, that there are black holes, that phlogiston exists, etc. – all these constructions have worked according to the beliefs of their constructors or still continue to do so. Many, if not most, advocates of their theories argue for them until the end of their life regardless of objections, reprovals, and falsifications. Often they respond to a refutation of their own theory with a refutation of the theory from which they were refuted. In the rare case when they give up their theory in favour of another, they declare the(ir) earlier theory as refuted, false or erroneous from the basis of an adopted follow-up theory.

Realist, traditional truth-oriented thinkers sometimes claim, as von Glasersfeld points out, that constructivism and other related modes of thought with relativistic tendencies and multiple worlds “are dangerous, because they have nothing to put up against such aberrations as nazism” (Glasersfeld 1998, p. 510). Karl Popper even insinuates that relativism leads to anarchy, lawlessness, and tyranny (Popper 1982, p. 106). But realist convictions all the same are no safeguard against holding and justifying arbitrary views. For examples, one doesn’t need to go to the texts written in a realist jargon by creationists such as Morris or Ross or even those of revisionists and holocaust deniers such as Faurisson or Butz – perhaps it may suffice to hint to the support of the Unification Church by realist-oriented thinkers such as Eccles, Bartley and Flew.

I doubt that constructivists must be tolerant “for purely epistemological reasons.” (Critical) Realists and Rationalists claim the principle of tolerance for themselves and base it on the fallibility of the human mind. And why shouldn’t there be dogmatic, intolerant and ignorant Constructivists just as there are tolerant and open-minded Realists (even though Popper only preached tolerance and intellectual modesty and von Glasersfeld lives it…).

Both modes of thinking – the realist just like the constructivist – are manifestations of an argumentation technique which allows one to present any arbitrary opinion, depending on whether they are held or declined as true, false, erroneous or refuted, in the realist case, and as (not-)viable, failed or refuted, in the constructivist case. This comes along with a reference to an “independent reality” or some other instances that can be created through the realization and universalization of theoretical constructs taken from biology or some other science.

The Radical Constructivism of Ernst von Glasersfeld can be credited at least with not feeling comfortable at all with this mode of argumentation and he does struggle with the problem of how to get rid of a predominantly objectivist and realist terminology. This is sometimes not easy; “That others don’t have to see their world so, as one can see one’s own” (Glasersfeld 1998, p. 510) is trivial in the case of different, subject-dependent worlds. But when the world is the same for someone else and for me and we “only” see it differently, then “seeing” loses its constructive moment. And when “everything that can be said, seen or felt can be interpreted differently” – then again the question arises whether the same or different objects are interpreted differently and then, which of these interpretations are viable and which are not.

The conflict between a constructivist proliferation of worlds and a realist reduction towards the one (and “true”) reality needs to be decided according to preferences drawn from presuppositions, which are only imperative as long as we make them…

Josef Mitterer is an Austrian philosopher. In two books, The Beyond of Philosophy and The Escape from Arbitrariness he developed a non-dualizing philosophy, which forgoes the categorical distinction between language and reality and abandons truth as the traditional goal of our cognitive efforts.
Brief remark

Constructivism is an answer to the question *how language relates to reality*. Realism is another answer. This relation forms the dichotomous presupposition of realist and constructivist discourses and serves as the *para-dox* of dualist philosophy. I am more interested in the (re-)construction of this relation and hence do not participate in the discussions between the various versions of the dualist argumentation technique. But although I try to keep an equidistance my sympathies are rather on the constructivist side.

Notes

Published for the first time in English, this is a translation from German of Mitterer (2001) (revised during translation).

1. The realist attempts often to refute the constructivist with the help of examples taken from “everyday-realism” – exactly that area for which many constructivists (but not von Glasersfeld) suspend their constructivism.

2. Terminological difficulties of constructivist theories are, for example, discussed by Schmidt (1998), pp. 567–568.

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All translations from German are made by the author.


So Far – From Now On
Josef Mitterer’s Non-dualistic Critique of Radical Constructivism and Some Consequences

Siegfried J. Schmidt ◇ Universität Münster (Germany) <sjschmidt@gmx.net>

I. So far:
Mitterer’s critique of constructivism

I. Unmasking dualism

Mitterer’s critique of the central argumentations of radical constructivists has been mostly neglected until today. The paper presents and evaluates his criticism and, in the second part, outlines a format of constructivism that tries to draw appropriate consequences.

Problem – Mitterer’s critique explains why the radical constructivism represented above all by Maturana, Varela, von Glasersfeld or Roth still remains in a dualistic format. In his view Neurobiology is used in their writings as the indisputable basis for deriving far-reaching epistemological consequences. Therefore constructivism evades self-application. To overcome this serious critique a different approach to constructivist thinking is sketched that operates without using any biological or psychological theories, tries to avoid dualism, and elaborates Mitterer’s basic argument that the description of an object and the object under description are the same.

Benefits – The paper shows what constructivism can learn from a serious critique and how it can be rewritten in a non-dualistic way.

Key words – dualism, epistemology, operative fictions, truth, contingency, construction.

In the early nineties, Josef Mitterer started to criticise (radical) constructivism on the basis of his newly developed non-dualistic philosophical approach. This critique is fundamental and far reaching because Mitterer does not attack single constructivist arguments but reveals the intrinsic rhetorical mechanism applied by leading constructivists such as Humberto R. Maturana, Francisco J. Varela, Ernst von Glasersfeld or Gerhard Roth. It is exactly this strategy that he continuously applies to unmask all sorts of dualistic thinking and arguing, viz. to reconstruct the dichotomic distinctions presupposed in all dualistic philosophies as argumentative suppositions (“argumentative Setzungen”).

In my paper I shall present an overview of the main domains of Mitterer’s critique and of the line of argumentation he applies to display the crucial weak points in constructivist argumentation. In my view this topic is of special relevance since nearly all other critiques of constructivism until today have neglected Mitterer’s fundamental and convincing arguments.

The beginning of philosophy is marked by implicit presuppositions, not by problems (Mitterer 1992, p. 11, my translation). Mitterer’s central argument reads as follows: Like all other variants of dualistic philosophy, constructivism, too, neither questions its basic presuppositions in terms of allegedly objective neurobiological findings nor its basic assumption that there exists a beyond of discourse (“Diskursjenseits”). Since the works of Maturana, Varela and their collaborators, neurobiological hypotheses such as the operational closure of the nervous system, autopoiesis as the necessary and sufficient explanatory mechanism for life, cognitive construction of reality instead of its representation, or the assumption that cognitive systems transform unspecific inputs from their environment into systems-specific states of order serve as unquestioned scientific knowledge from which epistemological consequences are directly derived. For Mitterer, this position reveals a naïve faith in science, which supports conservative and old-fashioned tendencies opposed to critical resolutions of this belief in the works of authors such as William Van O. Quine, Paul Feyerabend or Richard Rorty in the last few decades.

Constructivists, in other words, fail to construe the presuppositions upon which their whole theoretical building is based. In other words they fail to apply their own principle, viz. that everything is a subject-dependent construction, to their own constructions.

In Mitterer’s view, constructivists tend to universalise their own principles and to prescribe all other philosophical approaches just as realist philosophers do. This procedure becomes quite evident in the constructivist critique of realistic approaches in philosophy. According to Mitterer, this critique simply misses the point because since the works of Feyerabend, Putnam or, most recently, Rorty, such a naïve realism, as it is attacked in constructivist attacks, is no longer seriously advocated in the philosophical community.

Regarding the distinction between a constructed experiential actuality (“Wirklichkeit”) and an inaccessible and unknowable reality (“Realität”) behind actuality, which according to leading constructivists – has to be presupposed for epistemological reasons, Mitterer concludes that constructivists still adhere to a dualistic type of argumentation. The dichotomy between language and a language-independent world is still preserved at least as an indispensable cognitive regulative idea. This dualism becomes clearly evident in or behind the idea of viability advocated above all by von Glasersfeld. Viability is used as a criterion deciding the success or the failure of an enterprise. Although, in principle, we cannot recognise “as such” (the objective reality) we can still experience whether or not
a certain model, a procedure or an activity succeeds or fails. In other words, the hidden reality is still regarded as operating as an arbiter separating valid from invalid operations in the actual world.

Mitterer’s analysis of this dualistic dilemma of constructivism reads as follows: Constructivists claim that we are responsible for the success of our constructions. But who is responsible for their failure? Is it nature or the reality? In other words: Who decides whether or not our constructions are non-viable: reality or another theory about reality? Mitterer concludes: “Constructivism would become much more consequent if it would opt for the second variant” (1999, p. 176, my translation).

2. Truth

Although constructivists claim that our knowledge can never be objective, will never represent “the reality,” and as a consequence will never arrive at “the truth,” their argumentation does not differ in principle from dualistic strategies regarding the problem of truth. Maturana e.g., claims as facts that living systems are autopoietic systems and that nervous systems are closed. All other theories that do not fit into this conviction and into the epistemological consequences derived from it are in fact excluded from the scientific discourse by Maturana and Varela. Since human beings who act as observers construct their worlds according to their biological constitution, biology is regarded as the appropriate science for disclosing the conditions that constitute the observer as a human being. Biology, and that means Maturana’s biology, is proclaimed as true scientific knowledge and is thus (at least implicitly) universalised. Accordingly, Maturana or Roth repeatedly use expressions such as the present biochemical knowledge allows us to say… “it is a fact that…” or “as any neuro-biologist knows…” — although many neuro-biologists advocate quite different theories. Maturana’s central conviction, viz. that our nervous system is closed, serves as a dogmatic and intrinsically realistic argument from which all epistemological assumptions are derived. That means that, regarding the founding argument of constructivism, constructivist thinking is suspended.

Mitterer concludes from this analysis: “…the dualistic truth terminology can equally be applied as in realist variations of dualism. One’s own position is depersonalised, contrasting positions are personalised” (1992, p. 141, my translation). That is to say: the traditional idea is that truth is impersonal or objective whereas errors and false ideas are personal. The ideals I hold to be true (otherwise I would not advocate them) are (at least implicitly) placed into a beyond of discourse (they are no longer my ideas), whereas conflicting ideas are explicitly attached to special people in the discourse itself.

3. Science

For Mitterer it is not surprising that constructivist conceptions of science have no selective power. He concentrates his critique on Maturana’s criterion of the validation of scientific assertions (Mitterer 1992, p.131) This criterion, which Maturana equates with the scientific method, as such consists of four operations that must be performed in order to establish a scientific explanation. The most important point here is the validation of presented experiences in terms of a scientific reformulation of the experience that is accepted by/in a/the scientific community.

Mitterer argues that Maturana’s criterion neither distinguishes science from non-science nor does it determine the essential and necessary feature(s) of science. Maturana claims that the members of the scientific community must be able to repeat the respective validation. But this holds true only for those members who already advocate the same scientific assertions; otherwise all those assertions contested by other scientists – and most assertions are contested – could not be validated. Accordingly, Maturana’s conviction that scientific assertions are consensual assertions, which are only valid in the community that produces them, tells us no more than the triviality that scientific assertions are valid only for those who accept them – and that is to say, those who advocate them themselves.

Finally, Mitterer points out that realist scientists are no more successful than constructivist ones. And regarding the results of scientific endeavours, it doesn’t matter whether they are labelled as discoveries or inventions.

4. Objectivity

Regarding the problem of objectivity, Maturana creates a tricky dilemma. He is convinced that existence is created by all the distinctions that observers apply. It follows from this assumption that there exist as many domains of existence as there are distinctions applied by observers. All distinctions create domains of existence or so-called multiversa. Accordingly, there exist as many truths as there are versa. The problem of how versa can be distinguished remains unanswered by Maturana. In his view all versa are equivalent. But who is able to check this assumption? This could only be done by a super-observer who observes the versa and multiversa from an independent position outside; but this idea is inadmissible for a constructivist. Since nobody has a privileged access to “the reality,” the only way to resolve conflicts between versa is the construction of a common versus based on respect and confidence. Coexisting in the multiversa presupposes consensus, i.e., common knowledge. Common knowledge, however, can only be achieved by eliminating differences in the course of producing cultural uniformity. In other words, in case of conflict the individual versa are resolved to reach consensus. That is to say, the versa are transformed into one versus, i.e., a uni-versum. Thus, the differences between versa that are all interconnected by consensus become irrelevant from an epistemological point of view (Mitterer 1992, pp. 138 ff.).

5. Tolerance

Many constructivists hold the view that tolerance is a necessary consequence of the constructivist epistemological assumptions. Mitterer questions this argument. He emphasises that critical realists and rationalists, too, claim a postulate of tolerance simply because human beings fall prey to errors. In addition he points to the experience that there are dogmatic, intolerant and ignorant constructivists, and tolerant and modest realists (Mitterer 1999, p. 179.) Finally, Mitterer sums up, the realist as well as the constructivist models of thinking are nothing but manifestations of a technique of argumentation with the help of which arbitrary assumptions can be presented as true or false.

6. Achievements of constructivism

Despite his severe critique of constructivism Mitterer also recognizes an achievement of constructivism regarding epistemology. “This achievement,” he writes, “can be seen in philosophical

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a shift of the epistemological interest from the object of knowledge to the knowledge of the object, i.e., to the process of gathering knowledge” (Mitterer 1992, p. 146, my translation). The object of knowledge is no longer transposed into a beyond of the process of knowledge gathering; instead it is integrated into the process from which it results.

On the whole, however, Mitterer’s critique of constructivism is devastating. He says that constructivism is not a new paradigm at all. It is not more than the prevailing fashion among competing philosophical approaches. The reason for its success can be seen in the fact that after the collapse of progress-oriented concepts of science initiated by Fleck, Kuhn and Feyerabend, it is very welcome to have a bio-constructivism that re-establishes a faith in one’s own activities for which we are responsible a faith for which we have nothing to fear except self-critique (Mitterer 1992, p. 149).

II. From now on: Rewriting constructivism in the light of Mitterer’s criticism

7. Outline of a process-oriented epistemology

In the second part of my paper I shall try to outline a process-oriented epistemology. My intention is to demonstrate how radical constructivism can be rewritten if Mitterer’s critique is seriously taken into consideration. In the last few years I have made two efforts to react substantially to Mitterer’s critique in order to establish a non-dualistic variant of constructivism (Schmidt 1994, 2007a). The main ideas of this rewriting will be presented in what follows.

Mitterer has repeatedly argued that the description of an object and the object of a description coincide. The object of description is not different from the description or the language; instead it is that part of a description that has already been realised. (Mitterer 1992, p. 56) Objects are descriptions so far, which can be continued by descriptions from now on. I agree with this argumentation in principle. Therefore I shall try to elaborate it in some detail.

One of the main problems in theory building is the problem of the beginning. To avoid the recourse to neurobiology as a seemingly evident and objective starting point, I have looked for an initial argument that cannot be denied without approving it. My argumentation runs as follows: Whatever we do, we do it in the gestalt of a supposition (“Setzung”): We do something, and not something else, although we could have done so. Every supposition takes a certain gestalt for us and – should we be under observation – also for others: it is a supposition of a specific type.

As far as we can judge within a lifetime, every single supposition that we are making here and now has been preceded by other suppositions to which we (can) relate more or less consciously. All our suppositions to date therefore form a context of suppositions in given concrete situations. We can now refer to this context by way of memories and narratives. This context of suppositions comprises the totality of our prior life experiences that will, in turn, in every concrete situation affect our future experiences as expectations.

Every supposition makes at least one presupposition (“Voraussetzung”). As a rule, however, many presuppositions are made or drawn upon. The nexus between supposition and presupposition is auto-constitutive as neither can be meaningfully envisaged without the other. Supposition and presupposition are, therefore, strictly complementary. The presupposition of a supposition can only be observed in the reflexive reference to the supposition. If one accepts the auto-constitutive supposition and presupposition, then one also accepts that there can be no presupposition-free beginning – the only possible beginning is to make a supposition.

Whether we perceive or describe something, ponder something or become consciously aware of something as something particular, we are always executing a serious game of distinctions. We (and not anyone else) describe (and not explain) something as that particular something (and not as something else). In doing so we make use of linguistic resources whose semantic potential and social acceptance is tacitly presumed and, at the same time, by this very use confirmed as useful or efficient. All this is realised (meaning nothing but that we can envisage or think all this in this way only, not in any other) as a happening in a particular situation at a particular point in time, i.e., in a context of suppositions.

Suppositions constitute contingency because they must be selective with reference to other options. As selections they are decisions, and only qua decisions do they make contingency observable. This means that selection and contingency must be envisaged jointly, they constitute each other, they are strictly complementary.

Every supposition, according to the logic of the present argument, requires a positing instance that is affirmed by the very act of supposition. In the case of cognitive suppositions (e.g., perceptions), we call the positing instance consciousness. Consciousness operates on all levels by means of reference through the auto-constitutive interdependency of supposition (consciousness of something) and presupposition (without consciousness no something). The presupposition of a supposition can only be observed (posited) as such by way of reflexive reference and thus it repeats the game of supposition and presupposition. It is only by virtue of reflexivity that references can be recognised and communicated. Consciousness is the irreducible condition for dealing with consciousness, and reflexivity is the condition for becoming aware of consciousness.

Reference or rationality as the principle of consciousness, reflexivity allowing reference to presuppositions, the community-forming imputations of such relations in others, and the selective auto-constitution of the context of supposition and presupposition, seem to be the elementary principles or “mechanisms” driving all our actions and making them accessible to observation and interpretation. In the following I shall seek to explore where an application of these elementary mechanisms leads us in the development of our theories.

Consider an example. We observe or describe something in our environment as young, thus more or less unconsciously making use of the semantic distinction young/old. This distinction as a supposition must necessarily be presupposed because otherwise we could not in our act of judgment decide between young and old. But what do we refer to when observing, describing and judging? In our example it is age. It is obvious that the decision for one side of a difference (e.g.,
young) presupposes the unity of the difference young/old (i.e., age). If I do not possess the semantic category age, then I cannot differentiate it into all the possible shades of linguistic meaning between “very young” and “very old” and remain unable to perceive and differentially name something as old or as young. Differences, therefore, mark interconnectedness rather than exclusion. The operative use of one side of a difference keeps the unclaimed other side on hold, as it were.

8. Models for realities

In order to specify my argumentation so far I introduce three concepts: categories, semantic differentiations, and distinctions.

Categories, in the theoretical conception developed here, mark societally relevant dimensions of meaning in our language of description, e.g., age, sex, power, possessions, kinship, food, or clothing. Categories may be described as nodes in a network of categories, which attain distinctness and semantic profile by virtue of their difference from other categories (age vs. appearance vs. health etc.). Without such a difference even categories “cannot make sense,” and so we must again conclude that there must be a unity of the difference between categories that organises the basically infinite diversity of categories in a network, thus permitting selective reference. Furthermore, I consider it plausible to assume that this network has developed and proved its mettle in a society’s history of problem-solving and environmental adaptation, and that it can therefore co-orient the actions of the members of the society because it remains practically unchallenged, although it can certainly be observed to change on a long-term basis. I call this network, i.e., the unity of the differences between categories, a model of reality, to be understood as a model for realities.

The reference to categories is differentiated through action and communication and thus concretised into a smaller or larger number of semantic differentiations of the categories, e.g., binary or n-ary ones (dead/alive, but also freezing/cold/tepid/warm/hot). Semantic differentiations are processes, dynamic arrangements, which must continually be generated anew; they are not invariably fixed entities. They render categories describable by breaking down the unity of the differentiations or differences, i.e., the category, into distinguishable semantic suppositions. In the process of semantic differentiation, the semantic potential of categories is, as it were, operationalised for concrete processes of cognition and communication.

Whenever a particular supposition is made, i.e., a (symmetrical) semantic differentiation is transformed into an (asymmetrical) distinction (“a pretty young girl” and not “an ugly old man”), then – more or less consciously – one option is selected from the pool of available semantic differentiations, which gains its semantic valency by virtue of the difference from the other possibilities of semantic differentiation: young, pretty, and girl “make sense” by exploiting the implicit but unobserved difference from old, ugly, and man, with reference to the categories age, appearance and sex. In this sense, supposition and presupposition are mutually auto-constitutive and confirm each other in every process of supposition: suppositions operate on the basis of presuppositions; presuppositions orient the meaning attribution of suppositions. Consequently, categories can be described as the unities of the difference between semantic differentiations and distinctions.

9. Operative fictions

These reflections also make clear why categories and semantic differentiations as applied by agents in their distinctions and descriptions can only meaningfully be devised as cross-temporal and cross-individual: solely on this condition can they socially co-orient agents as autonomous decision-making systems, because every agent is convinced that all the others rely on the same presuppositions in an identical or at least sufficiently comparable manner. We simply cannot envisage an alternative to this unconscious transference of individual cognitive developments onto others. We are therefore fully justified in our belief that the world must appear pretty similar to all the others, and that they themselves also share this conviction of ours. This mode of reflexivity of the collective expectation of collective expectation (expectation of expectation) I call collective knowledge, which can be specified as operative fiction (Schmidt 2001). It is fictive because nobody can look into other agent’s heads; nevertheless it works rather reliably because agents act as if all others disposed of the same knowledge and applied it in their descriptions. This argumentation is based on the important difference between subjectivity and subject-dependency. That means that on the one hand the construction of patterns, schemas and meanings is subject-dependent: it happens in the respective cognitive domains in a systems specific manner. But this hypothesis does not at all imply that the construction of orders in the broadest sense is merely subjective or even arbitrary. Instead, subjects make use of cross-individual knowledge and strategies acquired during the process of socialisation.

In my view this argumentation overcomes the Maturana dilemma discussed in §7. Whereas Maturana tries to homogenise the multitude of individual versus by consensus post festum, I try to establish a partial pragmatic compatibility of subject-specific constructions of worlds (= cognitive autonomy) via a compatibility of the mechanisms applied and the language-specific categories, semantic differentiations and distinctions (= social orientations).

Categories and semantic differentiations become effective in controlling actions only as soon as supposition-competent instances (called “agents”) actually apply these orientation options in concrete contexts of action and communication for purposes of reference, i.e., for distinctions and designations. Thus they enact agent-related suppositions in temporally and spatially concrete situations (which I call histories and discourses to cover verbal and nonverbal activities as well) and thereby exploit these semantic presuppositions. The complementary interdependence between suppositions and presuppositions, therefore, calls for agents that activate this connection and keep it going.

Suppositions and presuppositions form an auto-constitutive nexus of mutual dependency that produces its specific “reality” through the effectiveness of the references for agents, and not through an appeal to a specific ontological arrangement in “the reality.”

Finally, the constitutive interconnection between suppositions and presuppositions also decides the constellations of observation. Observers of the first order (everyday agents) enact suppositions without conscious reference to their presuppositions. Second-order observers set in motion processes of observation in order to observe the presuppositions.
of the suppositions made by first-order observers, their own presuppositions functioning as blind spots. Observers of the third order observe the presuppositions of second-order observers with the help of their blind spots etc. This hierarchical arrangement in no way implies an ascending scale of increasing quality, but simply identifies directions of observation as they are practised in everyday life, in scientific research or in the philosophy of science.

10. Culture programmes

In what follows I intend to elaborate the idea of a reasonable mediation between cognitive autonomy and social orientation referred to in §16.

Models of reality, as models for possible realities, have been described so far as structure-oriented, i.e., static semantic networks. They become operative in action only when there is a programme learned and experienced by all agents during their socialisation that permits the socially prescribed realisation of potential forms of reference to categories and semantic differentiations as concrete suppositions of distinction, i.e., that permits situation-specific selections from amongst the possible relations between suppositions and presuppositions. These concrete realisations necessarily combine cognitive, affective, and moral components. As selections, such suppositions of distinction (or, in Mitteler’s term: all descriptions) are contingent; and this contingency is inevitable because every supposition simultaneously demands and admits of the choice of a particular option against the sense-constitutive background of all the excluded possibilities.

The programme of societally practised or expected references to models of reality, i.e., references to categories and semantic differentiations, their affective charge and moral weighting, and equally the programme of admissible orientations in and by the model of reality of a society, I call culture or culture programme. It obeys the principle that the consciousness of the agents links itself to culture as the dynamic arrangement for references to models of reality, and that it thus enacts itself. In other words, culture emerges, so to speak, through descriptive activities of agents who follow the rules and practices of sense production, acquired in the process of socialisation and deemed socially relevant.

This train of thought makes clear that models of reality and culture programmes can only be envisaged in strict complementarity. As all categories that are embodied in languages of description could in principle be connected with all other categories (an ontological exclusion rule is not in sight), we need rules of selection and combination as well as criteria of compatibility in the form of a presupposed culture programme that effect a permanent reduction of the multitude of relations and thus produce given realities as contingent selections out of infinite diversity. It is only as the unity of the difference between contingent selection and infinite diversity of observables and unobservables that a given reality gains processual identity.

Sense can, in the context of this course of reasoning, be described as the permanent individual experience of the success of the application of culture programmes, or as the socially successful management of differentiation and distinction by agents. I.e., it is a purposeful action in semantic space that must be presupposed for every supposition if sense experience and sense attribution for individual agents are to remain at all possible, socially transferable and compatible. However, sense must also be “made” by way of an arrangement of references. This means that sense is not proposed here as an all-grounding basic category but as the both presupposed and concomitant interpretation of the process of supposition and presupposition.

These deliberations about culture as a programme were intended to make clear that “culture,” in the theoretical scenario under discussion, does not feature as an observable entity “existing as an object.” Culture as a programme realises itself in concrete actions, as performed by agents in the form of offers of options and schematisations of options for purposes of reference to the model of reality, which is imputed to be obligatory for all the agents of a society, who make use of precisely these functions and expect all the other agents to proceed “grosso modo” likewise. Such offers and schematisations may be modified; but any new design will again work as a prescription — in keeping with the logic of the culture programme. As a programme for the creation of orderly arrangements and references, which solidifies itself in orderly arrangements and references and qua reflexivity functions as an operative fiction integrating cognitive autonomy and social orientation, cultural programmes serve as generating mechanisms for all the phenomena that the agents of a society characterise as cultural phenomena in the broadest sense. In a nutshell: without the functioning of the cultural programme in situation-specific actions of agents, nobody could know what cultural phenomena “are” and how they are recognised and evaluated.

To sum up: “culture” is described here as a discourse fiction. In other words, “there is” no culture as a sum of phenomena, but we need it as a programme in order to be able to generate, observe, describe and evaluate what we deem cultural phenomena. Every theory of culture is therefore necessarily a form of cultural practice (i.e., programme application), and descriptions of culture always indicate cultures of description. Every observation of “culture” is, at the same time, a kind of shaping it by applying the culture programme.

The chosen approach also helps to make the everyday concept “society” more precise. Society can now be specified as the unity of the difference between the respective model of reality and the respective culture programme. This specification enables us, furthermore, to make clear all talk of the irreducibility, inaccessibility, indescribability etc. of “society” and of “culture” in such a way as also to categorise what is called “society” as an operative discourse fiction. This implies that “society,” too, is not designated as an observable entity existing as an independent object in a beyond of discourse. On the contrary, society is constantly realised by way of the actual exploitation of models of reality and culture programmes through agent-specific suppositions and presuppositions in histories and discourses.

The categories, as units of the difference between semantic differentiations and distinctions, may remain conscious or may be made conscious as a kind of foil behind all suppositions. In the observation of the second order, therefore, all the options of the culture programme appear to be contingent due to their selectivity, but also changeable and malleable, if new programme components are successfully implemented as prescriptions and other components are re-valued. Contingency is thus not seen here as groundlessness but as the presupposition for mobility and creativity.
11. Scientific research: Systematic problem solving

Mitterer has rightly criticised Maturana’s criterion for scientific research. In the following I try to develop a plausible conception of scientific research. My proposal does not rest on the separation of arts and sciences, or of hard and soft sciences, but takes as its starting point the descriptive distinction “scientific vs. non-scientific.” The initial hypothesis is a follows: In scientific and non-scientific behaviour and communication, our central purpose is to have experiences and solve problems, such activities being emotionally and normatively geared simply because we have a body and live in a society. The difference between the two kinds of experience and problem-solving lies primarily in the explicitness and the repeatability of operation, and its regulative parameters. In other words, the difference lies in the strategic change of the point of observation and description from first-order to second-order and (occasionally) third-order observations. The specific character of scientific problem solving in its broad sense may be expressed by the formula: systematic problem solving by means of explicit (= operationalised and repeatable) procedures.

To follow this specification, certain requirements must be met. These are, however, not to be regarded as norms prescribed by a philosophy of science, but as pragmatic preconditions for solving problems in an explicit way by means of procedures that have proved their worth in past practice. First, there must be a systematically ordered conceptual framework for the constitution of phenomena and problems: in brief, an explicit theory as a conceptual strategy for problem solving. To meet the criterion of explicitness, the logical structure of this theory must be apparent and its central concepts must be defined or demonstrable by exemplar (= postulate of specialist terminology). Only on such a basis may one expect the theory to be used in an intersubjectively replicable and controllable way.

As soon as the problems, whose solution is considered relevant by a community of investigators, have been explicated theoretically, an operational procedure must be found that specifies all the steps leading to the expected solution of the problems (= methodological postulate) as well as the point where the problem may be considered solved. Methods are means to decide between acceptability and unacceptability, which are not to be understood as objective values, but as regulative ideas with reference to specific decision criteria established in a scientific community. They force the observer to move to the level of second-order observation. Only on the basis of such explicit interrelating of problems, problem-solving strategies, problem solutions and their communication, does the problem-solving procedure become applicable and testable intersubjectively. And only then does it become possible to assess its potential applicability to other problem-solving contexts (= postulate of applicability).

The requirements of scientific problem-solving described so far are furthermore essential both for the teaching and learning of theories, and for the interdisciplinary cooperation that aims at the reasonable interrelation of research projects rather than producing a patchwork of isolated studies conducted on mutually incompatible theoretical and methodological premises. They may not only help to secure the continual recruitment of high-quality professionals, but also improve the ability to promote permanent learning as well as the transformation of one’s stock in co-evolution with other disciplines. Both aspects are, as one may have become aware in the meantime, neither self-evident nor trivial.

If we advocate the view that “empirical” does not refer to “the reality itself” and to first-order observation (= immediate observation that does not observe its criteria of distinction and description) but refers to the production of facts in the sense of logical, pragmatic, mental and social stabilities that are regarded and treated as independent objects by means of theoretically and methodically controlled procedures. The kind of intersubjectivity resulting from empirical research is again not guaranteed “by reality in itself” but will be considered valid as long as its effects on scientific communication remain stable. It will end as soon as it fails to stand up to subsequent second-order observations or to alternative theories.

Consequently from the framing remarks made up to this point, an answer to the question of what characterises scientific empirical research may be based on two fundamental assumptions:

- Since the systematic question of empirical evidence is a question of second-order observation, the question of scientific empirical research must accordingly be posed on the level of the relationship between first-order and second-order observation.

- If we link the distinction “empirical vs. non-empirical” to social criteria of experience and its practical results, then scientific empirical research must also be subject to the sociality/culturality – and thus contingency – of knowledge. Indeed, as Mitterer puts it, the viability of our theories is not decided by reality but by another theory.

As I mentioned above, the results of systematic problem-solving operations are acceptable (or valid) as soon as and as long as they preserve their position in relevant scientific discourses, in other words, as long as they remain consensual in the respective discourses. The criteria for establishing consensual status quo are as yet undeclared pieces of evidence and convictions, which serve as stop signals to interrupt justification processes. Examples of such criteria are deep root convictions regarding basic dimensions of human experience and structuring of reality such as continuity, coherence, cause and consequence, structuration in time and space, and so on.

“Consensus” is used here very deliberately as an observer term describing that state of a scientific discourse where no objection is raised against a certain framework of knowledge. This reading of “consensual” excludes interpretations that define this concept in terms of “intersubjectivity” or correspondence of cognitive systems in “powerless communication” (sensu Jürgen Habermas).

12. Talking about truth in discourse

Mitterer (1992, p. 110) has called theories of truth a “disguise of club-law.” So what can be said about truth in a revised constructivist framework?

“Truth” is characterised here as the unity of the difference true/false, i.e., as a result of description and ascription. Truth, as statement reliability in histories and discourses, renders the contingency of everything known invisible, and serves as the interrupter of arguments by virtue of the legitimacy of the reference to the status quo of shared knowledge. Moreover, there is the requirement that, following the conclusion of an argument, a renewed corroborations of truth can be demanded any time, which should not, as a
rule, be refused. In other words, querying is part of the dignity of the truth discourse; it is, as it were, its morality.

This basic mechanism will now be further elucidated.

True can only be what can also be false. Peter Janich (2000) emphasizes. Correspondingly, truth refers to elements of discourse, to statements, assertions, and arguments, but not to objects and matters of fact. By labelling statements and assertions as true, we intend to solve temporally both the starting and the finishing problem in communication processes and discourses. Instead of undertaking a futile attempt to start with absolute primordial reason, we inevitably begin by falling back on already existing consensual knowledge, i.e., by recourse to knowledge that has been confirmed cognitively and is shared communicatively, and has therefore been labelled as true. And we can, on the other hand, terminate our arguments and their justifications as soon as we have reached an (explicit or implicit) consensus through the discourse in corresponding histories. In other words: Since we cannot, for simple pragmatic reasons, infinitely continue to haranguer doubts, we must be able to interrupt the discourse in corresponding histories. In this sense – i.e., not from within itself – it is evident, and can therefore be formulated in corresponding statements and assertions, as if it were independent of time and agents. For this reason, the designation “true” functions as a powerful discourse instrument for its user and may easily lead to the belief that truth is something one can possess, and is “not just” a discourse controller. Statements and assertions take place in discourses embedded in histories. They are enacted, i.e., belong to the category “action,” and can as such succeed or fail, reach or miss goals. Like all actions, they follow action schemata and are acquired communally in the course of socialisation(s). Assertions, as actions, Janich (2000) maintains, are not only dependent on comprehension but also on agreement, something that is decisive for the truth of an assertion. Janich, therefore, defines truth as assertoric success, asserting being not just a mere talking description of the world, but a means of the organisation of communal praxis whose truth is endorsed by the observer, a situation expressed succinctly in an observer-oriented: “the truth” is always on our side; “false” is always the statements of the others. And as all those who can and may advance claims to truth in discourse, which can be discursively realised, possess at least reputation if not power, it becomes clear that truth, beside morality, functions as an important mechanism of socio-cultural differentiation.

14. Truth as communicative quality

In an observer- and process-oriented, non-dualist argumentation, as developed here, the attribution of the category “true/ truth” is, consequently, seen as a discourse strategy that helps to determine the communicative quality of statements, i.e., their success in action – not, however, their congruence with something existing outside themselves, as in most of the correspondence theories of truth. “Communicative quality” may here refer to quite different things, depending on the discourse: discursive success (connectibility), usefulness, degree of asseveration, force of conviction, authenticity, evidence, conformity, coherence, consistency, etc. The emphatic concept of truth, as promoted by dualist philosophies, appears to be especially attractive because it is evidently concerned with power and the rejection of dialogue and responsibility – from science and religion to politics, education, and partner relations. Whoever holds the view that one can be “in possession of the truth,” however, commits a twofold mistake: they assume...
that truth is something existing in itself, i.e., something independent of time and person; but at the same time they postulate the ability to claim possession of this something through time- and person-dependent histories and discourses, and thus escape the contingency of histories and discourses by entering a “discourse of the other world” (in the sense of Mitterer).

In a non-dualist discourse, truth does not figure in the singular or as an entity, but only in the plural and in the adjectival form of the application of the difference true/false. The recent attempts by many authors to tie truth once again to experiences of perceptual evidence, are therefore expressly rejected here, because perception is seen here as a process of reference by observers, and not as a representation of reality.

15. Truth: The cognitive and the communicative aspect

The handling of the truth attribute can be differentiated into cognitive and communicative aspects.

In cognitive processes, we treat statements practically as true for as long as the process of meaning construction by means of the semiotic materiality of the statements is neither irritated nor interrupted. The presumption of truth is enacted here as an experience of immediate evidence. As long as the cognitive process of order creation is running undisturbed, the question of truth does not arise; we approve what we receive. If the process is interrupted, then we raise the question by communicating with ourselves, as it were, whether and why we are convinced by the meaning construct that we have assigned to the statement within the context of our available knowledge, or whether we can envisage a scenario that can support our belief (e.g., documents, methods of proof, statements by witnesses, experiments).

In communicative processes, too, as already stated, the question of truth does not arise as long as the process is not interrupted, and statements, assertions or arguments are not called into question or subjected to doubt. Here the recourse to true statements functions as an interrupter of legitimation, which restores the connectivity of communication. The ascription of truth realises itself here as a decision scenario, in which those knowledge constellations or decision practices are adduced that, at the given state of discourse, are accepted without protest.

This proposal rests on the following argument. If truth is not designed in the mode of correspondence relations (reality and knowledge, statement and object), but as the cognitively and communicatively efficient strategy of the invisibly contingent treatment of contingency, then it can be specified, from the observational perspective “discourse,” as the successful communication, stabilisation, and regress interruption that permits communal action; and from the observational perspective “history,” as the social assessment of an action as a viable problem solution, in the sense of a successful coupling with the environment in a social context. In both cases, in histories as in discourses, the goal is action success. If there is – as Janich (2000) also emphasises in his reflections on truth – an indissoluble interdependence between actions and assertions, then successful action becomes the definiens of “action-truth.” Assertions intended to serve as instruments of successful problem solutions must be true, if they are to be suitable for the organisation of communal praxis. The lack of action success renders assertions false; for assertions, as true speech, function as a summons in the organisation of communal activity.

Truth as a strategy of contingent contingency treatment, integrates cognitive, affective and moral aspects. Unquestioned acceptable knowledge permits cognitive and communicative operation, and allows for a positive pleasure–pain equilibration (in the sense of Luc Ciompi 1997). To command true knowledge is emotionally satisfying. In everyday life – apart from special forms of communication such as humour or advertising – it is morally expected (however counterfactually) that every agent always speaks the truth – white lies are the utmost in excusable counteraction. And scientists, in particular, are under high moral pressure to create and spread true, and only true, knowledge, unless they want to risk losing their reputation. Conversely, in fulfilling this expectation, they gain both cognitive and emotional satisfaction as well as social recognition.

Finally, if we realise the contingency of all our suppositions and the operative fiction called truth, we cannot escape the claim for tolerance. The problem here is that the realisation of contingency can only be achieved from a position of second-order observation. But how can this observing competence spread among at least a majority of people worldwide? (For details see Schmidt 2007b).

Nevertheless, the upshot of this insight, “the finality of provisionality,” is therefore a consoling, a mitigating formula that, however, would be incomplete without its converse, “the provisionality of finality” – and for this transient kind of finality we need identity, morality and truth.

Notes

1. See, e.g., the 36 analyses of von Glasersfeld’s philosophy in Ethik und Sozialwissenschaften 9 (1998), where no single reference to Mitterer’s critique can be found.
2. The very few exceptions are Schmidt (1994, 2007a) and Weber (2005).

THE AUTHOR

Siegfried J. Schmidt was born in 1940. He has been university professor at the universities of Karlsruhe, Bielefeld, Siegen and Münster for philosophy, linguistics, literary studies and media studies from 1971 to 2006 and is now professor emeritus. Recent publication: Histories & Discourses (2007).
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Non-dualizing Philosophy and Empirical Research

Armin Scholl ◇ University of Münster (Germany) <scholl@uni-muenster.de>

Introduction

Empirical methodology in social sciences not only consists of methodological rules but is also based on epistemological premises, although these premises are usually not reflected in practical empirical research. It is Karl R. Popper’s “Critical Rationalism” that can be regarded as the most influential philosophical approach to modern empirical social research. This analytical (and normative) approach combines epistemological realism with the prescription of methodological rules and standards, which are still common sense in social sciences. One of the most striking features of critical rationalism is a double dualism resulting from epistemological realism and from the methodological relationship between theory and empirical research. Both sides of scientific knowledge are restricted to clear-cut rules: theory has to be explanatory and rational in the sense that only empirically observable statements about reality are allowed within science. Empirical research follows methodological rules and serves as realistic test for scientific theory, which means that empirical methodology is used to reflect the real world in contrast to scientific laws, which derive from theory.

A non-dualizing philosophy cannot agree with this double dualism and has to challenge both the epistemological realism and the dualism of theory and empirical observation. As a consequence, non-dualizing philosophy has to define the status of empirical research within science. What is the relevance of empirical research for theory testing and theory building if empirical research and empirical observation cannot be considered to be an indicator of the real world but are discourse-related and discourse-dependent? The problem is striking, as a simple circular relationship between theory and empirical research is not an adequate description of how scientific knowledge develops. The philosophical solution to this problem can only be to distinguish between theoretical and empirical observation without considering both sides as opposite or dual entities.

This article aims to show the consequences that non-dualizing modelling of the relationship between theoretical and empirical observation has on the development of scientific knowledge. Therefore, (1) I critically reconstruct the contribution of non-dualizing philosophy to the relationship between theory and empirical research. (2) Arguing from a constructivist point of view, I will challenge Mitterer’s equidistant attitude towards both epistemological realism and constructivism. This critique is based on the argument that the constructivist and the non-dualizing perspectives do not differ substantially with regard to the relationship between theory and empirical research. (3) In a third step, I will show the consequences of non-dualizing philosophy for empirical research, which Stefan Weber has worked out with the help of Josef Mitterer’s non-dualizing approach. (4) Additionally, I will present some constructivist thoughts on this relationship, which I think are reasonable within non-dualizing philosophy as well as constructivist frameworks.

Some remarks on constructivism as a way of thinking

In this article I will treat (radical) constructivism as a system of epistemological ideas and arguments or as an epistemological discourse rather than as different authors’ positions and perspectives. Unfortunately, constructivist discourse sometimes seems confusing because many labels are used to distinguish between several sub-discourses, such as radical constructivism, social (or cultural) con-
constructivism, second-order cybernetics, etc. For the purpose of this article, it is not necessary to take these differences (entirely) in consideration but to apply the common idea(s) behind different constructivist (or related) approaches to the relevant question of this article: the relationship between theory and empirical research. As constructivist philosophers have not written much about this relationship, I will try to imagine what might be a (radical) constructivist perspective on this topic. Of course, there are significant differences between Humberto R. Maturana's constructivism base on a biological foundation, Heinz von Foerster's second-order cybernetics, or Schmidt's socio-cultural approach, but I consider them less important in the context of my comparative argumentation on constructivism and non-dualizing philosophy. All of these approaches primarily challenge realistic epistemology and, at least in an indirect way, the predominant realistic foundation of empirical research and methodology, too.

If we look at constructivism from a historical perspective, more recent works can be regarded as correcting inconsistent argumentations without abandoning the constructivist paradigm or epistemology. Even Siegfried J. Schmidt's "farewell to constructivism" (cf. Schmidt 2003) expresses an ironic semantic rather than a substantial turning away from constructivism. Schmidt has developed an even more advanced position within constructivist discourse and, in my opinion, one that is more truly "radical", whereas the founders of "radical constructivism" are often not as radical as they claim to be or as Schmidt's approach actually is.

As a consequence, I am interested in the potential of the constructivist epistemology as a whole rather than in specific positions held by certain constructivist authors and in constructivist subdiscourses. Therefore, the following elaborations reflect my interpretations of the constructivist epistemology and its consequences for empirical research. Although this point of view is abstract and reductionist with respect to the various, different constructivist positions and approaches, it should be suitable for presenting fundamental reflections on the topic. Within this strategy of argumentation I interpret Josef Mitterer's non-dualizing approach as a necessary correction of constructivist inconsistencies rather than as a completely different epistemology. This is also how Schmidt (2003) treats non-dualizing ideas: if constructivism aims to be radical and to give weight to its arguments, it should be non-dualizing or at least incorporate non-dualizing suggestions. Therefore it is necessary first to reconstruct non-dualizing arguments about the relationship between theory and empirical research.

**Critical reconstruction of non-dualizing philosophy**

In the preface of his major book, Josef Mitterer expresses the main aims of his philosophy. He is not interested in questions such as "What is the case?" or "What are we able to know?" or "How are we able to know?" (Mitterer 1993, p. 13), but in questions about the pragmatic, practical, communicative, argumentative, or power-related consequences of a dualizing way of speaking, particularly in the case of argumentative conflicts (pp. 14f). Mitterer's position is that of a critique of language or the use of language, particularly of the dualizing way of speaking. His philosophy takes no account of differences between language and other bases of interpretation of the world and abandons differences such as theory/language or reality/world completely (pp. 42f).

Non-dualizing philosophy can be (not must be) interpreted within three dimensions, which Mitterer himself does not use in his text but which can help to better understand his philosophy and its consequences for the relationship between theory and empirical research (cf. for the following interpretation Mitterer 1993, §§25–50). The main aspect of his approach is the dimension of *time*. Every description of an object is a description so far, which can be continued as (further) descriptions from now on. The second aspect is that of the inherent *logic*. The object of the description and the description of the object must not be separated in order to avoid the dualization of description and object. As I understand Mitterer, he does not talk about a dialectical relationship between knowledge (description) and matter of fact (object) or any other relationship (e.g. construction, reflection, etc.). A third aspect is the *social* dimension: describing objects occurs within discourses, and the identity and background of the participants in the discourse are relevant to the outcome of controversial or consensual descriptions.

In the following I will try to reconstruct Mitterer's position towards the relationship between theory and empirical research (cf. Mitterer 1993, §§32–50). The common basis for a (scientific) discourse is not neutral (or object-related) but "neutralistic," which means that there is a consensus about the descriptions so far (§37). From now on, there may be differences in (further) descriptions of the object, but the common sense so far cannot be declared an arbiter, whether descriptions from now on are true or not (§§38–40), because the description(s) so far fit(s) different and even controversial descriptions from now on (§44). The decision of whether a description of an object is true or not implies a certain theory of truth (§§42–43). If a participant in (scientific) discourse claims the failure of a description that is opposite to his own description, he cannot only state the difference between both descriptions but also has to give reasons why his description is better, truer, and more adequate than the opposite description (§45).

Within scientific discourse the researcher legitimates his position, or the truth or correctness of his description, with the help of (scientific) procedures that must be common sense within the scientific community (Mitterer 1993, §46). According to a dualizing epistemology, the procedure of science itself proves whether the description fits (corresponds to) the object or not (§47). In a non-dualizing sense the test of a description cannot be carried out with the help of the object (itself), but starts from the object of the descriptions so far (§48). The failure of a description of an object is neither caused by the object itself (and its attributes) nor by given descriptions so far because they do not go back to descriptions that exist already but anticipate new ones. These new descriptions do not fit the so-called failed description. Instead, they must have been developed together, must fit description A, and cannot fit the alternative or opposite description B (§50). To declare a description false does not ultimately require reference to an external reality but "occurs" within the discourse of
concurrent descriptions. Within the frame of a dualizing epistemology, verification/viability or falsification of a description is due to a reality beyond the discourse (§30). In a non-dualizing epistemology there is no need for this inference, and, I would add, from the viewpoint of a constructivist epistemology there is no need for the assumption of a real world outside the discourse, either. From a non-dualizing perspective, it is not possible to approximate a description towards an object. Even basic or rudimentary descriptions of objects are not “closer” to the objects themselves than evolved or theoretical descriptions, because all kinds of different descriptions are discourse-related and cannot represent a world outside of the discourse (Mitterer 1993, §63). Therefore, Popper’s assumption that (basic) empirical or protocol propositions are approximately correct descriptions of objects must be rejected.

The non-dualizing alternative is this: a rudimentary common-sense description (“indication”) of an object can be seen as a neutralistic (not neutral!) basis of descriptions so far for further descriptions to be developed and continued from now on. Neither neutralistic descriptions so far nor new descriptions from now on are related to the “same” object. There is no difference between object and description(s); there are only different descriptions and therefore different objects of descriptions (Mitterer 1993, §§69, 72). If the rudimentary descriptions of an object are seen as adequate descriptions within a discourse, they constitute the object of descriptions. As long as this primary description is successful, it is the basis for new, further descriptions. The relationship between the rudimentary descriptions or indications of an object and the following descriptions are dynamic and depend on the process of the (specific) discourse (§72). If there is no consensus about the rudimentary descriptions, the discourse itself changes into a meta-discourse, a reflective discourse, etc. (§73). This is a relevant clarification, as both theory and empirical research are based on neutralistic descriptions so far (and not on objects with an identification of their own).3

Striving for knowledge or truth in dualizing epistemology implies a preference for correspondence of propositions or descriptions with reality, objects or with a given system of propositions over deviations, which are treated as false descriptions (Mitterer 1993, §94). In a non-dualizing way of speaking, correspondence or coherence cannot be a criterion for truth. Instead of a pursuit of truth (that results in invariance, standstill and maintenance of the status quo), non-dualizing philosophy prefers a pursuit of change (§97).

“Reality in a non-dualizing way of speaking is the ‘way things are at the moment’, the achieved positions in discourse, the descriptions so far which cannot be continued, changed or developed (yet). The consistency of reality is determined by the course of descriptions” (Mitterer 1993, §98, my translation).

**Critique of non-dualizing epistemology**

There are several aspects of non-dualizing philosophy that I do not agree with, although my critique is not fundamental. In the following, I will argue that non-dualizing philosophy is not as different to constructivism as it seems to be in the light of the great distance Mitterer keeps towards constructivism.

Although the term dualism or dualizing philosophy is central for Mitterer’s approach, there seems to be confusion between the terms dualism and dichotomy (cf. Mitterer 1999, §10). According to a distinction made in empirical methodology, variables with only two categories are dichotomous (disjunctive) variables, whereas polarized scales with more than two categories are dualistic but gradualized variables. As I understand Mitterer (with the help of Stefan Weber), the focus of the non-dualizing argumentation is a critique of dichotomous constructs (cf. Weber 2005, p. 335). Thus, theory and empirical research may be considered dualistic in relation to Mitterer’s position, as the failure of a certain construction of reality can also be interpreted as a failure of (communicative) acceptance in the discourse about the construction of one’s reality.4

Mitterer (1993, p. 145) then criticizes Maturana’s biological foundation of constructivism: Constructivist philosophy presupposes that the nervous system must be closed (instead of open towards a world outside). As this assumption cannot be validated in a realistic sense, the fact that the nervous system is closed or open does not contribute to the argumentation of constructivism at all. This is exactly the position Schmidt (1994, 2003) adopts, when he puts his constructivist philosophy on a cultural basis (without any reference for the biological assumptions).7

Many of the criticized premises of dualist philosophy seem to be typical only for a realist’s standpoint. Reading Mitterer’s books, I get the impression that non-dualizing philosophy comes much closer to constructivist thinking than to realistic positions, even if these realistic positions are “critical” (as it is in the case of so-called reconstructivism) rather than “naive” (as can be said about a simple positivism). I will try to support this impression with some arguments about the constructivist perspectives on truth and other concepts.
Mitterer’s denial of truth as a trial to find evidence outside (scientific) discourse follows the same logic as Heinz von Foerster’s argumentation: “Truth is the invention of a liar,” is the title of his long interview with Bernhard Pörksen (von Foerster & Pörksen 2004). Like Mitterer, von Foerster denies any notion of truth, either as correspondence with reality or as consistency within scientific theory. Von Foerster’s aim is to diminish truth completely, as it separates human beings into those who are right and those who are wrong and this separation is a lie itself (cf. von Foerster & Pörksen 2004, p. 29). Similar to Mitterer, von Foerster primarily looks at the consequences that claims of truth have. Both insist on the position that claiming the truth leads to fatal consequences including even war (cf. von Foerster & Pörksen 2004, pp. 30ff).

Mitterer’s argumentation seems to suggest an identity between the use of language and its meaning, which may cause a reification of language. Mitterer criticizes constructivists’ use of “reality” and “viability” as dualist remainders of constructivism. But perhaps “reality” in a constructivist sense does not mean the same or is not used the same way as it does/is in a realistic sense. Of course Mitterer would or could assume another dualism here—caused by dualizing the use of language and its substantial meaning. However, the difference between different usages of the same semantic (here, “reality”) can also be modelled within a non-dualizing pragmatic framework because different usages (of the same linguistic expression) indicate different communicative claims within (epistemological) discourse.

For a realist, reality or objects are the arbiters of whether our theory is true or not. From a constructivist perspective, reality is a construction deriving either from a computation by our nervous system (biological or psychological reality) or by communicative processes within a (scientific, religious, economical or public) discourse (social reality). Mitterer reconstructs the constructivist position as a two-step epistemology: first, descriptions constitute the object, then, after the constitution of the object, this object can be interpreted in different ways (cf. Mitterer 1993, §71). I do not agree with Mitterer’s assertion that constructivism (he uses the term idealism in this thesis) fundamentally distinguishes between constitution and interpretation. A radical constructivist perspective can be called radical because it is process-oriented, which means that every constitution is a construction (interpretation) and vice versa. Otherwise, we would be better to call this position reconstructivism, which is a moderate kind of realism rather than (radical) constructivism. With regard to the scientific value of “reality,” a constructivist argumentation would not even agree that the “constructed reality” has the power to decide whether a theory is true or not. Instead, constructivists talk of a second-order observation because participants of a discourse have come to the conclusion that they have achieved a consensus about theory-driven first-order observations. Mitterer’s technique of observing (scientific) discourses corresponds with the constructivist concept of second-order observation.

Mitterer’s main practical goal seems to be to show the hidden assumptions of dualizing discourse and the power mechanisms working within dualizing discourses (cf. Mitterer 1999, §13). If I am right, a constructivist second-order observation and a constructivist epistemology have the same goal. As a consequence, the difference between non-dualizing philosophy and constructivism seems to be overestimated, at least in a practical sense, when doing empirical research. Either radical constructivists are non-dualists themselves or they follow a dualizing argumentation of a kind that does not have the same fatal consequences that a realistic dualization has. In the latter case, Mitterer’s argument that there is a fundamental difference between dualizing and non-dualizing philosophy should be toned down because the differences within dualizing philosophy are too big to ignore (as Mitterer does). These differences within dualizing philosophy interfere with the main difference between non-dualizing and dualizing philosophy so it would be better to gradualize the differences between dualizing and non-dualizing philosophy and not dichotomize them.

As a consequence, I want to show that both non-dualizing philosophy and constructivism come to the same conclusions about the pragmatics of empirical research. Mitterer’s strong argument that philosophy cannot escape arbitrariness is “true” in a logic sense. From a socio-logical perspective, both society and science can theoretically be modelled as social systems and thus try to reduce arbitrariness with the help of rules and norms. In the following paragraphs I want to show how this mechanism works in the case of the relationship between theory and empirical research. Mitterer’s non-dualizing epistemology is very helpful for this argumentation but a constructivist epistemology is helpful too (unlike a realistic perspective).

The relationship between theory and empirical research in non-dualizing philosophy

It is to Stefan Weber’s merit that he draws conclusions from non-dualizing philosophy for the practice of empirical research. Instead of the usual dichotomies of theory vs. practice, theory vs. empirical research or theory vs. method(ology), Weber (2000, pp. 71ff) suggests a mutual constituency of four scientific components: theory, method(ology), empirical research and practice. Although he follows constructivist definitions of the four components, he maintains distance from both realism and constructivism with regard to the relationships between these four components. Scientific reality emerges from the circular, process-related, dynamic and contingent relationship of theory, methodology, empirical research and practice.

Weber’s main suggestion for practical empirical research is to separate fundamental epistemological propositions (such as “reality is constructed by observers”) from empirical hypotheses on trends. Dichotomous concepts such as self-reference vs. external reference, autoapoiesis vs. heteropoiesis, autonomy vs. heteronomy, etc., result in binary ontological schemes and should be replaced by gradualized empirical concepts. Gradualization does not neglect dualization but replaces fixed descriptions so far (“mass media construct a reality of their own,” “social systems are autoapoietic,” etc.) with empirical descriptions from now on (“mass media descriptions of reality are more or less constructed or authen-
tic,” “social systems are more or less autopoietic or heteropoietic,” etc.). Gradualization can also be understood in a time-related sense: autopoietic systems have not always
been autopoietic but have emerged from society in a historical process (cf. Weber 2000, pp. 79–88; Weber 2005, pp. 333ff).

These replacements decrease the gap between abstract and logic-driven theory and empirical research because theoretical hypotheses including gradualized concepts better match empirical research than abstract or logic concepts, which cannot be tested. As a consequence, the revised understanding of theory (which, by the way, comes very close to Popper’s understanding of rational hypotheses) cancels the dualism between theory and empirical research and guarantees equality for both modes of description. This distinction between a philosophy of thinking and empirical practice of observation is suggested not only for constructivism but also for non-dualizing philosophy (cf. Weber 2005, p. 338, p. 343).

Practical goals of a non-dualizing science would be a de-dualization or de-dichotomization of binary positions in many scientific discourses. Although even non-dualizing philosophy includes the logic of distinctions, these distinctions do not reinforce dualisms in the sense of dichotomies (cf. Weber 2005, pp. 351f).

Although I agree with Weber’s attempt to build a bridge between (abstract) theory and (concrete) empirical research, I am afraid that Weber’s solution leads to a new problem because there is now a new gap between abstract or logic-driven theories (such as philosophy or theories of society) and empirical hypotheses. Should we, therefore, abandon constructivist logic?

Some of the abstract and logical concepts, such as self-reference, autopoeisis, autonomy, etc., can be considered a starting point for empirical observation. If I want to observe a social system, I have to assume that this system can be observed as a system. Therefore, I will observe it from the starting assumption of autopoeisis (unless I observe an object that cannot be considered a system but that might be any other kind of object).

When carrying out empirical research I may come to the conclusion that the autopoeisis of the system observed is not a strict one but one that has to be gradualized because the structure of the system is determined by many internal and external factors. My suggestion comes down to a dual use of the concepts “autopoeisis,” “self-reference,” etc., and I think this is not very far from Weber’s concept of gradualization (cf. Loosen, Scholl & Woelke 2002).

However, there are terms or concepts that cannot be used in an empirical sense. One of these terms is “construction.” Mitterer and Weber criticize that the way of speaking of “construction” is just “a façon de parler” because everything is a construction. They ignore the constructivist distinction between first-order observation and second-order observation. In everyday life we are realists and do not doubt that our observations represent the object/world/reality observed as it is. It is only second-order observation that observes that an observer has observed the object/world/reality. Only from this perspective do we consider an observation construction. But the term or concept of construction is not the opposite of (correct) representation because all representation does strictly relate to an observer. It is not possible to state a proposition about correct or false representation.

The relationship between theory and empirical research in constructivism

In the following I will try to explain my understanding of constructivist epistemology with regard to the relationship between theory and empirical research. These elaborations base on the position Schmidt (1998) has developed.

First, theory is not conceived of as narrow, as it is in critical rationalism. From a critical rationalist’s point of view, theory has to be rational before it can be tested with the help of empirical research. Rationality of a theory means that all hypotheses derived from theory can be tested empirically. As a researcher I have to legitimate the rationality of my hypotheses in advance. From a constructivist perspective, the rationality of a theory or of hypotheses is a product of scientific discourse and not its presupposition because the relationship between theory and empirical research is contingent. Maybe a theory cannot be tested empirically so far, but it is possible that either theory or empirical methods will be developed in a way that this theory can be tested from now on.

Empirical research operates with facts (objects made) rather than with data (objects given). It stabilizes scientific observation by depending on methods and methodological rules that are valid (so far) and accepted within the scientific community (cf. Schmidt 1998, pp. 124ff). Stabilization also includes reduction of complexity and trivialization (sensu Heinz von Forster) (cf. Schmidt 1998, pp. 125ff, pp. 140f). Probably Mitterer would suspect a kind of dualism behind the notions “complexity” and “trivialization”, a kind of substratum of reality. In fact, complexity and trivialization do not relate to a real world outside the (scientific) discourse, but characterize the comparison of two descriptions: a scientific description resulting from empirical research and a non-scientific description resulting from interviewees in an interview or from a text in a text-analysis. As both interviewees’ responses in an interview and textual interpretations in text analyses or content analyses are contingent, a specific scientific interpretation is only one possible interpretation from many other possibilities. If a constructivist uses the terms “complexity,” ”reduction” or “trivialization,” he need not refer to an object as a substratum (surrogate) of the “real world” but to the comparison of several possible descriptions. Scientific description is just one of these and is determined by methodological rules that are, as abstract rules, consensus in scientific community.

Introducing theory into the process of scientific knowledge makes the argumentation even more complex. According to Schmidt, who characterizes theory and empirical research as two sides of a coin or two aspects of a complex totality, there is no theory without elements of empirical evidence and no empirical evidence without a theoretical framework. Indeed, it is only theory that makes empirical observations possible. Theory consists of more abstract propositions following certain rules (e.g. rules on how hypotheses have to be formulated or established). Empirical research consists of descriptions that are much more detailed and concrete (less abstract), although they follow certain rules (e.g. methodological rules written down in textbooks or known from scientific experience). Both theory and empirical research result in (different kinds of) description of an “object,” which in sci-
ence is a subject or topic rather than an object.

In critical-rationalist philosophy, empirical research is an arbiter of theory (of propositions in the form of hypotheses). This view presupposes that empirical research refers to an object itself. Although even realists do not think that empirical observations immediately reflect reality or objects in reality they suppose that rudimentary descriptions of an object are “closer” to the object itself than advanced, theoretical, abstract descriptions. Mitterer criticizes that this assumption cannot be founded but only be presupposed as given. Consequently, empirical observations or descriptions are also descriptions of an object (although different kinds of descriptions rather than theoretical descriptions) and therefore cannot be used for falsification. Despite Mitterer’s sceptical attitude towards constructivism, his philosophical position fits the constructivist position with regard to the relationship between theory and empirical research.

I will try to work out this argument. Accepting a theory or hypothesis is a question of consensus within the scientific community. This consensus includes several elements. First, the researchers have to refer to the same tools, methodological rules and their applications. Then, the researchers have to refer to the same subject or matter of interest. Furthermore (and probably not finally), they have to accept that the theoretical hypothesis raised matches empirical research on this hypothesis. Disagreement may occur if the method used is controversial, if the hypothesis is not accepted as a rational proposition, or if the method used is supposed to be unsuitable to test the hypothesis under question, etc. In sum, scientific consensus is related to the relationship between theory and empirical research and may include both verification and falsification of the hypothesis by empirical results. There is no need for correspondence or coherence in a logical or ontological sense because consensus is a matter of the social procedure of doing scientific research. Schmidt (1998, pp. 152ff) has pointed out this “action-related” understanding of (doing) empirical research is from a constructivist point of view, which I think entirely fits the non-dualizing position because it avoids referring to a world beyond (scientific) discourse. It would be a misleading interpretation if an action or discourse approach was assumed to prefer consensus and standstill to disagreement and change. Both results are possible.

We have to go one step further to describe an alternative understanding of the relationship between theory and empirical research to the classical understanding, which attributes to empirical research the role of an arbiter of whether a theory is true or false. The critical rationalist’s understanding of the relationship between theory and empirical research is characterized by the preference of logical deduction to logical induction. We start with a hypothesis and try to find out (with the help of empirical research) whether it is true (provisionally or so far, definitely and not for ever) or false. Qualitative methodologists have often challenged this view as only half of the “truth” and as not typical or even not relevant for actual research procedures. They prefer an inductive (or abductive) logic, which does not start with explicit but with vague hypotheses that will become more detailed, more complex and better adapted to the data in the course of empirical research. In this view the research process is not linear but can be described as a spiral leading to better understanding of the phenomenon (subject, object, topic, problem etc.) under study. This seems to be a typical constructivist view of research and scientific discourse. But there is a danger of dualization within this argumentation, too. Again, the data (empirical descriptions) are characterized to be closer to reality (beyond scientific discourse). The term often used for that is “authenticity.” Interviewees’ responses to open questions (within in-depth-interviews rather than standardized interviews) or text interpretations (within hermeneutical text analysis or qualitative content analysis) seem to be more realistic, more valid, or nearer to the meaning constructed by the interviewee or by the text.

From a constructivist perspective, this argumentation is misleading, as we do not know if there is an original perspective (description) of the interviewee, the text, etc. or if we can reconstruct it. What we do know is that we include interviewees and texts into the process of empirical research to gain (further) scientific knowledge and discourse. Siegfried J. Schmidt (1998, pp. 155f) characterizes the scientific discourse as a self-explanation including external references. Thus the term “external references” does not mean the assumption of a world outside and beyond the discourse but the self-referential and self-perturbing mechanisms. Self-referentiality and external referentiality are two sides of a coin, two kinds of strategy for carrying out descriptions of objects (within scientific discourse).

The practical difference between qualitative and quantitative methodology is the observer’s visibility within the research process: a qualitative methodologist (in his/her role as interviewer, text-analysar, participant observer, etc.) is gradually more visible than a quantitative methodologist (cf. Pørksen 2006, p. 107). Pørksen argues that the observer’s status can neither be eliminated from a research procedure nor from research process as a whole. Thus, particularly quantitative methodologists who rely on a realistic epistemology are wrong with regard to their role within empirical research. The introduction of an observer to the process of empirical research seems to be an ontological decision in itself. From a non-dualizing perspective, we better express this matter of fact like this: The (self-) description of a qualitative or constructivist methodologist as a visible observer corresponds to and defines the observer’s role in the research process as more subject-related. As a consequence, the quantitative or realist methodologist is right when he neglects his (active) role as an observer in his (self-) description but constitutes this role as subject-independent with the help of his (self-) description. Scientific discourse itself decides whether the observer’s role in the process of empirical research is an issue of relevance for the validation and interpretation of the empirical results or not.14

What are the consequences for a constructivist understanding of methodology and methods, then? Bernhard Pørksen (2006, pp. 105–118) asks some important questions a constructivist has to answer when doing empirical research and discusses different answers to these questions: (1) Do methods and methodological tools have to be changed according to the epistemology or methodology preferred? (2) Do the results of empirical research have to be interpreted in different ways according to the epistemology or methodology? (3) Can methods of different epistemological and methodological origins and bases be combined?
Although the answers to these questions are debated controversially, I prefer a position that I think is closer to the non-dualizing epistemology than the opposite position. As the relationship not only between theory and empirical research but also between theory and methods or methodology is contingent, it is not possible and not necessary to draw strict conclusions from epistemological standpoint for the use of methods and methodological tools. On the other hand, this relationship is not an arbitrary one. The answers to the questions raised above are no—yes—it depends: (1) Constructivists do not have to develop their own methods and tools of methodology. Of course, they can apply methods that are developed from the perspective of a realistic epistemology if (2) they keep this realistic origin in mind and interpret the empirical results obtained from these methods within the constructivist epistemology. However, it is reasonable to evolve methods that were established within a realistic epistemology towards constructivism. 1) 3 Qualitative methodology seems to fit constructivism, quantitative methodology seems to fit realism. A combination is possible if the epistemological differences are ignored pragmatically or if the results of this combination are interpreted within constructivist epistemology (cf. Loos, Scholl & Wolke 2002; Scholl 2008a, 2008b).

In sum, the debate of the epistemological origins of and consequences for methodology and methods is a second—order debate, which in practical empirical research does not play a role unless there is a methodological debate about the application of methods or the interpretation of the empirical results. From a non-dualizing perspective, this debate can be delegated to a meta—discourse within science. This meta—discourse regulates the relationship between theory and empirical research and between theory and methods. An interpretation of these relationships that satisfies both non—dualizing epistemology and constructivism can be the description of what is going on (and not what should be going on) in the research process.

Specifying empirical research by differentiating between qualitative or open research methodology and quantitative or standardized research methodology reflects the process of refining. Following a qualitative access to research practice implies keeping as much complexity of the phenomenon observed as possible to the first stages of the research process (data inquiry) and reducing complexity in the later stages of the research process (data analysis). Within the framework of a reconstitutive epistemology, this openness to the phenomenon under study is often misunderstood as a more authentic approach, although it only means a higher degree of complexity and refinement at the beginning of the research process, but one that will be reduced and abstracted at the end of the research process (cf. Scholl 2008a).

Following a quantitative access to research implies reducing the complexity of observation immediately at the beginning of the research process by standardizing the methodological rules and tools of methods, which leads to a less refined mode of observation. In the analytical stages of the research process, complexity is refined by the use of complex statistical tools. Standardizing methods is often misunderstood as a necessary and sufficient condition for comparison between research objects, e.g. respondents within surveys or observation units within observational methods (cf. Scholl 2008b).

Conclusion

Non-dualizing epistemology is a challenge for both of the opposing epistemologies, constructivism and realism. However, I have argued in this article that most of the non-dualizing criticism of these epistemologies is relevant for realistic epistemology because constructivism and non-dualizing philosophy have more in common than non-dualizing philosophy and realism or constructivism and realism. Thus, I challenge the claim of the equidistance of non-dualizing philosophy from constructivism and realism. Reconstructing Mitterer’s argumentation, particularly his position towards the research process and the relationship between theory and empirical research, shows that non-dualizing philosophy should not only be used as a critique of constructivism but can also be used to clarify constructivist positions. Mitterer’s “exaggerations” of the difference between non-dualizing philosophy and constructivism are probably caused by the variety of constructivist approaches, including lots of internal differences.

The general idea of this article is that empirical observation refines and adjusts theoretical observation. Doing empirical research in comparison with theoretical statements implies a permanent check and balance between abstraction and concretion. The mutual relationship between theory and empirical research is characterized by stabilization and by irritation or perturbation. This should be consistent with non—dualizing and with constructivist considerations.

In sum, we can learn from non—dualizing philosophy that the relationship between theory and empirical research is not a kind of mutual validation to get better knowledge of a world outside but the relationship could better be characterized as refining observation and balancing abstraction and concretion of scientific observation. The gradualization of complexity best describes this relationship.
Notes

1. It should be mentioned that in a non-dualizing way of speaking the notion of falsification cannot claim the same logical status as it does in critical rationalism, although in the case of controversial descriptions of an object, it is almost inevitable to talk of "true" and "false" statements within a discourse. The attributes "true" and "false" should not be understood in a strict logical sense, as they are products of a discourse or debate and not the result of necessary qualifications of a (theoretical) statement with the help of criteria beyond this discourse (such as object, reality, etc.).

2. According to Mitterer, this criticism does not only concern realistic philosophy but also constructivist or idealistic philosophy because it does not matter whether the object is given before its description or is produced by language (cf. Mitterer 1993, §66).

3. Mitterer’s position, in this case, resembles a theory of autopoietic social systems, which assumes that the scientific system (or discourse) is autonomous and self-referential. The system’s relationship to (objects of) its environment is characterized by a system-determined construction of the objects in its environments (cf. Luhmann 1990). According to Mitterer the objects have no independent identity but are already (so far) described with the help of the system’s language.


5. There is only one exception: with regard to the analysis and problematization of dualistic presuppositions, Mitterer labels himself a constructivist (cf. Mitterer 1999, §21).

6. However, I entirely agree with Mitterer’s critique of Maturana’s principles of scientific explanation (cf. Mitterer 1993, pp. 131ff). Maturana’s criteria fail to distinguish between scientific and non-scientific explanations. They only show that science is a kind of social system (according to Niklas Luhmann’s theory of social systems) with its own code for deciding which explanations can be called scientific and which cannot. Obviously such systems are self-referential, and the border between the scientific system and its environment is a matter of social processes, including mechanisms of social influences, power, etc. (cf. Luhmann 1990).

7. In his critique of constructivism even Mitterer (1993, pp. 146f) admits that the change of perspective from the object of knowledge to the process of developing knowledge is much closer to a non-dualizing epistemology than to a realistic position. I do not know whether Mitterer accepts Schmidt’s turn to a new constructivism that tries to react to non-dualizing objections and to integrate non-dualizing argumentation (cf. Schmidt 2003). It is Weber (2005, pp. 231ff, pp. 298ff) who still detects passages in Schmidt’s book that he considers as ontological remaining in Schmidt’s argumentation. Obviously, Schmidt’s constructivist philosophy and Mitterer’s non-dualizing philosophy do not merge entirely.

8. Weber (2005, p. 266, footnote 7) argues that it is almost impossible to develop a non-dualizing way of speaking without inventing an artificial language (examples are presented on p. 293, footnote 22). If a participant in a discourse uses words like “probable” or “presumable” (instead of “obvious” and “evident”), is he then a non-dualist? Or the other way around: are words such as “evident”, “obvious” etc. really (necessary or sufficient) indicators for a dualizing way of argumentation or are they simply habitually used words? Does communication (pragmatic aspect) merge into language (semantic aspect)?

9. Pörksen (2006, p. 101, footnote 235) offers a didactic explanation for a sometimes inconsequent use of language: Maturana’s aim is to make people who are not used to thinking in such unusual terms and concepts understand the constructivist position.

10. Weber (2005, p. 284) supports Mitterer’s thesis of a fundamental difference between non-dualizing philosophy and constructivism when he points out that viability is a criterion used to decide whether a (new) description fits a constructed reality, whereas non-dualizing philosophy compares or confronts old and new descriptions. New descriptions of an object result in new objects described; they are not mere constructs. If we understand viability as a communicative criterion it only means that discourse participants agree with their constructions. Thus, constructed reality in a constructivist sense is a described/discussed reality, which comes very close to non-dualizing descriptions of objects. Furthermore, viability significantly differs from truth, as two (or even more) different perspectives may both (all) be viable constructions. Eventually, viability, in contrast to the criterion of truth, does not necessarily serve as a strict criterion for excluding other perspectives than those already accepted as viable.

11. However, Weber (2005, p. 267) insists on the difference between the constructivist concept of second-order observation or the logic of a blind spot and Mitterer’s concept of suspicion of a false observation (“Falschwahrnehmungsverdacht”), which means that every new observation is suspected to be false or illusionary. Weber prefers Mitterer’s concept to the constructivist concept of the blind spot because it is entirely free of ontological presuppositions. But is this argument suitable for a fundamental critique of constructivism or is it just a way of using language differently?

12. Again, Weber’s concept of an auto-constitutive relationship is similar and comparable with a constructivist or a system-theoretic position, although Weber postulates a difference.

13. Weber (2000, pp. 82f) denies that starting assumptions, like definitions, should imply autopoiesis because whether a system can be characterized as autopoietic or not should be open to empirical research. Avoiding circular argumentation is necessary within critical rationalism, which describes the process of research as linear. But Weber himself conceives empirical research as an auto-constitutive process. Theory and empirical research cannot strictly be separated. Weber’s solution of starting with the assumption that a social system can be defined as a “form” within a “medium” just shifts the problem of fo-
cussing the observation: What are the borders of a form? What do I observe if I observe the form (of what)?

14. Methodological arguments about the adequacy of either quantitative or qualitative methodology within empirical research often start with the subject-object relationship. This dualism need not be restricted to subject vs. object but can also be referred to different cultures (researcher’s cultural background vs. research object’s cultural background) or to the difference between a scientific system and its focused environment, etc.

15. I cannot elaborate this argument here as developing methodological tools in detail is a practical matter (cf. Görke 2006; Moser 2004).

References


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Non-dualistic? Radical Constructivist?

Karl H. Müller • Vienna Institute for Social Science Documentation and Methodology <mueller@wisdom.at>

Purpose – Josef Mitterer’s essays are considered to be important philosophical advancements of radical constructivism. The main purposes of this paper are, on the one hand, to structure the RC landscape and, on the other hand, to investigate the relations of Mitterer’s work to radical constructivism in particular and to philosophy in general.

Findings – In this short essay focusing on Mitterer’s Das Jenseits der Philosophie, I would like to stress two major points. First, Mitterer’s book should be considered as one of several contemporary variants of a radical critique of the semantic turn in the philosophy of science that has taken place since the mid-thirties with the works of Rudolf Carnap, Carl G. Hempel, Hilary Putnam, Alfred Tarski and others. Second, it is by no means clear how to determine the relevance of the new semantic critique for the present and future cognitive status of radical constructivism. The degree of relevance depends crucially on the use of the term “radical constructivism.” If radical constructivism, as I will argue, is seen as an umbrella term for a group of empirical research programs, then, by sheer necessity, the relevance can be marginal only. If, however, radical constructivism is viewed as a special form of philosophy of language and/or as a new epistemology, then the importance of Josef Mitterer’s approach must be judged within the context of available functional alternatives.

Implication – An immediate consequence of this article lies in a renewed emphasis on advancing an empirical research agenda for radical constructivism and in an effective downsizing of radical constructivism as a philosophical perspective.

Key words – Cognitive maps, research programs, varieties of constructivism, varieties of dualism/non-dualism.

Reconstructing radical constructivism

In 1992 Josef Mitterer published the very well-written essay Das Jenseits der Philosophie (JP), which has been viewed by prominent former radical constructivists such as Siegfried J. Schmidt (2003, especially pp. 92ff) as a new manifesto for radical constructivism.

“Radical constructivism” has become a label that, like “happiness,” means contemporaneously different things to different people. There was a time when there was constructivism as a radical artistic movement that started after 1919 in the Soviet Union and that had lasting effects on the German Bauhaus. In the writings of Heinz von Foerster and the Biological Computer Laboratory (BCL), the term “radical constructivism” does not appear until the dissolution of the lab in the 1970s. There were no inside or outside descriptions of the BCL work as radical constructivist up to 1976, the date of the final termination of the BCL. In Beer’s books the word “radical constructivism” can nowhere be found as a self-descriptor, although Beer uses an interesting cognitive map for relevant approaches and persons in the field of self-organization and management cybernetics (see, for example, Beer 1994b, p. 570). Gordon Pask, probably one of the most radical thinkers and engineers, never lectured on or described radical constructivism in any detail. Instead, Pask propagated a still extremely interesting research program under the name of conversation theory (see, for example, Glanville & Müller 2007). Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela developed their autopoietic program without reference to radical constructivism. Even in 1987, in the German edition of the Tree of Knowledge (Maturana & Varela 1987), one will search in vain for the combination of the words “radical” and “constructivism.”

Who, then, invented the term “radical constructivism” as a group label, as a new interdisciplinary paradigm and as an intellectual and seemingly homogeneous post-modern movement?

In 1974 Ernst von Glasersfeld credited Jean Piaget as the core person for a new approach to learning, which von Glasersfeld termed “radical constructivism.” But in his 1974 article Jean Piaget was placed in central position and not von Foerster, Watzlawick, Varela or others. In 1981, Paul Watzlawick edited the volume Die erfundene Wirklichkeit (which was translated as The Invented Reality three years later) with the subtitle Contributions to Constructivism. Here, von Glasersfeld and von Foerster are presented at the beginning with von Glasersfeld’s Introduction to Radical Constructivism and von Foerster’s Constructing a Reality. However, in Watzlawick’s book one finds contributions by Jon Elster and by Rupert Riedl, too, who would have been very much opposed to being classified as radical constructivists. Thus, Watzlawick’s book could not be the tipping point in the rapid diffusion of radical constructivism.

In my view, it would be exceedingly difficult to determine a single event or occurrence as crucial or decisive for the diffusion of the group label “radical constructivism.” Rather, “radical constructivism” was invented in the German-speaking world in the course of the 1980s through a homogeneous flow of events, through self-propagations, especially by von Glasersfeld, and through publications, lectures, workshops, conferences or media reports, which were very much supported by the fact that the new group members knew each other very well and interacted intensively about their scientific work.

An important step in the construction of radical constructivism was, for instance, the publication of three volumes with articles by Maturana (1985), von Foerster (1985) and von Glasersfeld (1987). These three books
were published in German under the guidance of Siegfried J. Schmidt and brought these three authors to the attention of a German-speaking audience for the first time.

In 1987 Schmidt himself edited the book *The Discourse of Radical Constructivism* (Schmidt 1987), which comprised Maturana, Varela, von Foerster, and von Glasersfeld as well as a group of German authors who concentrated their work on special aspects of radical constructivism. Equally importantly, the 1987 volume contains a long introductory article by Schmidt on radical constructivism as a new paradigm for interdisciplinary discourse. In this overview, radical constructivism appears as a coherent design that was jointly generated by the work of Maturana and Varela in the domain of biology and by von Foerster and von Glasersfeld in the area of cognition and philosophy.²

Adding to the stream of events, in 1984 Niklas Luhmann published his *Social Systems* (Luhmann 1984), which contained very frequent references to von Foerster, Maturana and Varela and which raised interest in these three authors in the sociological or social science community.

By the early 1990s, radical constructivism had gradually emerged in the German-speaking parts of the world as a common label that von Glasersfeld persistently used as a self-description and that was also used as a self-description by other radically constructed group members of radical constructivism.³

Two important points must be emphasized.

On the one hand, the process of homogenization of radical constructivism towards a single paradigm was accompanied by a gradual drift towards the philosophical domain and by a successive marginalization of the inhomogeneous empirical research agendas. Both for the speakers of and for the listeners to radical constructivism a gradual convergence occurred towards a new philosophical paradigm with post-modern undertones, directed against realism, against ontology or against truth and addressed to the observer and to the empowerment of the observers as world-generators or world-producers.

On the other hand, highly important authors and groups not included in this diffusion phase of radical constructivism, such as Ashby, Beer or Pask, were no longer considered part of the radical constructivist core group and their “family resemblances.” Even Jean Piaget, although the unquestioned hero in von Glasersfeld’s 1974 article, moved into the periphery of radical constructivism.

Whenever one speaks of radical constructivism, especially in the German-speaking world, one should be aware, in a weakly self-referential mode, that this movement itself was the product of a radical construction that brought together a group of empirically operating and philosophically minded scientists, working in the United States, in Europe and in Latin America, under a unifying and seemingly attractive brand name.

In this article, a new term will be used, namely the concept of the radical constructivist set or RC set. The RC set comprises a group of heterogeneous research programs that had a “visionary leader” at their organizing center⁴ and that were developed from the late 1950s and 1960s onwards. The RC set includes, in alphabetical order, W. Ross Ashby, Stafford Beer, Heinz von Foerster, Ernst von Glasersfeld, Humberto R. Maturana, Francisco J. Varela & Ricardo Uribe, and Gordon Pask. In the 1980s and 1990s, Dirk Baecker, Peter Hejl, Ranulph Glanville, Niklas Luhmann, Gerhard Roth, Siegfried J. Schmidt, Paul Watzlawick and many others made significant additions and contributed, thus, to a rapid diffusion of significant parts of the RC set under the label of radical constructivism.

The descriptions so far have led to a bifurcation point. From here onward, this essay will follow along two different paths. The first way, which can be described as the internal road, gives a short description of Mitterer’s JP in the domain of contemporary philosophy. The second trajectory, the external one, will present maps of different program versions within the RC set and will assess the relevance of Mitterer’s perspectives for the entire RC group. It remains, then, for the reader, Mitterer or the author included, to decide and to determine the degree of relevance of Mitterer’s pragmatic turn for the field of philosophy proper.

The internal way

The internal road leads to the contemporary arena of epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind and other philosophical sub-regions such as ontology or modal logic. Topics to be addressed along this way include the scope of Mitterer’s approach, the wider context of his work and, finally, the degree of relevance within the present philosophical arena.

Turning to Mitterer’s JP essay from the year 1992, one of the most impressive points is the period of its production, which occurred between 1973 and 1978 at the University of Graz. At that time, radical constructivism had barely been invented and, for myself, I was stunned and fascinated at the same time to listen to Mitterer’s new way of language-thinking in the philosophical seminar rooms of the University of Graz.⁵

But already in the 1992 introduction to JP, Mitterer points to substantial changes in the cognitive landscapes after 1978 and he mentions Paul K. Feyerabend, Nelson Goodman, Francois Lyotard, Humberto R. Maturana, Richard Rorty, Heinz von Foerster or Ernst von Glasersfeld as important co-workers in the de-construction of semantics and of the philosophy of language as we knew it. Along the internal way, I will not attempt to present an overall evaluation of Mitterer’s new approach, but I want to stress three fairly obvious points, two of them related to the early construction period, the third one connected with the issue of non-dualism and with the scope of Mitterer’s approach in general.

The first argument stresses the considerable advances within the philosophy of language in general and within the semantic turn in particular, especially in the last decades. Contemporary versions of semantics have been able to accommodate and to adapt to the pragmatic critique that has swept the semantic stage, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. And this implies that the current versions have become far more sophisticated than the early referential semantics. Taking Scott Soames’s *Age of Meaning* (2003, see also Soames (2007)) both as a historical account of the last fifty years and as a potpourri of contemporary semantic frameworks, Soames basically argues that the pragmatic turn, despite its early successes during the 1960s and 1970s, has run into more and more internal difficulties and has been brought to an end through the analyses of Donald Davidson and, above all, Saul Kripke. Due to these new cognitive inputs one can see, in parallel, a revival of semantics.
and, following Soames, an effective downsizing of pragmatic aspirations.

The second point consists of a quick reminder that Mitterer, aside from the authors mentioned by him in the introduction, is by far not an isolated iconoclast or a lonesome prophet in a dualistic desert with only temporary and partial companionship from Nelson Goodman or Richard Rorty. I want to introduce just such another powerful non-dualistic tradition in American philosophy, namely the tradition from Wilfried Sellars (2002, 2007; Seibt 2007) to Robert B. Brandom. Taking Robert Brandom’s work, especially his Making It Explicit (1994) and Between Saying and Doing (2008) as another non-dualistic reference point, one finds a highly sophisticated terminological and logical machinery that is used within an overall recursive design. In the online version of his John Locke Lectures from 2006, Brandom characterizes his approach in the following way:

“My aim in these lectures is to present a new way of thinking about language, specifically about the relations between meaning and use, or between what is said and the activity of saying it. To that end, I will introduce a new metatheoretic conceptual apparatus, and develop it through applications to a number of sorts of locution that have, properly, been the focus of intense philosophical interest: logical and semantic vocabulary, indexical vocabulary, modal, normative, and intentional vocabularies. The concerns that animate this enterprise arise from a way of thinking about the nature of the general project pursued by analytic philosophy over the past century or so, and about its epic confrontation with Wittgensteinian pragmatism” (Brandom 2008a, p. 1).

Moreover, Brandom does not view a dualistic semantic perspective and a non-dualistic pragmatic approach as mutually exclusive alternatives, but sees them as complementary and as necessary parts in a larger whole. Brandom starts from a non-dualistic pragmatic framework and brings in, recursively, additional vocabularies in a triadic and self-generative manner. It would clearly go against the scope of this article to compare Mitterer’s and Brandom’s non-dualistic approaches, so I leave it up to the reader to decide whether a non-dualistic approach is covered best or preferably by Mitterer’s JP or by available alternatives such as Brandom’s past and present work.7

The third argument along the internal path centers on the question “Which kind of dualism?” On closer inspection it is not only possible, but even necessary to distinguish between at least three different forms of dualism/non-dualism.

The first kind can be qualified as semantic dualism/non-dualism and this form is based on the dichotomy of language and world, description and object, sign and referent, etc. In view of the subtitle of Mitterer’s book Against the Dualistic Knowledge-Principle one would assume that JP is not primarily concerned with the dualism of descriptions of objects and objects of descriptions. But Mitterer addresses this form of dualism and sees his non-dualistic position almost exclusively in the semantic domain, although at times he writes about the dualism between the world and our knowledge of the world (JP, pp. 21, 59).

The second form of dualism/non-dualism can be characterized as linguistic dualism and is based on the deep structure of languages. Languages that are based on a dual split between noun-phrase and verb-phrase can be qualified as dualistic languages. Here, Benjamin Lee Whorf and his linguistic relativity principle become central. Whorf does not eliminate linguistic dualism but places languages in a wider context and dualistic languages alongside other non-dualistic forms. At some point, Mitterer criticizes Whorf for his semantic dualism, but does not discuss the issue of linguistic dualism. Nevertheless, it is still an open issue whether non-dualistic languages could lead to different types of logic and mathematics or to different groups of physical theories about space, time and motion.

The third form of dualism/non-dualism is firmly rooted in the philosophy of the Greek-Western tradition from its very beginnings and can be classified as epistemological dualism. Epistemological dualism means a fundamental separation between at least two kinds of knowledge and runs under various distinctions such as, in a classical differentiation, doxa and episteme, objective and subjective knowledge, confirmed and unconfirmed knowledge, etc. The most consequential non-dualist protagonist in the third domain is, of course, Parmenides who, in his poem On Nature, states that thought and being are the same. Similarly, radical scepticism in the Pyrrhonian tradition can be viewed as another variant of epistemological non-dualism by placing all forms of knowledge on the same fallible or unfounded basis. Later forms of epistemological non-dualism question the differentiation between subject and object or between the object of knowledge and the knowing subject. Still other versions of epistemological non-dualism can be captured by the metaphor of Neurath’s boat or by his aphorism that science does not operate in any deep structure, because everything is situated at the surface-level only.

Upon a closer look, epistemological dualism is not in the program of Mitterer’s theater. The main arguments in JP are focused on the dualism/non-dualism between language and world. Only in his discussion on Maturana does Mitterer deal with epistemology and ontology, because this is the consensual domain between Maturana’s philosophical work and Mitterer’s philosophical replies. But in almost all instances in Part I and Part II of JP, Mitterer writes consistently about a semantic non-dualism or monism and does not address other non-dualistic issues that have some family resemblance to the semantic dualism/non-dualism distinction.

And this, in turn, leads to a preliminary answer to the first question in the title of the paper.

Non-dualistic? – Yes, in the semantic domain; no, in other arenas.

The external road

The external road leads to the fields of radical constructivism, broadly conceived as the RC set of empirical research programs. Here, the guiding questions will focus on the cognitive distances between Mitterer’s approach and the RC set, on potential heuristic guidelines from JP for different empirical research areas, on the relevance of JP for particular RC approaches or on the overall importance of JP for the RC set. The discussion along the external way will be probably more diversified and will culminate, in contrast to the previous section, in a preliminary assessment of the overall degree of relevance of Mitterer’s radical pragmatic turn for the entire RC set.
In a first move, the RC set will be presented in a detailed way through an operation called cognitive mapping (see, for example, Müller 1998 or Holenstein 2004). These maps offer a topological, two-dimensional view of research topics and their cognitive distances. In the following pages, a series of cognitive maps will be outlined that produce symbolic representations of various elements in the RC set. Likewise, Mitterer’s approach will be mapped as well in order to determine the degree of its cognitive closeness or its linkages to other components in the RC set.

Initially, the mapping will start with von Glasersfeld and his version of radical constructivism (RCG, see, for example, Glasersfeld 1997a and 2007). For the RCG mapping, as well as for the subsequent mappings, it will be useful to differentiate between three different areas of radical constructivism, which comprise radical constructivism:

**Area I** – an empirical research program

**Area II** – a meta-narrative for the post-modern condition. It is composed of contemporary discussions on postmodern conditions in a wide variety of fields, mostly outside the domains of philosophical sub-disciplines. As typical authors for Area II one can name, *inter alia*, Zygmunt Bauman (2000) or Jean-François Lyotard (1984).

Normally, Areas I to III are only weakly inter-linked whereas RCG and other programs in the RC set establish strong connections between them. And it is probably due to the permanent re-combination of these three arenas that RCG has been open to a cascade of different interpretations, including my present one. Moreover, one can show that von Glasersfeld plays in these three different locations simultaneously, even within a single article.9

Turning to Area I of the cognitive map, von Glasersfeld’s RCG is organized as an empirical research program with all the necessary ingredients of research programs. Figure 1 shows the typical modules or building blocks for empirical research programs such as a theoretical core (TC), a set of methods, models and mechanisms (MMM) linked to the theoretical core, the embeddedness of TC and MMM within a wider background knowledge (BK) as well as a class of paradigmatic examples, i.e., applications of the theoretical core and of methods, models and mechanisms on observable or actually observed processes.10

Shifting to the theoretical core, the main building blocks of RCG are adapted mostly from Jean Piaget. Basically, RCG in Area I uses Piaget’s action scheme approach with assimilation and accommodation as the two main dynamic operations. The class of relevant methods, models and mechanisms of RCG reflects this theoretical core and comprises a series of Piagetian models for the cognitive formations of fundamental concepts such as time, objects, identity or moral judgements. Moreover, the MMM-class contains instruments for conceptual analyses that have been developed by von Glasersfeld in his cooperation with Silvio Ceccato. Turning to the application side, one can find at least three paradigmatic examples of RCG, namely chimpanzee communication and the construction of Yerish language, the formation of numerical concepts in children and, finally, concept formation in the education of physics.11 RCG in Area I took place mostly between the 1960s and the 1980s, after von Glasersfeld entered the United States, although his earlier work with Silvio Ceccato served as an essential preparatory or latent phase for RCG as a research program. Table 1 lists several important building blocks for the theoretical core as well as for available models and methods of RCG in Area I.

Area II consists of two large segments, one being the history of philosophy, and one being contemporary philosophy, composed of areas such as epistemology, ontology, philosophy of science, logic, ethics and the like. With respect to the history of philosophy, RCG associates itself with a small philosophical tradition that includes various forms of idealism (Berkeley, Kant) because of the active involvement of the human mind or solitary thinkers such as David Hume or Giam battista Vico, who is applauded for the active role of the human mind in structuring experiences. Proceeding to the right-hand side of Area II in Figure 2, RCG can be characterized as a negative ontology, as yet another variant of an evo-
volutionary epistemology and as a philosophy of language that is pragmatic in nature.

For RCG, Area III has become increasingly important over the last two decades. Here, RCG sees itself as an intellectual avant-garde that tries to accomplish what David Hume provoked in Immanuel Kant, namely an awakening from dogmatic slumber or, more specifically, from realist daydreams.

Figure 2 summarizes the overall organization of RCG with the help of a cognitive map with three different areas. In Area I, RCG has been placed in the upper left-hand corner, which is due to the fact that Area I of the map is constructed with two explicit dimensions: a vertical one for micro-macro levels and a horizontal one for degrees of formalization. Area II exhibits a 0/1 dimension only, differentiating between the history of philosophy (left side) and contemporary philosophy (right side). Area III contains, once again, two explicit dimensions, a vertical one for degrees of diffusion and a horizontal one for conceptual complexity (low/high). RCG in Area III has been mapped with a high degree of diffusion and with a relatively low degree of conceptual complexity.

Continuing the cognitive mapping operations with von Foerster as another important member of the RC set, von Foerster developed a vision for a new type of living research on living systems under the heading of second-order cybernetics (SOC). In 1988, Foerster compared the attempted coup d’etat scientifique with an unusual form of reverse demolition:

“Everywhere, in the United States too, the oldest and most beautiful houses have nowadays been demolished and instead steel and glass-skyscrapers with 36 stories are being constructed. I want to emphasize the reverse process. I start with a 36 story steel and glass-skyscraper and demolish it. But I am not building a baroque castle instead, but something completely different: maybe a cockchafer, maybe an ant colony, maybe a family” (Foerster 1988, p. 20, my translation).

In short, the established scientific method with its emphasis on laws, physics and logic or, metaphorically, on glass and steel, is to be replaced by a Scienza Nuova of living systems and an associated epistemology of living science. More specifically, von Foerster points to two new elements that lie at the centre of SOC and that are needed to bring about this fundamental paradigm change, namely a new type of logic as well as new forms of algorithmic or formal description-devices (for more details, see Müller 2007a). Together with state-determined machines, cognitive tiles or, alternatively, non-trivial machines, these two elements formed the central triadic SOC-group.

With respect to SOC research designs, generative relations, triadic closures and autology formed a second group. Finally, the unity of cognition thesis, cognitive tiles and sensory-motor double closures constituted a third SOC group with respect to the new theory of cognition. Figure 3 summarizes the main building blocks for SOC with a total of nine building blocks and a multiplicity of triadic relations.

Subsequently, Figure 4 presents radical constructivism à la von Glasersfeld (RCG) and von Foerster’s second-order cybernetics (SOC), as well as their distribution across the three main areas. In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, von Foerster addressed some philosophical issues directly, although always in a brief and sketchy nature, which can be
classified, nevertheless, as Area II-contributions. Additionally, he developed a considerable number of aphorisms or *koans* that can be located in Area III in the same position as RCG. Von Foerster’s aphorisms became very popular and were immediately understood by people with heterogeneous backgrounds from science or from other domains such as coaching, family therapy or management consulting.

In Figure 5, two other important research programs from the RC set are mapped within the two-dimensional mapping space with three different areas. In general, Beer used the organization of the nervous system and complex geometry to design his viable systems models for the study of socio-economic organizations (Beer 1994a, b, c). Pask had a vision of a new theory framework for learning and communication under the name of “conversation theory” and a clear focus on machine-supported learning and teaching processes (Pask 1975a,b, 1976). Aside from a new research focus on machine learning and organization, some of the significant differences between RCG and SOC on the one hand and Beer’s management cybernetics (MBB) and Pask’s conversation theory (CTP) on the other are the following:

Turning to Figure 5, both Beer and Pask could be qualified as implicit philosophers, being rather reluctant to address genuine philosophical issues in Area II. They were writing on epistemology in the empirical rather than the normative domain and they were publishing almost exclusively outside philosophical journals and mostly for non-philosophical communities. Therefore, the circle for MCB and CTP is drawn with dotted lines. Additionally, Beer and Pask, despite a global and universal resonance (both were constantly engaged in modern arts and design, for example), did not build substantial links to postmodernism or postmodern philosophy. Pask’s *Microman* (1982, with Susan Curran), Beer’s *How Many Grapes Went into the Wine* (1994d) or his *Designing Freedom* (1994f) remain still highly readable books which, however, have never been near to becoming postmodern classics.

The mapping of the RC set could, in principle, continue with maps for Maturana or Varela (Maturana & Varela 1980, Varela 1979), who over the years drifted considerably apart in their emphasis on Area I and Area II research. But the mapping so far is sufficient for three general assessments of the RC set in general.

The first important point for me is that the maps of the RC set point to a rich and diversified research agenda that was focused on a highly interrelated network of topics, comprising brain-design, cognition, learning, living systems and organizations as central network nodes. This research agenda, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, produced a high output of new networks of relations, of new perspectives and of new insights. However, for a variety of reasons this period of high cognitive growth could not be sustained from the 1980s onwards.

Second, since the early 1980s, considerable advances have been made in the area of brain design, cognition, learning, living systems, and organizations outside the RC set and mostly without reference to the RC set. State of the art publications on the history and on the contemporary status of brain design, cognition, learning, living systems or organizations hardly ever refer to articles by or to persons behind the RC set. In 2008, the RC set in its Area I work has practically stopped having lasting or tangible effects on current research in brain design, cognition, learning, living systems or organization studies. (However, a new neurophysiologically-inspired discipline “neuroconstructivism” has appeared in the meantime, see Mareschal et al. 2007).

Third, the permanent re-combinations of new networks of conceptual relations, new theoretical insights on cognition, on the organization of the nervous system or on living systems in general, with new research designs...
CONCEPTS

Figure 4: A map for von Glasersfeld-style radical constructivism (RCG) and second-order cybernetics (SOC). C/P: Ceccato, Piaget; RCG/SOC: Warren McCulloch, Laws of Form. (Note: This is a conceptual representation and does not provide specific data or analysis.)

Figure 5: A map for Pask’s conversation theory (CTP) and management cybernetics à la Beer (MCB). NW: Norbert Wiener. Dotted lines indicate weak links.
generated, almost as a by-product, a rich repertoire or a surplus of paradoxes and counterintuitive examples for the broad scientific mainstream. Beginning in the 1980s, this rich repertoire became more and more central, especially in the lectures and articles by von Foerster or von Glasersfeld, and the underlying research agenda gradually vanished from the scene.

Within this overall context, Figure 6 produces a map of Mitterer’s JP together with radical constructivism à la von Glasersfeld. JP is placed obviously in Area II, with a link to Area III and no links to Area I.

In terms of cognitive distances, Figure 6 shows in a direct way that Mitterer’s JP comes closest to the writings of von Glasersfeld on problems in contemporary philosophy. In other words, Mitterer contributes to the discourse of radical constructivism in the philosophical domain. Through his radical and non-dualistic pragmatism Mitterer improves, most probably, the philosophical tool-box of radical constructivism, especially because von Glasersfeld, at times, mixes epistemological dualism and semantic dualism. Mitterer, however, is clearly operating in the domain of semantic non-dualism and argues against the dualistic constructs of language and reality, of description and object, of sentences and propositions and the like. Similarly to RCG, also JP is engaged in a cautious flirt with post-modernism, and small parts of JP add to the post-modern discourse of radical constructivism.

However, despite the closeness of Mitterer’s JP to von Glasersfeld in Area II and Area III, there are no family resemblances or links between JP and von Glasersfeld’s research agenda in Area I. So far, no JP elements can be identified that can be used as guidelines or a heuristic for empirical research in biology, the cognitive sciences or any other empirical science for that matter. The clear distances between JP and the empirical research program of von Glasersfeld can be generalized for the entire RC set. As pointed out earlier, the core issues for the empirical research programs of the RC set were focused on brain-design, cognition, learning, living systems and organizations. Thus, the relevance of JP for each of these topics must be considered as marginal at best or simply as non-effective. Mitterer’s JP plus his subsequent writings (see, for example, Mitterer 2001) and the empirical research programs of the RC set play in different cognitive environments and it would even be unreasonable to expect any significant inputs and effects from a purely philosophical essay in the right-hand side of Area II on to Area I.

The marginal relevance of Mitterer’s approach for the RC set can be supported by a second line of argument. The basic issues and problem-domains in Area I, namely brain-design, cognition, learning, living systems and organizations, are nowhere to be found or discussed within the context of JP. It is highly interesting to note that Mitterer’s critique of Maturana is situated exclusively in Area II and Mitterer is very careful to deal with the philosophical aspects of Maturana’s oeuvre and to leave his biological writings outside this debate. Thus, it becomes so obvious that from an Area I perspective JP is situated in the hereafter of empirical research, and that from an Area II-view the empirical aspects of the RC set remain irrelevant for the pursuit of Mitterer’s semantic non-dualism.

And this, in turn, leads to a definite answer to the second question in the title of the paper. Radical constructivist? – In the context of the RC set, no.
Conclusions

The conclusions of this article can be drawn in two ways.

First, this article can be seen as an attempt to assess the merits of Josef Mitterer’s JP approach as a philosophical program while drawing attention to the fact that RC as it developed during the 1960s and 1970s was explicitly research-driven and only implicitly philosophical. In recent decades, much of the RC work has become explicitly philosophical and not even implicitly relevant for research issues.

Second, in the light of the descriptions so far, one of the concluding continuations from now on can be couched in a very short dialogue between the title of this paper, or the reader for that matter, and the author of this article:

Non-dualistic? – Yes, in the semantic domain; no in other arenas of non-dualism.
Viably non-dualistic? – Maybe, although viable alternatives to Mitterer’s non-dualism abound. Radical constructivist? – Yes, but only in a very special version of radical constructivism as a philosophical or post-modern perspective exclusively.

Radical constructivist in a broader sense? – With respect to the much wider research side of RC, the answer is negative because one cannot find new inputs or tangible designs for the core issues and problems of RC research.

And what are the central RC research problems? – Brain design, cognition, learning, living systems, organizations.

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Notes

1. Due to the initiative of Ernst von Glasersfeld, an autobiography of radical constructivism was even being fabricated as How We Invent Ourselves (Foerster & Glasersfeld 1999).

2. It is interesting to note that in the bibliography of Siegfried J. Schmidt’s overview on radical constructivism he cites most frequently a group of German authors: Heij (6), Roth (6) and Schmidt (9)), followed by radical constructivists such as von Foerster (2), von Glasersfeld (4), Maturana (2) and Varela (3). Equally interesting, Piaget is cited only once and Ashby, Beer or Pask are not to be found in the bibliography.

3. See, however, Heinz von Foerster (2001, p. 241) who expressed his strong mental reservations against the term “radical constructivism” by saying, “I don’t want to be associated with constructivism. I have no idea what constructivism means” (my translation).

4. On the importance of visionary leaders, see, for example, Hollingsworth & Hollingsworth (2000).

5. This is another way of saying that Mitterer and I have known each other for more than thirty years. More importantly, we have developed an intensive co-operation in organizing conferences, workshops and lectures on the topic of radical constructivism in Vienna, especially in relation to von Glasersfeld and von Foerster. This special issue is also an occasion to thank Josef Mitterer for his tireless efforts in helping and promoting RC perspectives.

6. It is interesting to note that Mitterer himself speaks of two possible paths of a non-dualistic approach, which, following Gilbert Ryle or Clifford Geertz, could be classified as thick and thin approaches. A thin approach such as Mitterer’s uses only a small number of key terms, whereas a thick approach is context-sensitive and develops the non-dualistic framework with a rich vocabulary and a sophisticated logical machinery. (Mitterer 1992, p. 17)

7. I would like to point very briefly to a large number of unresolved issues for JP. For obvious reasons, in the non-dualistic mode, too, distinctions are needed to differentiate between, say, the word “Hegel” as a collection of letters [E, G, H, L] and Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel who became Professor of Philosophy in Berlin in 1818 or between the historical circumstances of Hegel’s early development and the overall structure and organization of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit in 1807. So far and until now, Mitterer’s descriptions have not provided any pragmatic clues or guidelines for pragmatic distinctions. Mitterer’s “The object of the description is the description of the object” is simply question-begging in this respect.

8. In the introduction to his essay on Maturana, Mitterer points to the delicate and self-supporting structure of Maturana’s biological work and his philosophical studies. In a variation of a dictum by Immanuel Kant, Maturana’s philosophical explorations without his biological studies would be empty and Maturana’s biological studies without his accompanying philosophy would be blind.

9. A detailed example, analyzing von Glasersfeld’s Introduction to Radical Constructivism has been given in Müller (2007b).

10. As a relevant selection from the philosophy of science literature, see Balzer, Moulines & Snee (1987), Donovan, Laudan & Laudan (1988) or Snee (1979).

11. These three paradigmatic examples have been taken from Glasersfeld (1997b), which presents a short autobiographical sketch.

12. For more details and for the principal components of RCG in Area II, see, once again, Müller (2007b).

13. The vertical dimension of Area I differentiates between micro-analyses at the level of the neural organization and macro-studies at the level of the observable behaviour of actors.

14. The horizontal dimension of Area I separates research programs with relatively low degrees of formalization (left side) from approaches with a high degree of formalization and modelling (right side).

15. According to von Foerster (2003, p. 302) the term “cybernetics of cybernetics” goes back to the year 1968 where this concept was invented jointly with Margaret Mead.


17. Particularly popular aphorisms were statements such as “Truth is the invention of a liar”, von Foerster’s ethical imperative (“Act always as to increase the number of choices”), his aesthetic imperative (“If you desire to see, learn how to act”), his
therapeutic imperative ("If you want to be yourself, change!") or "The listener, not the speaker, determines the meaning of a statement."

18. Each of the research programs in the RC set entered a period of stagnation and decline, due to the age of the program leaders, due to the non-availability of followers who could continue the current work, due to funding difficulties, due to health problems or due to political changes. Each of the programs in the RC set has its own and its specific history of decline.

19. It should be added that the position of Schmidt’s Histories and Discourses (2007, HDS) would be identical to JP in Figure 6 although the linkages would be different. In the case of HDS, linkages can be produced from HDS to a new and non-constructivist type of media and communication research in Area I.

20. It is sufficient to point to some passages in JP, especially in the preface (p. 14) and towards the end of Part II (pp. 107f) where Mitterer plays with JP not only in the semantic, but in the post-modern theatre as well.

References


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Notes towards Uniting Actor-Network Theory and Josef Mitterer’s Non-dualizing Philosophy

Krzysztof Abriszewski ◦ Nicolas Copernicus University, Toruń (Poland) <krzabr@umk.pl>

**1. Introduction**

In his two remarkable books, Josef Mitterer (1996, 2004) sketched a metaphilosophical approach called “non-dualizing philosophy” or “non-dualizing way of speaking” (NDS), which manages to describe most of (or the whole of) the philosophical tradition and contemporary philosophy in terms of dualizing way of speaking. Mitterer’s proposition deserves thorough discussion, since no other philosophical account was able to grasp the philosophical field so deeply with such simple conceptual tools. As a result, Mitterer’s books usually provoke two kinds of reactions: 1. “He must be joking” (Mitterer 1996, p. 6), 2. “There is something in it, but what was said is not enough.” If I was to choose, I would take option number two: I am sure “there is something in it,” and that NDS needs some interpretational elaboration and extension. But I am also certain, that there is much more in current NDS than it is assumed in option two. Interpretational elaboration and extension mean that NDS needs some work similar to coloring samples in order to make them visible under a microscopic lens: one has to apply NDS to, at least, some traditional philosophical problems in order to notice all the advantages of NDS. This cannot be done without some interpretational actions. Thus, having such a methodology, I would like to structure my argument as follows: I start with a brief sketch of NDS, than I move to the main part of the text, juxtaposing NDS with actor-network theory (ANT). One of my main claims is that the deep structural similarity between NDS and ANT naturally leads to uniting them. Such is my interpretational extension. Finally, I indicate only some of the problems that could be tackled or even solved by NDS that is extended in this way. At the very least it would be able to reformulate them in its own terms.

I. The non-dualizing way of speaking (NDS)

When writing a text like this, aiming at investigating convergences between NDS and ANT (I hope the reader is not irritated by the abbreviations yet), you have to introduce NDS very briefly. The shortest possible introduction boils down to a quotation from Mitterer’s *Beyond of Philosophy* (or *Beyond for short*);3

“The canon of core problems in philosophy, especially in epistemology, has not changed much since Plato. Problems have survived the attempts to solve them. There are no problems at the beginning of philosophy. There are only unproblematicized assumptions. Those assumptions consist of dichotomous distinctions (in epistemology and philosophy of language these are, for example, language-world dichotomy, object-description dichotomy, object-proposition dichotomy, being-consciousness dichotomy, subject-object dichotomy, and others)” (Mitterer 1996, p. 3).

Philosophy that is grounded in those dichotomous distinctions and that formulates philosophical problems starting with them, is called by Mitterer a “dualizing way of speaking” or just “dualizing philosophy.”

In *The Escape from Arbitrariness* (or *Escape for short*), he names common features of dualizing philosophies: dualizing (dualistic assumptions), truth orientation, and direction of thinking, which means object-oriented thinking (Mitterer 2004, pp. 11–13). Having introduced the first one in the quotation above, I shall briefly elaborate the second and third ones. According to Mitterer, truth orientation in dualistic philosophy is related to the necessity of philosophical controversies, which stimulate searching for techniques that would enforce one’s own account thus weakening opponents’. The essential part of the techniques strives against arbitrariness by moving towards truth (or Truth) and at the same time pushing all the opponents’ alternative accounts towards arbitrariness. Truth theories are thus vaccines for dualistic philosophy against arbitrariness and contingency, and reaching truth would be a warranty of successful escape from arbitrariness (Mitterer 2004, §10 in the introduction).

The third feature, object orientation, is also easy to comprehend with relation to philosophical controversies. When reaching disagreement, dualizing philosophers try to
select only one of the competing descriptions by referring to an object outside the discourse (Mitterer 2004, §10 in the introduction).

Given this, the idea of a non-dualizing way of speaking seems to be very simple. Its purpose is to describe how a dualizing way of speaking emerges and proceeds (see Mitterer 1996, introduction). It is emphasized that it is to be a "philosophical description" or "critical inquiry" in a traditional, Kantian way (inquiry into possibility conditions), and not some kind of historical analysis. The first aim of NDS is to throw light on dualizing assumptions, therefore NDS itself should be free from them, thus the name: "non-dualizing way of speaking" or "non-dualizing philosophy."

On the pages of Beyond, Mitterer proves to be very skillful at demonstrating how a dualizing way of speaking is embedded both in realistic (objectivist) accounts, and also in anti-realistic (relativistic) accounts. Quotes from works of Thomas Kuhn, the late Ludwig Wittgenstein, Benjamin Lee Whorf, and Willard van Orman Quine are taken to forcefully demonstrate dualizing assumptions (Mitterer 1996, introduction). Regardless of the way one evaluates the NDS project, how Mitterer proceeds is highly respectable. He never falls into attacking a weak, straw opponent of oversimplified philosophies. Conversely, instead of taking easy targets from objectivist texts, he rather picks sophisticated textual constructions to extract and demonstrate dualizing assumptions.

Yet, in turn, the very elaboration of NDS was so short and sketchy that many questions need to be posed and numerous issues discussed. To make a long story short: NDS views any investigation as a movement from one description to another, and then to the next one. Any description accomplished is called a "description so far," and its continuation, a "description from now on." To use Mitterer’s example of a teacher asking a student about the capital of Austria: dualism would describe this situation as speaking about an object, here, the capital of Austria (object orientation). NDS views it as giving the so far description “the capital of Austria” in order to move to a continuation, some from now on description, e.g., "Vienna." Yet a student could answer, “Zurich.” A dualizing way of speaking would view this as giving a false answer (truth-orientation), while a NDS philosopher would say that the very continuation is wrong: a description, “the capital of Austria,” does not entail a description, “Zurich.”

As stated before, NDS seemed to generate a bunch of problems. One of them was its relation to “reality,” and the issue of the “reality-description” relation (I use dualistic terms to demonstrate the problems in an ultimately clear way). The concept of “description” seemed to be a troublemaker (Is the whole world equivalent to a gigantic text, since one speaks only about descriptions?). And also, dualizing philosophy is always at hand, and that seemed too easy to be true, too alarming: it looked as if the whole of philosophy, all the schools and paradigms and thought styles were doomed in the abyss of dualizing philosophy. Some of those who heard my conference speeches on NDS asked about the point, plausibility and legitimacy of elaborating NDS, since we used to be very much into dualizing philosophy. Indeed, we know it very well, and we have elaborated it to a certain degree. Why then change one’s ways? The list of problems could be even longer, and I think all of those mentioned above could be solved or resolved. And then the only way to do that is to elaborate NDS further. I think that such an elaboration, the one that fits perfectly, is ANT, which has arisen in science and technology studies, mainly in the works of Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law. I do not promise that by the magic power of this ANT-NDS union, I am going to solve all the problems mentioned, but let me take the first step towards that.

Radical constructivism appears to be one of the main inspirations and contexts for Mitterer’s idea of NDS. In short, radical constructivism claims that a system (mind, society) is epistemologically closed and is not able to transcend its own experiences (Riegler 2001, pp. 5–8). As Alexander Riegler claims, the mind (i.e., cognitive system) is an epistemological solipsist. This thesis was applied and elaborated in various fields (communication theory, biology, sociology, cultural studies, psychotherapy, group therapy, cognitive sciences, etc.). Given this, it may be tempting to view NDS as a more radical radical constructivism, as an attempt to solve some of its internal problems by pushing certain ideas further. For example, when Mitterer says that even in dualizing philosophy we are not able to move beyond descriptions, one may interpret this as: Radical constructivism was not radical enough in emphasizing the epistemological closure of a system. Michael Fleischer, for instance, views NDS as belonging to a non-dualistic trend in constructivism together with Siegfried Schmidt’s works (see Fleischer 2005, pp. 18–39). Bernhard Pörksen proposed in a conference discussion that we deploy NDS as transcendental constructivism, that is, an account that investigates the possibility conditions of constructivism.

I think that if Mitterer’s NDS starts from radical constructivism, then it will arrive at something else. It is a distinct, original philosophical account. And, I believe that is the reason why it is structurally similar to ANT, and why they both look so promising. And this hope is what I am going to infect the reader with.

2. Convergences and similarities

Here, my main claim is: There are a number of profound convergences between NDS and ANT, which stem from analogous theoretical decisions made, respectively, in different fields with different conceptual tools (e.g., concepts, conceptual relations, methods, theoretical backgrounds). Certainly, there are major and minor similarities there. The list I present in this section is brief, but I would not dare to say that it is complete.

2.1 Dualizing no more

While Mitterer analyzes dualizing philosophy with NDS, thus making a criticism in the traditional sense, ANT refutes thinking in terms of primary and secondary qualities (Latour 1999b, 1999d). It is the same move done with different concepts and terms.

In §4 of Beyond, Mitterer says the following:

“The critical part of the book is directed towards a still-discussed idea of a given, discourse-independent and language-independent outside world that is mirrored or reflected in language. I am also interested here in ideas of a merely non-language or ‘different-from-language’ world, which could be called ‘sculptor theories,’ ‘chaos theories’ or ‘stream theories.’ These theories are grounded in a simple scheme, which one may typically find on the very first pages of books written by
There is a presupposition of a disorderly world, a chaos, a stream of things. Then this, at first, non-language, presupposed world is populated by human beings with their language, and they put it in order. The initially unshaped world is turned, by means of language, into a shaped world. This process depends certainly on the efficiency and range that we ascribe to a tool, i.e., language. Then it is not a non-language world, but just a ‘different from language’ one – you can hardly say what it looks like without our intervention. And the more language participates in world shaping, the more you cannot say anything about it. Thus a degree of relativism can be determined. And sometimes it goes as far as saying that different epistemological accounts are matched by different worlds” (Mitterer 1996, §4).

Further on, he says:

“Various framework relativisms suspend the part of the cognitive activity of language-reality dichotomy that deals with the very construction of a framework” (Mitterer 1996, §6).

In the beginning of §4, Mitterer speaks of objectivist splitting up, resulting in two domains: the non-language world and language that allegedly reflects the former. This is just a version of dualizing philosophy. Then, we have another version, which views the non-language world as at first a disorderly, undivided whole, which is then processed by the means of language so that it ends up as the world-as-we-know-it. Language is here a framework that we are imprisoned in. What Mitterer emphasizes is the common structure of those different versions of a dualizing way of speaking.

On the other hand, Bruno Latour refers to the same structure of thinking, when using such traditional philosophical terms as primary and secondary qualities. They appear in the context of the common views of science and the contribution of science studies. He says:

“Primary qualities define the real stuff out of which nature is made, particles, strings, atoms, genes, depending on the discipline, while secondary qualities define the way that people subjectively represent this same universe” (Latour 1999b).

“[T]hey [the secondary qualities – K. A.] only divide us into multiple points of view, which may be subjectively relevant but are objectively (in the traditional sense) irrelevant” (Latour 1999b).

“We will end up with a world made up of a substrate of primary qualities – what science sees but the average human misses—above which subjects add secondary qualities that exist only in our mind, imagination and cultural accounts” (Latour 1999d).

Although the terms used in the quotations above are “primary qualities” and “secondary qualities,” the structure that Latour describes nonetheless remains the same as in Mitterer’s dualizing philosophy. How does this happen to be? Look at Figure 1.

Figure 1: The most common way of viewing science, according to Bruno Latour. Science remains in touch with the primary qualities thus experiencing the real outside world, while the secondary qualities refer to the social, cultural or individual excess imposed on the real world as a result of the activities of human agents. Yet dualizing philosophy has the same structure. Human agents remain “imprisoned inside” language, which together with the non-language world creates the imprisoning framework. Whether you are a relativist or a objectivist (both are dualists) depends entirely on how much power you attribute to each side. A relativist would say: “We know nothing about the non-language world (0%), except that it is there, but everything comes from language (culture, group, mind etc.) (100%).” While an objectivist would say: “We know a lot about the outside, non-language world (say 70%), thanks to science, but there are also essentially language (cultural, group, mental, etc.) phenomena (30%).” The more objectivist you are, the more you grant to the non-language world, and vice versa.

Primary qualities in Latour’s argument occupy the same locus as the non-language world in the paragraphs quoted from Mitterer. Then, secondary qualities correspond to language. It is easy to translate between different philosophical vocabularies based on the same pattern as long as we stick to the hint that the primary qualities correspond to “the world” or “object” and the secondary qualities correspond to “the agent” or “subject.” Thus one may choose to complete the pattern with terms from the analytical philosophy of language (proposition, language, state of affairs), with constructivist terms (constructing of representations, unknown world), with terms coming from the Kantian tradition (phenomenon, thing-in-itself) or any other account.

Finally, it does not matter which terms you choose to complete the pattern with, whether they be primary and secondary qualities (as Latour says) or non-language reality and language (as Mitterer puts it). The important thing here is the very pattern of various forms of dualizing philosophy, and that they both (Mitterer and Latour) reject it (on different grounds).

2.2 Networks of associations

Rejecting one way of thinking usually leads to some positive cognitive offer. Both accounts – ANT and NDS – primarily are, above all, some kind of such intellectual, cognitive offer. Thus, one may suppose some sort of monism if referring only to the rejection of dualizing philosophy. Yet this seems be misleading when used unproblematically, without further analysis, because of the well-established philosophical tradition of the term. Instead, it would be better to focus on how ANT and NDS reinterpret cognitive practices in contrast to dualizing philosophy.

While rejecting the non-language object described inside discourse, Mitterer introduces a procedure of moving from one
description to another, from the so far description to the from now on description. I mentioned this when discussing the example of a student answering the question concerning the capital of Austria (see Mitterer 1996, §§14–19).

Generally speaking, it is possible to grasp any cognitive activity in terms of generating some new from now on description, some alternative from now on description or as a controversy between different descriptions. Mitterer does not elaborate this argument, but this can be easily done: for instance, an analyst may check whether the very movement from one description to another is justified. ANT calls this phenomenon “a trial of force” or “a trial of a connection/association” (Latour 1987, p. 78).

If one could view the cognitive practices from “above,” then what would become visible are the number of descriptions and movements among them, including conflicts and controversies about descriptions and movements, which themselves take the shape of descriptions and movements. I would say that what we have here is the network of descriptions generating new descriptions, connected with movements.

On the other hand, ANT speaks of fabricating, stabilizing, sustaining and breaking the networks of heterogeneous connections among various entities, usually called “actors” or “actants.” An actant is any being that acts, and acting means nothing but changing other or “actants. “ An actant is any being that acts, among various entities, usually called “actors” or “actants.” An actant is any being that acts, among various entities, usually called “actors” or “actants.”

2.3 Descriptions and articulations

Viewing cognitive practices as constructing the network of heterogeneous connections could be acceptable even for someone who is not an ANT or a NDS theorist, since s/he takes into consideration that what happens in the ordinary course of research amounts to a series of attempts to collect and bind together samples, their descriptions, measurements, the comments and opinions of our dear colleagues, quotations, our own opinions and views, methodological problems, money running short, stubborn instruments etc. Certainly, that is not ANT, but a proper step towards it.

Things are different with the term “description.” When speaking of cognitive processes as generating new descriptions, one may ask: And those are descriptions of what? Descriptions are defined as something belonging to language, so what about non-language things (such as the HIV virus, for instance)? Are we back in dualizing shoes?

In my opinion, there is only one plausible solution to that problem – a redefinition of “description.” Since dualizing philosophy is rejected, “description” cannot refer solely to the language domain. It is so important and so awkward that it requires careful analysis and a proper solution. So I postulate the change: we need to redefine description as referring not solely to language, but as a much more universal process, for instance a sort of Derridian writing. But the rest of this is for a different text, on a different occasion.

Nevertheless, there is a similarity between ANT’s networks of associations among various actants and NDS’s networks of descriptions. There is a shortcut to elaborating this that avoids the description-as-referring-soley-to-language problems. It goes through the notions of proposition and articulation introduced by Latour in his Pandora’s Hope as one of the metaphors for scientific practice, and used later on in a model of collective dynamics in Politics of Nature (see Latour 1999a, pp. 140–144; Latour 2004). By the way, I am afraid that “proposition” and “articulation” may seem obscure and hermetic, at least more than “actant” or “articulation.” Briefly speaking, let us define “proposition” as the equivalent of “actant,” and “articulation” as the equivalent of “association” (or “connection,” “delegation,” “translation” etc.). When using these terms, one would say that a proposition associates with another one by articulating it. For example, Pasteur articulates microbes, Alexander Riegler articulates constructivism (for instance in the text mentioned above), Stefan Weber articulates the non-dualizing theory of media, and I myself articulate Mitterer’s account, who in turn articulates NDS.

That is why I assume that “articulation” in ANT is the equivalent of “description” in NDS. The first defines cognitive practices as generating successive articulations, while the second defines it as fabricating successive descriptions. What piece is missing in the picture? Only this: NDS requires a concept or an idea that would match ANT’s “proposition.” But, honestly, this lack is due to the fact that NDS is still in its early stages, still under construction. Besides, NDS was invented as a small toolbox for analyzing dualizing philosophy, thus the lack is nothing but a program of analysis to be done.

I repeat, NDS speaks of generating successive descriptions, and ANT of articulations. Now it is time to focus on words like “generating,” “fabricating,” and “constructing.”

2.4 Dynamic and change

In the introduction to the Polish edition that opens Escape, Mitterer writes:

"The escape from arbitrariness is a contribution to the ‘philosophy of change’" (Mitterer 2004, p. VII).

Indeed, Mitterer emphasized movement from one description to another one even earlier, in his Beyond. The interesting thing was change, not a description. Furthermore, changes occurred while redefining everyday cognitive practices in NDS terms; before that it was hardly visible. Dualizing philosophy sticks to change of beliefs against an intelligible world (in realist dualisms) or unintelligible world (in constructivist dualisms). Here, NDS is located closer to constructivism. Realist accounts could refer to the correspondence between the results of cognitive processes and states of affairs (e.g., correspondence between a given proposition and a relevant state of affairs); while constructivist accounts that speak about unintelligible reality have to emphasize the internal dynamic and change of the cognitive results. NDS takes just one more step further but it also remembers the internal dynamic of cognition. Yet the step is crucial, because rejecting the so-called “other side of
discourse” equals elimination of a sharp boundary between ontology and epistemology. And this, in turn, is better elaborated by ANT.

ANT rejects the epistemology/ontology distinction, since any cognitive change (epistemological domain) is a change of a collective world (ontological domain) (Abriszewski 2006; de Vries 1995; Latour 1999a, pp. 92–98, 113–115, 145–146). Science and scientific practices (lab research, text writing, getting grants, etc.), which are the basic ANT research area, are viewed as the main sources of changes in a collective life (Callon, Law & Rip 1986, p. 4; see also models of scientific practices in Latour 1987, pp. 145–176, and Latour 1999a, pp. 80–112). And even the very processes in which representations are constructed do not move ANT at some other level or domain (e.g., knowledge domain) but mean only fabrication of the new actors (actors). ANT is not interested in idealized models of the constructing of representations (focused on leapfrogging between world and language), but it empirically studies long processes of meticulous fabrication of chains or networks of representations described by the notion of a “circulating reference” (Abriszewski 2006; Abriszewski 2007; Abriszewski & Afeltowicz 2007; Latour 1999a, pp. 24–79).

And yet again, ANT, similarly to NDS, does not look too much at networks; it rather emphasizes all the actions resulting in connecting the actors (translations, delegations), in destroying such connections or in testing their durability.

In short, ANT and NDS are convergent in two ways. First, they both emphasize change and dynamic rather than that what undergoes changes. They are focused on movements – from one description to another one, from one actor to the next. Second, the general picture that emerges shows the world of constant changes, permanently reshaping. There is no doubt, one may find more similar philosophical accounts to those two, at least in that respect. But, regardless of the need to do such comparative work in the future, there might be one small problem here, called “irreductions.”

2.5 Irreductions

Such is the title of one of the most difficult of Latour’s works.13 Yet what is at stake here is quite easy. As Latour puts it: “nothing by itself reduces to anything else” (Latour 1988a, section 1.1.1). Switching to NDS jargon: no from now on description emerges naturally from a so far description. Switching back to ANT: no association that connects actors is obvious, even the humblest of translations needs effort, even the smallest transformation has to be paid for.

Thus, any global change is a result of some collective effort.

This is more thoroughly studied in ANT. One of the results of this study says that there is no such thing as a natural border between science and its context (Latour 1983; Latour 1999a, pp. 109–112). Yet, referring to NDS, one may view Escape as an attempt to study the irreductions and the ways of blurring them, for the principle of irreduction is nothing but the principle of arbitrariness. If a philosopher wants to escape from arbitrariiness, which is carefully studied by Mitterer in Escape, then he surely tries to blur the principle of irreduction, exchanging it for some local necessities. He would like to say that some from now on descriptions are arbitrary, but there are some that are not. If the principle of irreduction in NDS says that no description generates another one by necessity, then a phantom of arbitrariiness appears on the horizon. Then the philosopher needs techniques of escape from arbitrariiness, of reducing it and refuting it.

When speaking of arbitrariiness, it is necessary to add another comment: neither ANT, nor NDS fall into praising some absolute arbitrariiness. That would be a misunderstanding. By emphasizing arbitrariiness, they try to focus on the effort needed in movement from one description to the next one, or when connecting various actors. Obviously, there are some local necessities and constraints here. But what does that mean? Only this: that if you study an object (create a from now on description starting with a so far description), say scientific practice, then you do not apply in advance any theory of, for example, what is scientific, and not. An ANT researcher is not allowed to apply any prior theory; s/he should just follow the actors, which means that local necessities are identified by the actors themselves and them only.

2.6 Infra-level

This leads to another similarity between ANT and NDS. The latter aims at describing dualizing philosophy by critical entering into philosophical problems. Not solving them, not just describing them, NDS wants to find a way leading to them (Mitterer 1996, p. 4). Mitterer uses the same methodology when he outlines the mechanism of arbitrariiness and truth theories as means of escape from it (Mitterer 2004).

ANT is similar when it investigates scientific practices – for instance, when studying the emergence of circulating references, which aim at mobilizing resources from the world. Briefly speaking, a circulating reference refers to a network that is fabricated while moving from an initial question (Is the Amazon forest shrinking? How does my brain work? How is it that the same HIV virus causes different kinds of AIDS in Africa and North America?) to the final stack of data (often with numbers and figures) that are used in a scientific report. ANT itself does not so much mobilize resources and construct circulating references in that way, but it describes how sciences manage to do that. It follows them step by step, mapping their smallest moves (Latour 1988b).Thus opponents sometimes accuse ANT of not using this or that scientific theory as a philosophical ground, which absolutely misses the point. It is not about grounding in theory, it is about following the connections in the same way, as NDS is about following the descriptions.

In short, both ANT and NDS prescribe proceeding on an infra-level. In both ANT and NDS, an analyzer is not at the same level as what s/he analyzes. S/he aims at describing the mechanisms of what s/he analyzes. S/he is like a car mechanic slipping under a car. And this leads to the last of the major similarities, if both have the same perspective, do they see the same things?

2.7 Scientific/philosophical controversies

The general similarity in the outlines of scientific and philosophical controversies stems from summarizing some minor similarities in that matter.

Mitterer says: “[T]he possible settling of a controversy between competing theories results from using some instance or criteria or at least by appealing to them” (Mitterer 2004, § 90).

The instances used may vary, these could be: “nature, reality, states of affairs, history or laws.” Then Mitterer adds: “Some of the
instances are mute, but they all have authorized representatives (…)” (Mitterer 2004, §91). This means, that the controversy does not involve instances themselves but only different analysts who invoke them. The winner is the one who is able to invoke them more efficiently, and fabricate better documents for that.

ANT similarly says that those involved in scientific controversies are spokespersons. These are spokespersons who strive to settle a controversy between competing accounts (Latour 1987, pp. 70–74). In this way, Pasteur is a spokesman for anthrax, and Talcott Parsons is a spokesman for social structure. In the same manner, it is not that the AIDS “infection” account competes with the AIDS “intoxication” account, but it is their spokespersons who are involved in the controversy, for example Robert Gallo, Peter Duesberg (and many others). They all aim at being better and more truthful spokespersons.

Reality, that is, the instances mentioned above, is represented in controversies by authorities (Mitterer 2004, §91). ANT, in turn, emphasizes that these are allies (including authorities) who help in making any new actor (an innovation) more real; briefly speaking, they help to construct reality (Latour 1987).

Mitterer says that it is “difficult to separate power, law, authority and truth” in scientific controversies (Mitterer 2004, §92). ANT similarly says that participating in controversies is expensive, and relies on mobilizing resources and allies by various means: lab research, redefining of classics of the field, putting more money into the research, writing negative reviews of competing books, articles and grant applications etc. (Latour & Woolgar 1979, pp. 105–150; see also the already-mentioned models of scientific practice: Latour 1987, pp. 145–176 and Latour 1999a, pp. 80–112).

Both ANT and NDS point out that participation in a controversy often involves tremendous costs (Mitterer 2004, §25) because running a laboratory, having your polls paid, buying new equipment, and even purchasing books are expensive (Latour 1987, pp. 145–176 and Latour 1999a, pp. 80–112).

Mitterer says that truth claims do not solve a controversy, something more is needed, something like a fundament or an instance that may be referred to (Mitterer 2004, §§90–91). According to ANT, the result of a controversy depends on which party can afford to enlist more resources, powerful allies and which of the competing parties’ resources and allies could be weakened, counter-recruited or just made useless.

It is said in Escape that “discourses do not start with a conflict, but with a consensus” (Mitterer 2004, §127). In the same way, ANT points to black boxes and stabilized networks of relations, which act as a whole (see Callon & Latour 1981, p. 285; Latour 1987, p. 35 on black boxes; see Abrizszewski 2005 on initial consensus and black boxes).

One way of enforcing an account, as Mitterer puts it, is depersonalizing it (Mitterer 2004, §§128–134). There is a big difference between saying “I see a similarity between ANT and NDS,” and saying “There is a profound convergence between ANT and NDS,” or even saying “The structural similarity of NDS and ANT has been scientifically proved.” But when viewing the competing account, you may use a reverse of that trick: “John Doe is not able to notice the similarity between NDS and ANT because of his prejudices.” Personalizing reduces an account to someone’s personal mind games. Thus the account loses its serious structure, turning into a sort of individual flight of ideas.

ANT presents the (de)personalizing of accounts and propositions as an element of a wider concept of modalizing of statements. An initial statement may move towards fact or fiction depending on positive or negative modalizations (qualifications) (Latour 1987, pp. 22–26; Latour & Woolgar 1979, pp. 75-86).

Finally, Mitterer says that it makes no difference if you are a realist or a constructivist when it comes to the results of a research process or an investigation (Mitterer 2004, §6 of appendix 2). Latour notices that Pasteur, in his scientific practice, is a bit of a realist and a bit of a constructivist, depending on the situation, and that it does not seem incoherent (Latour 1999a, pp. 127–133).

3. Fusion

It should be clear now that NDS and ANT are significantly mutually convergent. The very convergence refers both to certain individual claims and to the whole structures of thinking. Both reject the dualizing way of speaking, offering some alternative instead. Both are relational and anti-essentialist, and have the network as their global model (or topology). However, both are reluctant to speak of networks, since both prefer to study the making of descriptions/connections than to focus on static network-like end products. Both emphasize that connections (or moving from one description to the another) are contingent, and reductions are “unnatural” (irreduction principle). Both try to study cognitive practices, that is network-building practices, from the outside.

All these convergences are good reason to make a fusion of both ANT and NDS, one that brings to mind an ordinary zipper used in jackets. Both sides of a zipper need to match but cannot be identical, in order to work properly. And the zipper itself connects two different sides, so they are united in making something new (for example, a jacket that protects from the wind).

NDS and ANT are both parts of the zipper here. The fusion of them would be better than mutual translation of key concepts because it may give us something else, because the two accounts offer two different domains. Both represent different fields of research, different methods, questions and results. ANT operates in the area of science and technology. NDS operates in philosophy. ANT is a contemporary form of empiricism, NDS is critical in the best, traditional meaning of the word. ANT says: “follow the actors,” NDS says “study the conditions of the possibility of philosophy.”

What connects them – the point of first contact in the zipper – could be the notion of a description redefined in the way I proposed earlier.

4. Not hostile, but a takeover

The aim of this text was to open a possibility to unite NDS and ANT, and make a single and wide style of thought. I hope it could be fruitful as a philosophical perspective, as a methodology, and just as a way of thinking. The simplest next step would be to redefine traditional philosophical problems thus answering them anew. And this seems to locate us in a broad field.

Let me point out just three possible areas of such a redefinition, picked up contingently. And the contingency is justified, since without a systematic plan of research, a wider
sketch of a united account, there is no chance for systematic problem-solving with its intrinsic logic.

The united account may pose the question of truth anew. This would omit efforts to define truth in dualizing terms of a relation between two ontological realms (correspondence) or as an internal problem of one of those realms (e.g., coherence, consensus) or as any mutation of them. Instead it could define the problem in terms of heterogeneous, many-sided relations constructed and stabilized among many different actors, or as a making of moves among different descriptions. This would avoid a dualizing way of speaking and could use some of the intuitions of the traditional truth theories at the same time.

The united account also brings a new perspective for the problems of interpretation. Interpretation, in terms of NDS, could be defined as any from now on description, and the interpreted text as a so far description. Thus, the questions one may ask are concerned with the desired destination, rather than with being truthful to the point of departure.

The united account could also help to view differently parts of the history of philosophy. I undertook a couple of such attempts - for example, reinterpreting Berkeley as a non-dualizing philosopher, and the prevailing interpretations of his works as examples of imposing dualism on a non-dualizing way of speaking, which leads to contradictions and absurdities (Abriszewski 2000). I also attempted to redefine the doubts of the traditional, Greek skeptics in terms of NDS, which gives them a different epistemological perspective than the usual one (Abriszewski 2007). In this way, instead of having doubts about a leap over two domains described by dualizing philosophy, they just have doubts about the practice of dualizing. This way of investigation becomes all the more important with reference to research done by Andrzej P. Kowalski, who has described a phenomenon called “pre-philosophical thinking” or “metamorphic thinking,” presenting a sort of the non-dualizing way of thinking in historical terms. He says that people departed from metamorphic thinking gradually. And the process could be studied by investigating the successive, historical layers of our culture (Kowalski 2001). From this perspective, a quest for the traces of non-dualizing thinking would equal searching for the big alternative, an Other of our culture. But if dualizing thinking is associated with writing, as Kowalski claims, than what about the claim repeated by McLaugh, de Kerckhove and others, saying that our civilization is presently undergoing a crucial transformation from a culture based on writing to a culture based on electronic media (see, for example, de Kerckhove 1995)? And, following this path, it could be that a new culture would require a new philosophy, and this time a non-dualizing one.

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Notes

1. As there are no English translations of Mitterer’s books, I used Polish editions throughout my text as a basis for translations. I also refer to them, and not to the original, German editions (Mitterer 1992; Mitterer 2001). The good thing about the technical part of Mitterer’s books is that they are structured into numbered sections, so regardless of the language, most of the references can be easily traced.

2. In this text I use as synonyms “non-dualizing way of speaking/thinking,” “non-dualistic philosophy,” and “non-dualism,” although there seems to be a small difference between “dualistic,” and “dualizing.” The former describes something done and consisting of two different elements, the latter describes something in the making. The difference is clear in the Polish language, although it is subtle. However the distinction is not important in this text, so for better ease I use them as synonyms and most of the time I use the shorter expressions, rather than the longer and more precise ones.

3. Although, as indicated earlier, there are no English translations of Mitterer’s books, for the comfort of the reader, I use English translations of the titles. I translate Die Flucht aus der Beliebigkeit (Mitterer 2001, 2004) as The Escape from Arbitrariness. Such translations were used by Josef Mitterer in discussions about his books. By the way, Polish translation of the first book has a slightly different title, which roughly translated would be: The Other Side of Philosophy.

4. I described NDS as a critical project in my review of the Polish edition of Beyond philosophy (Abriszewski 1999).

5. I would view some of Andrzej P. Kowalski’s works as investigations concerning the historical emergence of dualizing philosophy. In one of his remarkable books, he described pre-philosophical thinking and the emergence of philosophical thinking (i.e., dualizing philosophy) in terms of successive cultural layers (see Kowalski 2001).

6. For example, the “Torun group” tried for some time to deploy what could be called “contents of experience” or “reality” in-
side NDS. However, most of our interpretations returned to a dualizing way of speaking.
7. This argument arose many times whenever I presented NDS to philosophical conferences and lectures.
8. Further steps require collective work, yet there is a hope for this with this issue of CF. Besides, there is a number of scholars whose efforts aim at elaborating NDS: Józef Mitterer is focused on his third book on NDS, Stefan Weber applied NDS to media studies (Weber 2005), and the same course of research is visible in the Wrocław group (Marek Graszewicz, Dominik Lewinśki, Mauryçy Graszewicz); in Toruń, a colleague of mine, Ewa Bińczyk, worked on NDS in the context of a concept of “reference” and Stanley Fish’s interpretive communities. Compared to that, my results are much more insignificant, for I applied NDS to the history of philosophy (to reinterpret George Berkeley’s immaterialism, and to redefine the problem of skepticism – Abriszewski 2000 and 2007), and also to investigate the practice of fabricating the circulating reference (Abriszewski & Afeltowicz 2007).
9. Epistemological closure of a system means that all representations of the outside reality are constructed inside the system. This does not equal saying that a system is not related in any way to its environment or that the environment itself is a system’s construct (ontological solipsism).
13. Irreductions is the second part of Latour (1988), pp. 153–238, but it is often referred to as a separate work.

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Looking for Consistency in Avoiding Dualisms

Ewa Bińczyk ◊ Nicolas Copernicus University, Toruń (Poland) <ewa.binczyk@umk.pl>

First, a brief introduction

The article presented below tries to answer very simple questions: How far can philosophy travel while avoiding dualism? In which direction should the itinerary be built for such a risky journey? During this narration, before the rejection of dualism can be more carefully explored, a short rethinking of the conceptual, social and ontological change seems. The text portrays selected features of this decisive instance and also considers an alternative, non-dualizing mode of speaking, created by Mitterer and depicted in his books.

In the second and the third and the fourth parts, the text presents the incarnations of the other side of the discourse that appear in three perspectives: 1) Richard Rorty’s neopragmatism; 2) the strong program of the sociology of knowledge and 3) radical constructivism. The text does not create complete pictures of the conceptions used in it. The analysis will only examine selected possible philosophical consequences of the concessions to dualism that are visible in the standpoints mentioned above. Finally, the last fragment of the text depicts Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory (ANT) – which is rooted in the tradition of the social studies of science and technology. ANT can be interpreted as one of the most interesting extensions of Mitterer’s postulates. The text claims that the reason for this is a fact, that actor-network theory is a very consistent antiessentialist research program for studying the dynamic of change (and this is a conceptual, social and ontological change at the same time). The other side of the discourse, and thereby causal pressures are redefined here as relational effects of certain efforts, as transitory results of the processes of stabilization.

Mitterer’s meta-philosophical comments – laconic, but relevant

The crucial notion of this text – the other side of the discourse – derives from a fascinating and elegant book written by Josef Mitterer, entitled in the original German Das Jenseits der Philosophie (Mitterer 1996). The book portrays the contingent status of our deepest philosophical assumptions. At the beginning of the text, we read that Western philosophy and also Western common thinking originate from the basic assumptions of dualism. The so-called dualizing mode of speaking, understood simply as a set of practical rules of conversation and argumentative techniques in situations of conflict, assumes and creates the ontological difference between the object and its description, between the world and language. The philosophical problems of the external world, truth, objectivity, identity and reference (as the problem of a mysterious gap between language and reality) arise as simple side-effects created by the dualizing practices of communication. They come into being when we futilely try to clarify relations between two poles of the assumed dichotomy: this side and the mysterious other side of the discourse.

Unlike many deep, hidden and fragile philosophical objects of inquiry, the dualizing mode of speaking (as well as its drawbacks)
can be empirically noted and described by history, anthropology, philosophy of language, theory of speech acts, or even mundane sociology of communication. I believe this to be an important methodological research advantage of Mitterer's reconstitution. As a result, this kind of view can be inspiring in many domains.

As the Austrian philosopher suggests, in the process of socialization individuals internalize rules and norms of dualism as obvious and overwhelming. They are forced to construct descriptions according to these rules and norms and, often being corrected by others, they enter into discourses utilizing dualizing modes of expression. Additionally, the dualizing mode of speaking has a history. We can probably reconstruct the social/conceptual transformations in which dualizing techniques emerged, stabilized, were institutionalized, and became more and more obvious, rooted, and unproblematic. Inspired by Mitterer's remarks, I have attempted in my book to develop an anthropological model of the archaic, pre-referential use of language and its gradual disappearance (Briencez 2007).

In a very simple way, as described by the Austrian philosopher, the dualizing mode of speaking creates the other side of the discourse. This other side plays the important role of the independent instance that can settle any debate or argument in philosophy, but also in politics or ethics. The other side of the discourse is obviously not a part of the discourse itself, but exists as an object of reference that is perpetually pinpointed, determined, characterized, specified, and articulated. As a result, it can possess many different faces, such as the only God in a monotheistic religion, the objective reality in scientific arguments, or the essence or nature of things within every type of essentialism. Frequently, this extraordinary instance is given a priori. It is essentialized and, in effect, cannot be subjected to any discussion or transformation. It becomes immune to any criticism.

Allow me to make a short digression here. I will use the term ‘essentialism’ as referring to a standpoint that assumes the existence and the cognizability of the essence of objects. Essences are ahistorical and invariable. They determine the identity of objects. It is possible to express them in definitions. For example, things possess their essence objectively, independently of the way in which human beings relate to them. When we reject the assumptions of essentialism, we obtain an antiessentialist or relational perspective. Instead of asking essentialist questions, we describe conditions, functions, and historical processes, in which results gradually emerge and will be seen later as objective, stable, independent, and essential. Essences become historical, transitory results of the processes of stabilization. Of course, from a traditional point of view, they are no longer essences. In this context, the difference between ontological and epistemological questions is undermined. There is no point in assuming the existence of objects that have not yet been recognized, placed in networks, or described. Ontological postulates and conjectures play their role as artifacts of epistemic practices.

The specific instance of the other side of the discourse within the dualizing mode of speaking is strongly believed to be independent and somehow responsible for the adequacy of description. Moreover, it appears, along with the monistic presupposition, that there is only one adequate response to every question. But of course, being mute, this decisive instance needs professional spokespersons that can speak in the name of it. When the other side becomes the only God, we hear theologians promulgate; when it becomes objective nature, we see and hear scientific experts who speak in the name of facts. It would be an interesting and fertile study to trace historically how certain groups or individuals become authorized to speak or “take the floor” as professional representatives of the other side. In this context, the nature of representation in an epistemological and in a political sense can be seen from a new perspective. This kind of project in respect to the origin of both the scientific and social representation was realized by Shapin and Schaffer (1985) and commented on by Latour (1993).

What is sometimes surprising is that the other side of the discourse can function as a kind of camouflage, especially in radical or constructivist conceptions, which I will discuss more carefully below. Constructivist standpoints often assume that a context around every cognitive system must be ordered in some way, if we are to admit that cognition is possible. The other side of the discourse takes here a form of clearly negative resistance, given previously every interpretation, underdetermined, elusive and difficult to describe. It plays no decisive epistemic role, but still it is assumed to be necessary.

According to Mitterer, the rejection of dualism is possible in the form of the so-called non-dualizing mode of speaking. On one hand, the status of this alternative is simply didactic and auxiliary – it helps to reconstruct the mechanisms of the dualizing argumentative techniques, but also to localize its drawbacks and blockades. On the other hand, the non-dualizing mode of speaking has an important practical or even political role to play. It might be useful to overcome essentialist blockades of communication. We can also read about it in Mitterer’s second book, Die Flucht aus der Beliebigkeit (Mitterer 2001), and I have commented on it in my own writings (Briencez 2005).

Within this alternative proposition, the very dichotomy between description and the object of description becomes problematic. The object of description is redefined as a “description so far,” that has already been made. To continue the process of describing is to propose a “description from now on.” There is no categorical ontological difference between them. In the traditional, dualizing mode of speaking, objects of description are unchangeable and unquestionable. They are localized metaphorically “outside” the discourse. However, as Mitterer accurately points out, it is impossible to indicate or to pinpoint (beyond any form of describing) an object itself, or its properties, or essence, or identity. If we agree upon the possibility that human knowledge is fallible, changeable, and not ultimate, then those essentialized objects become transformed into specific artifacts.

Let me explain at this moment that the identity ascribed to the object of description is not stable when we try to avoid dualism – it cannot be essentialized. Every new description that is articulated changes the object, which becomes the final result of the process of describing. The purported reality is interpreted here as the “achieved positions of a discourse.”

Let me make one last comment on Mitterer’s position. The non-dualizing matrix sketched above has interesting practical consequences. A conflict does not apply here to the object, but rather it proceeds between two (or more) alternative descriptions. To solve such a conflict, we need to reformulate the discourse while proposing new “descriptions from now
on.” Beyond dualism, communication will step forwards for future consensus, rather than backwards to appeal to the other side of the discourse, only to prove that one side of a conflict is ultimately right. As we can observe, after the rejection of essentialist blockades, it is possible to conduct human negotiations freely in many directions. Such a gesture would allow societies to avoid deadlocks and idle debates. The discussion would prove to be open, continuous, and politically productive. Opponents would be free to describe together, to change their knowledge together, possibly searching for a better starting point for negotiation, or better basic descriptions to create further narrations.

Once again on Rorty’s clever dodges

In Richard Rorty’s neopragmatic conception, human knowledge, language and also science are conceived in a deeply antessentialist way. Knowledge, for this philosopher, is a result of social practices aimed at the formulation and the justification of beliefs. Simultaneously, the criteria for the best description and the best justification are always historically contingent and socially shaped. Rorty’s naturalistic Darwinism encourages us to interpret beliefs or vocabularies as tools that should be assessed in terms of the particular purposes they may serve. This author abandons the philosophical tradition that interprets language (and knowledge) as a mirror that represents reality. Within this tradition, such categories as correspondence, representation, truth, or realism were frequently used. Rorty proposes instead to view sentences as mere instruments that govern our practical actions, and that coordinate human behavior in an everlasting effort to cope with reality.

Of course, according to the American thinker, no description is absolute, final, or privileged. By the use of words we have no deeper access to the intrinsic nature of objects, other than by the simple manipulation of them. As a result, any philosophy should be projected only in a nominalistic way – as proposing contingent descriptions legitimated ethically or politically.

Consequently, and in accordance with his antirepresentational perspective, Rorty also redefines empirical science as a set of practices invented to predict and control certain aspects of the environment. The practical success of science is not a sufficient reason to claim that this activity should be epistemologically privileged. Science serves transitory purposes and solves transitory problems. The presumption that it represents adequately the nature of reality, that it gives us the ultimate and objective truth is not sufficiently justified. It is rather a wish or intuition.

Nevertheless, Rorty’s spectacular antessentialism seems to be inconsistent. First of all, in its point of departure, it is mainly epistemological, not ontological. According to this philosopher, only our statements about objects, not objects themselves, are relational and nominalist. Rorty’s specific inconsistency becomes visible when we analyze closer the role of the notion of causality within his position. For this philosopher, people and their environment are related causally. According to Rorty, our beliefs are justified holistically only by other beliefs, but they are caused by the objects in reality (cf. Brandom 2000, p. XV). This means that the environment can causally determine the success or failure of our actions. But causal relations cannot be represented unambiguously and ultimately by human knowledge that is fallible. Causality can be described in different ways, at different times, and for different purposes. By itself nature does not distinguish the classifying scheme that is correct. Due to the problem referred as the “underdetermination of the empirical data,” it is impossible to discriminate precisely what was derived from human conceptual schemes and what was derived from nature itself. Rorty writes:

“We shall reject the idea that Nature has settled on a single input–output function that, incarnated in each member of our species, enables us to represent our environment accurately. For that idea requires that Nature herself has divided up the causal swirls surrounding these organisms into discrete inputs, and has adopted a particular input–output function as distinctively Hers” (Rorty 1995, p. 299).

In spite of quite a radical decision, inspired by Donald Davidson’s articles, to reject the dualism between a conceptual schema and empirical content, Rorty still claims some form of rudimentary dualism. He tacitly admits that there is an important difference between elusive causal relations and descriptions of causality, formulated by humankind. That is the difference between the ontological and epistemological domains. Descriptions of causality are entirely institutionalized through the human practices of categorizing, describing, articulating, and interpreting, but not the causality itself. In this connection, causal pressures remain epistemically elusive, but they are pressures nonetheless.

Obviously, causality plays the role of the independent other side of the discourse in Rorty’s philosophy. Mitterer briefly describes this inclination in Rorty’s thought in his second book, in point 13 (Mitterer 2001). Referring to the category of causality, Rorty assures us that his vision is not a kind of antirealism. But even if such an instance as causality makes no discernable difference to human descriptions or conventionally shaped beliefs, it still plays its role of some very important ontological assumptions that constitute dualism.

Tiny weakness of the strong program of the sociology of knowledge

The famous “strong program of the sociology of knowledge” was formulated and supported mainly by two representatives of the Edinburgh School: Barry Barnes and David Bloor. They proposed four methodological principles for numerous case studies and larger research projects carried out in the interdisciplinary field that connected the sociology of knowledge with the history of science and the social studies of science and technology. These projects were created to study simultaneously the context and the content of knowledge. They were principles of: 1. causality, 2. impartiality, 3. symmetry and 4. reflexivity. They advocated the following:

1. Sociology of knowledge should examine the various conditions and causes of knowledge, and those causes can have multiple forms, not only natural, but also cultural;
2. While studying both successful and unsuccessful theories, beliefs and theses, sociology of knowledge should stay impartial;
3. Sociologists of knowledge should use symmetrically and consistently the same types of explanation for any kind of belief – having true or false status, known as justified
or unjustified; their causes of credibility should be interpreted as of the same type;
4. The methodological program presented by the Edinburgh School must be applicable to the sociology of knowledge itself.

The Edinburgh School epistemological solutions, especially the crucial implications of the principle of symmetry were widely discussed as relativistic. Incidentally, the same accusation was formulated about Rorty’s standpoint. While writing about knowledge, British sociologists, similarly to the American neopragmatist, prefer a metaphor of adaptation to that of representation. The reason is that we can easily admit that there is more than one possible way to adapt successfully to the environment. The same cannot be easily agreed upon regarding the representation. The model of cognition included in the strong program contains the following elements:
1. Reality – understood as a causal factor – which is unfortunately impossible to verbalize in an unambiguous way. It is depicted as a large, complicated sequence of information that needs to be categorized by humans.
2. Different, irremovable determinants of cognition: biological, psychological, linguistic, contextual, and social. All of those determinants make knowledge possible. If we want to build a complete, scientific model of cognition, we should not exclude them as irrelevant or dangerous contaminants.
3. Knowledge as a final result: verbalized beliefs that are conventional, linguistic, institutionalized, and holistically underdetermined by the reality and also by the previous beliefs and theoretical assumptions.

In the context of this paper, the most interesting issue is the specific role of the reality or nature in the Edinburgh model. On one hand, as the authors admit, their position can be called “materialistic” (Barnes, Bloor & Henry 1996, p. 200), so the role of the environment is certainly taken into consideration within this perspective. Any classification, or recognition of similarities or differences proceeds on the basis of a complex infinite supply of information generated by nature.

But, on the other hand, knowledge is defined here as a collective system of beliefs. Bloor and Barnes indicate that the a priori, theoretical component of empirical knowledge originates directly from the conventions of a society. Cognitive determinants of all kinds mentioned above co-determine the content of knowledge at all possible levels. They intervene in every phase of the cognitive processes. From this perspective, and in spite of the fact that there exists some kind of resistance, it is not possible to isolate its influence, neither while analyzing the content of our descriptions, nor while studying the very process of cognition.

The participation of the determining factors mentioned above does not mean that human knowledge is arbitrary. We cannot remove biological, conceptual, or metaphorical instruments and mechanisms to cognize more adequately. On the contrary, they make knowledge possible, and due to them, all human cognition is located both in the context of reality and in the context of social practice. As a result, knowledge turns out to be practically successful and can always be assessed according to the norms and criteria present in every community. They assume the existence of the criteria of rationality, but the status of those criteria is not believed to be universal or ahistorical.

In the Edinburgh School texts we can find interesting descriptions of the history and processes of stabilization of such elements as categories, assumptions, criteria, ways of reasoning, schemas of classification, and more. Researchers associated with this area depict processes in which some theories or assumptions have gradually been objectified.

According to Barnes and Bloor, human reasoning is conventionally and socially rooted due to the role of many presuppositions given a priori due to the previous expectations and routine patterns of interpretation – all the hidden impacts that influence what is important and that guide human attention. They are visible even in perceptual and interactive habits of individuals. British sociologists distinguish in this respect between individual, biologically determined, inductive susceptibilities and inductive reasoning, which is culturally articulated and shaped. In this moment they introduce the same rudimentary dualistic opposition that was used by Rorty: between the ontological and epistemological domains. On one side, which is distant and elusive, they localize inductive susceptibilities; on the other side, they place descriptive inductive reasoning that is situated inside a human discourse.

One more issue: Radical constructivism and the other side of the discourse

Radical constructivism is the third standpoint analyzed in the text that remains visibly agnostic towards traditional epistemological questions. I will briefly illustrate this feature using as examples the conceptions of Ernst von Glasersfeld and Niklas Luhmann. Both authors stay epistemologically skeptical towards the other side of the discourse. Nevertheless this special instance plays a certain role in their formulations of constructivism, which needs to be shortly discussed in this paper.

Instead of analyzing knowledge that is a stable result, radical constructivists ask about the dynamic processes of knowing, emerging from the multiple interactions of the organism (or system) with the environment. Radical constructivism is projected as a matrix for studying mechanisms of cognition that lead to adequate behavior or fitting. The main function of cognition in this context is not representation, but viability.

During the history of its interactions with the environment, an organism organizes its experiential world and at the same time it organizes itself. An observer arises gradually from the processes of relating and differentiating. In other words, the observer cannot be separated from the processes of observing. Networks constituting organisms are modulated and transformed by environmentally induced perturbations.

Radical constructivists underline that any knowledge is possible only by the previous introduction of distinctions. But all distinctions are internal operations of a cognitive system. Differences, regularities, identities and similarities are produced internally. As Luhmann reminds us: only closed systems can know; cognizing organisms are informationally closed.

As a result, radical constructivism comprehends reality not as an objective, unchanging, independent structure, but rather as a result of a subject’s active production of distinctions. Even the notion of causality is reinterpreted in this framework as the conceptual invention or habit of the observer, which serves to organize experience. The other side of the discourse takes a specific form
in this context – it becomes a result of cognition, an internal construction, intertwined with the system’s cognitive activity. Within this solution the other side is not essentialized.

Yet we have to admit that radical constructivism maintains the other side as a specific source of negative constraints. It becomes visible when we take into consideration the evolutionary-rooted notions of viability and the environment. An organism is motivated to act (also cognitively) in an adequate way due to the perturbations and constraints of the environment. The environment plays a decisive role, it gives some kind of negative instructions – it merely eliminates organisms if they are not viable. Luhmann writes explicitly about some non-arbitrariness of knowledge, which is understood as the evolutionarily-controlled selectivity of the process of a system’s transformation (Luhmann 1990, p. 77).

At the same time, the other side of the discourse as a sphere of negative constraints stays epistemically elusive: it cannot be responsible for the adequacy of description. As Glasersfeld writes: “The nature of constraints is inaccessible to the constructing subject because there is no way of telling whether a failure is due to a flaw in the constructive operating or to an obstacle in the ontological world” (Glaserfeld 1992, p. 7). In fact the “obstacles” cannot be ultimately localized or demonstrated. The negative instance of external reality cannot be represented: “There is an external world, which results from the fact that cognition, as a self-operated operation, can be carried out at all, but we have no direct contact with it” (Luhmann 1990, p. 64).

In the framework of radical constructivism, human knowledge cannot claim uniqueness: no matter how viable the cognitive solution might seem, it can never be regarded as the only possible one. This reformulation significantly resembles Rorty’s view. The environment is so rich that it is possible to construct a lot of epistemic alternatives. The only limitations are previous constructions, because new conceptual structures should be compatible with those already existing. Alexander Riegler comments on this topic: experiences of a subject are connected to each other, they form a network of hierarchical interdependencies (Riegler 2001, p. 7). We read: “Once a certain path is taken relating experiences to each other in a particular manner, the mind uses previous constructions as building-blocks for further constructions” (Riegler 2001, p. 8).

It seems that Mitterer’s project can be interpreted by radical constructivists as rightly formulated. It explicitly localizes a dualistic basic distinction between description and the object of description. Yet distinctions are unavoidable during the processes of knowing: “The impossibility of distinguishing the distinction that one distinguishes with is an unavoidable precondition of cognition” (Luhmann 1990, p. 73).

Let me make one last comment. Unfortunately, such standpoints as radical constructivism analyze cognition mainly in the individual context. (By the way, the same can be stated about enactivism, which conceptualizes cognition as effective action.) Yet human cognitive activity is a collective, multidimensional phenomenon. We need to take this into account, especially observing the practical success of human knowing, incarnated in contemporary science and technology. Human cognition is enriched through collective coordination and language, through the use of instruments, laboratories, and things. This is why I think that theories such as enactivism or radical constructivism can be fruitfully supplemented by actor-network theory, which will be discussed in the last part of my article.

Latour’s amazing reformulation

The specificity of ANT lies in the fact that it was intentionally projected as a peculiar, agnostic methodology to describe mainly the dynamic processes of change and stabilization (in every domain). As a result it has deep relational and antessentialist connotations. Latour’s research focuses on the emergence of technological innovations, scientific discoveries, controversies and their multidimensional dynamic outside laboratories. As a result, actor-network theory turns out to be a great instrument for diagnosing the global, uncertain, changeable, contemporary conditions of reality and society. ANT is able to play a role of a new social theory, a new epistemological standpoint, or a new kind of program for studying science. The originality of this view lies mainly in its clear and expressive antidualism, which is able to be incorporated into empirical case studies.

To explain the features mentioned above, let me follow from the beginning the decisive polemic between Latour and Bloor over the role of nature in epistemological models (Bloor 1999a, 1999b; Latour 1999). Bloor uses an example from the history of science, of a controversy between Pasteur and Koch. According to the British sociologist, they proposed two different conventional, theoretical descriptions of the same elusive, but resistant, substance in their laboratories. Of course, Bloor introduces a distinction that was already mentioned in the text, i.e., a distinction between two domains: the ontological, underdetermined one and the epistemological, which is articulated by humans and co-determined by various factors in the process of cognition.

But for Latour no such instance of resistance – such as an elusive substance in a laboratory that simply “plays a role without making a difference” – is needed, and especially it should never be essentialized. If we do not possess any neutral vocabulary that is able to settle the controversy between Koch and Pasteur, we cannot admit that those two scientists gave us only two alternative descriptions of something that only we are able to describe correctly. We do not know if it really was the same “grayish substance.” Instead of answering questions before the study, it is better to follow the controversy and the very processes of stabilization in both laboratories.

The French thinker in this step does not privilege ontology over epistemology. This author resists focusing only on the epistemological domain, leaving ontology to the scientific vote. One of the possible reasons for this is that his standpoint is a meta-redescription and includes as its subject of research the area of contemporary science.

The other side, which took in the controversy mentioned above, a form of a grayish substance, does not play a decisive role. Instead, in the framework of actor-network theory, each element of the two hybrid networks built in the laboratories of Koch and Pasteur is able to play an important settling role and make the difference. Causal pressures are present in this model, but they are redefined as dispersed over networks. The independency and objectivity of any factor is, for Latour, always a result of the previous sta-
bilitation of associations. The resistance can be also redefined as the cost of disassembling the network. Pasteur, for example, creates a network where we have not only a grayish substance in his laboratory, but also other important political, institutional, cognitive, and material elements. By a successfully introducing a microbe and a vaccine to our world, Pasteur, in fact, transformed the whole of French society, its institutions, human habits and knowledge, materials, farms, hygienists' practice, and many other factors.

To understand this position, crucial notions of network, actor and actant should be characterized briefly. First of all, let me clarify that networks are not ontologically specified, but heterogeneous (the same can be said about actors). Networks are: “simultaneously real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like society” (Latour 1993, p. 6). A very good example of such a hybrid network is the ozone hole, which is “too social and too narrated to be truly natural […] too full of chemical reactions to be reduced to power and interest; […] too real and too social to boil down to meaning effects” (Latour 1993, p. 6). Actor or actant is defined as a transitory stabilization of a part of a given network. Latour often prefers the notion of an actant, to avoid the anthropological connotations of the first category. Of course, we can articulate or localize the essentials of actants, but only as some contingent effects of the historical processes of stabilization. Moreover, for each case, complex networks can be traced and studied, but they are not essentialized either.

The massive production of new associations is being performed by humankind all the time. We domesticate the environment through the work of fabrication and articulation. People simultaneously try to exert practical control and to understand some relations or phenomena. This is why they build and maintain associations between themselves, things, and narrations. Those efforts are continuously stabilized, materialized in artifacts, institutions, objectified norms, replicable solutions and technological systems that are more and more predictable.

Many philosophers and sociologists have been simply focused in their research only on one sphere—a sphere of stable results, such as ready-made, objective natural facts, social relations, ideological trends, innovations, or political functions. But all of those objects must historically and gradually arise as recognizable and real. As it turns out, there exists an extremely interesting area to explore, containing processes in which the shapes of our world constantly emerge. And, as Latour underlines, only an agnostic methodology will prove to be effective enough to depict their mechanisms impartially.

As actor-network theory indicates, in the context of a scientific or technological practice, we encounter the resistance of things that are called, in this perspective, not only “actants,” but also “non-humans” or “quasi-objects.” “Things” are always understood in accordance with modernist, ontological, dualistic assumptions. They are presented as passive, independent, ontologically given and stable. Non-humans are interpreted by Latour in a completely different way—as historical, hybrid, being able to act, taking different possible forms: of natural/factual objects, discursive, controversial phenomena, or the hypostases of social relations.

As we can see, even the very issue of the agency of matter is problematicized in actor-network theory (Latour 1999, p. 125). In each case, we can search for the resistance of a non-human with whom scientists negotiate in the laboratory to check its competencies for action. But we should prepare ourselves for the possibility that, during a closer study, any factor may disperse into a network of relations. All objects are seen here as complex relations, locally stable and institutionalized as independent. As a French sociologist writes, during experimental laboratory work, actants achieve new competences and they transform themselves into new beings. For example, during Pasteur’s practice, microorganisms become visible, autonomic, real, but Pasteur, who articulated them, also gained new competencies. His position was transformed as well. The ontological status of a given actant (be it a new scientific object, such as an epidemic, a dangerous virus, a discovery, a new problem of inquiry such as the ecological crisis, or a technological, legal, institutional innovation) can be assessed only when the process of fabrication is finished and controversies are closed.

At this point the text will stop. Following the actor-network theory, we tried to explore how far it is possible to travel while avoiding dualism. The text attempted to demonstrate how to build a perspective in which the other side of the discourse is radically redefined to the point where it seems to be almost eliminated. An important condition of such an undertaking was to stay consistent in antessentialism. Beyond the presuppositions of essentialism, the other side of the discourse was redefined as a transitory result of stabilization.
Philosophical Non-Dualizing Philosophy

References


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The Non-dualizing Way of Speaking and the Female Subjectivity Problem

Aleksandra Derra ◇ Nicolas Copernicus University, Toruń (Poland) <aldewicz@umk.pl>

Problem – The underlying assumption of all feminist theories is that in order to achieve our emancipatory goals we have to resolve the so-called female subjectivity problem first. That is, we have to answer the question of what is (is not) the nature/essence/main feature of being a woman. The debate about where and how we should look for that essence seems to be endless and it still continues in contemporary feminist theories. This stalemate blocks the initial political and social power of the whole feminist movement. It also seems to contradict the idea that philosophy can serve practical purposes, which was a driving force behind feminist theories as such. Solution – While analyzing contemporary feminist theories we can discover that they are dualistic with respect to the cognitive situation. Using tools taken from Josef Mitterer’s philosophy and the idea of emancipation developed by Bruno Latour, I want to consider the idea of avoiding stalemate situations in discussions on female subjectivity. I claim that this strategy can be more effective in achieving certain practical goals that are important from a feminist point of view. Benefits – We are able to show that the aim of our theoretical activity is not to agree about what a woman is and what kind of woman we are going to emancipate, but rather to define which problems should be solved in order to improve the situation of women. We just have to learn how to formulate the description from now on of initial matters of concern that is acceptable to all those involved in a given dispute. Key words – (anti-)essentialism, identity, feminism.

I see feminist philosophy as the activity aimed at articulating the questions of individual gendered identity with issues related to political subjectivity, the production of knowledge, diversity, alternative representations of subjectivity and epistemological legitimation. (Braidotti 2003, p. 198)

I. Through Mitterer’s theoretical landscape: Introductory remarks

There is a certain tone of fear in the philosophical claims in which philosophers realize that there exist many different theories concerning the same problem. There is also a certain tone of apprehension when it is shown that in fact almost anything can be said about a given matter. As Josef Mitterer points out, a lack of limits (Beliebigkeit) is seen as the biggest enemy of philosophy and it is quite often used as a rhetorical weapon against conceptions one disagrees with (Mitterer 2004, point 5). Philosophy is supposed to be about truth, and it is supposed to be equipped with tools that can help us find it. Hardly anyone mentions that philosophical methods haven’t been chosen merely with a view to achieving this aim, but rather are the result of the local context, that is the result of our intellectual development, emotional growth, university we have graduated from, professors we have been influenced by, questions we have been asked during our PhD examinations, etc. Mitterer insistently and rightly reminds us that we are the philosophers of a certain time in history and of a certain culture, socialized in specific ways of thinking that too often are treated as eternal and unchangeable. It has been also emphasized by many feminist thinkers that our knowledge is situated and that all our theories are standpoint theories (Haraway 1988; Harding 1991, pp. 11, 119). I owe a lot to these thinkers. Additionally my philosophical debts should be paid mainly to Mitterer’s idea of a non-dualizing way of thinking and Bruno Latour’s understanding of emancipation, which I will try to elaborate in what follows.

Mitterer openly speaks about his aim of doing philosophy. He underlines that he is interested in analyzing non-problematized establishments that are made, so to speak, before rational discourse and that are the main source of eternal philosophical problems. He wants to unmask the argumentative figures that make the dualistic way of arguing possible and hence to weaken its power and influence (Mitterer 2004, §13). Of course, Mitterer’s own considerations are not free of premises that are not discussed in his argumentation process: there are some where we can quite easily read another meaning between the lines. According to one of them, diversity is better than unity; according to another, dualistic philosophy results in debates that end with stalemate situations, which seems to be cognitively fruitless. Dualism is not cognitively creative. Many philosophical theories, such as the theories of truth, aim at equalizing, surveying and putting all positions on the same level. It is something we would like to avoid in theories that are supposed to be creative in constructing more or less effective solutions to specific problems. We want to develop ideas and propose theories while being maximally aware of the assumptions that we are taking for granted. These two specific features – the theoretical awareness of the presence of the cultural foundations of our theories and the idea of tracing their implicit assumptions – are what makes Mitterer’s philosophy so attractive to me. What is more, and what is of interest to me here, this methodology seems to work for feminist theories dealing with the subjectivity problem, such as, for example, Judith Butler’s performative conception of the subject and Rosi Braidotti’s nomadic conception of subjectivity. They are attempts in which one tries to avoid understanding subjectivity as a given, essential, sui generis entity that can be described once and for all. The impossibility of formulating a traditional theory of the subject, where the subject is treated as an entity
having a certain foundation, comes from a
detailed analysis of the validity of such philo-
sophical categories as subject, identity, origin,
nation, mother tongue, etc. (Braidotti 1994,
introduction; Butler & Salih 2003, p. 9). The
subject was always confronted with the object
in the history of philosophy, and as such it has
always been described as a thing (entity, essence, idea), as something that is founded in
some stable, non-negotiable, cognitively arbit-
trated ground (in nature, or society or, and
culture and so on). In all such views, dualist
distinctions have played the most important role (real [the world]/discursive [language],
stable [nature]/fallible [culture], rational [male]/emotional [female]). I read Butler and
Braidotti as thinkers who want to show that
one can do philosophy of the subject without
the entire theoretical machinery of distinc-
tions at which Mitterer points while describ-
ing dualism. Accordingly to them, one can think
about subjectivity as a process, which is not a
thing, which is not stable and constant and
immune to all cultural surroundings. In that
sense, certain anti-essentialist feminist theo-
ries can be interpreted as concrete illustrations
of Mitterer’s general idea of a non-dualizing
way of thinking.

Like dualists in philosophy, thinkers in tra-
titional feminism do not admire the lack of
limits in formulating theories because their
basic aims are political (Beauvoir 1989, Millett
1970). They prefer to see feminism as a con-
crete, stable and non-negotiable call for equal
rights for female and male members of a soci-
ety. In this view, it is not a theoretical project
(in other words, it is not so much about truth,
though we may sometimes see it in this way),
but rather a political movement that has a the-
oretical background (hence it is very much
about freedom). It began as a utopian social
movement fueled by the idea of achieving
intellectual and existential liberation for all
women. It can be understood generally as a
project to reintroduce female subjectivity in
every area of human identity, for we have to
know who all these women are that we are
going to liberate. There are plenty of theories
dealing with the female subjectivity problem,
but in a sense they are monolithic about their
limits in formulating theories because their
views are treated, in what sense and how the theoretical
results will be useful in solving certain practical
problems (e.g., a given theory of jus-
tice will help with improving the situation of
the payment gap between men and women).

According to Latour, we should under-
stand emancipation not as a synonym of free-
ing from bonds, but as a synonym of being well-
attached (Latour 2005, p. 218). To put it
briefly, we can say that we are more free to act
when we are more deeply connected to all pos-
sible chains of relations, associations and con-
nections of whatever sort. More free in the
sense that we are situated in a way that makes
more of our actions possible and more of them
effective. For Latour the history of our civiliza-
tion can be written with the use of the meta-
phor of moving toward a higher level of
attachments, which makes us able to act in
wider areas. If we want to be more free, we
have to interfere more (as in the case of saving
the environment in its natural form; if we want
to save more, we have to make more interven-
tions in the ecological systems). This view of
emancipation is political since the political
and the epistemological are seen as tightly
connected here. According to Latour, if we
want to know how politics functions, we have
to look at knowledge acquisition. Such a sense
of emancipation also helps us to understand
our current situation in the contemporary
world (Latour 2008). Let me just underline
that the last claim is truly crucial to the whole
feminism project. What are the consequences
for female subjectivity if we treat emancipa-
tion in the way Latour proposes? First of all, it
is no longer the case that establishing female
subjectivity is their aiming at emanci-
pation. The crucial thing is, however, how one
understands what emancipation means. It is
also important because it entails how the rela-
tionship between theory and practice will be
treated, in what sense and how the theoretical
results will be useful in solving certain practi-
tice. Hence the emancipatory goal of the
whole feminist project should be to re-formu-
late women’s problems in a way that allows
them to be established as important matters
that must be solved here and now, for the sake
of everyone who can support it. Secondly,
since the connections in Latour’s view are cre-
ated from various elements (human, non-
human, theoretical, practical, material, sym-
bolic), there is no prior point of departure.
That is to say, we can no longer claim that fem-
inism is a theoretical project with practical
aims, for the theoretical and the practical can-
not be clearly separated here. Putting utopian
ideas into practice requires the presence of
revolutionary concepts and metaphors, but
also things, lobbies, a suitable time in history,
and technological innovations (to name only a
few) that put in place certain configurations
and relations that can sustain and preserve
actions and the influence of these ideas. In
order to avoid stalemate situations in the fem-
inist discussion on female subjectivity we have
to concentrate on the possibility of action
rather than on establishing theoretical frames
for that subject. Actions and temporary solu-
tions that can be applied here and now seem to
be of more importance, and in that sense,
Latour’s view on emancipation complements
Mitterer’s call for doing philosophy without
totalities framed in dualistic distinctions.

2. The female
subjectivity problem:
Useful utopias serving
practical results

I find the task of elaborating female subjectiv-
ity one of the most important tasks of the
whole feminist project. This very task can be
treated as a non-problematized establishment
(in Mitterer’s sense) of all feminist theories
dealing with female subjectivity. In almost all
feminist theories, subjectivity has been usually
understood as a notion that should be re-
thought and re-formulated in order to serve
emancipatory and political goals (Butler 1990,
p. 5). In other words, in order to formulate the
basis for building female subjectivity we have
to change the way we have been dealing with
subjectivity as such in our philosophical,
sociological and psychological theories. This
theoretical step is treated as a necessary condi-
tion for achieving practical results. So far, so
good, but it gets quite complicated and more differentiated when it comes to deciding where to look for the essence of the female. There are too many overly complex and sophisticated feminist theories of female subjectivity for them to be analyzed in detail here. Nevertheless, I can use them as good examples to illustrate some of Mitterer’s basic claims.

One of the main features of dualistic philosophy are dichotomous distinctions: between language and reality, opinion and object, and between knowledge and the object of knowledge, to name only a few (Mitterer 2004, §10). It is important to note here that not all distinctions make our thinking dualistic. It is crucial that one of the sides of such oppositions plays the role of the arbiter in all possible cognitive disputes (reality, object etc.). Hence, when tracing feminist theories, one has to be careful with regard to any dichotomies that are used there. In many feminist theories the validity of such distinctions as male/female, private/public, rational/irrational is criticized, but it is not the case that the usage of all of them makes our philosophy dualistic. As Mitterer points out, in order to solve any given philosophical problem or to provide a conclusive argument to our opponents, we refer to certain instances. These instances are: nature, reality, the state of affairs, history and law. (Mitterer 2004, §91). In the feminist theories that I call essentialist, we will refer respectively to biological capacities (nature: for example Shulamith Firestone, Mary Daly), psychological tools and social position (history, law: for example Nancy Chodorow), and a metaphysical sense of female body and mental equipment (reality: for example Simone de Beauvoir, Mary O’Brien). These instances are treated as certain fundamentals in which female subjectivity is grounded, and we are supposed to be able to present them in our theories (Marshall 1994, pp. 104–107). All essentialist theories can be interpreted as theories directed at the object of discursive practices (of describing, characterizing, presenting, defining, etc.), for they treat subjectivity as something that waits somewhere to be presented in our theory—to be presented properly in accordance with the accepted methodology.

Historically speaking, one can see that there is also a second group of thinkers dealing with female subjectivity, namely anti-essentialists (nominalists, constructivists) (Alcoff 1988). It can be rightly observed that an anti-essentialist tendency dominates in contemporary feminist theories. It results from the observation that subjectivity (which is interesting for feminist purposes) is always something real, embodied and surrounded by things and environment (situated) and as such requires us to look around at the features that shape its dynamic construction. It also makes use of the postmodern critique of the traditionally understood rational subject. One aspect of such a critique has its roots in the pragmatic approach to solving concrete problems rather than formulating and re-formulating certain theories (Young 1997, p. 17). It would mean that to theorize about female subjectivity in fact does not help to build and re-build real female identities, so we should look for other ways to highlight the difference. These feminist theories are often very sensitive to location, the positionality of the (female, knowing, acting) subject, and historical and cultural conditions of certain emerging ideas about female subjectivity. In other words, they usually take into account the fact that women are born in a certain place and time; that they belong to a certain social class, state, national- ity; that they have such and such a profession, etc. Proceeding from more general and abstract categories (subject, rationality) to more concrete ones (like the color of skin or the social class) in formulating conceptions of female subjectivity, forces thinkers to take into account the social and cultural facts that were traditionally excluded from philosophical thinking. It results in treating theory as an area that is supposed to deliver certain solutions that will be useful in solving concrete practical problems. It should be noted that the above mentioned distinction between essentialism and anti-essentialism in feminist theories simplifies the view of a great number of theories dealing with female subjectivity. When we consider particular conceptions, it will occur that the distinction may not be so easy to make. One can be an anti-essentialist and a materialist at the same time (like Monique Wittig) or one can postulate the existence of essences while being a deconstructionist (like Luce Irigaray; Fuss 1990, p. 26). Looking at feminist theories on a general level, however, we can show that the discussions on the female subjectivity problem can be rewritten as a discussion on the method of formulating an adequate theory of female subjectivity (Bordo 1990, p. 142). The method can be chosen when some general questions have been answered. The first one is: is establishing the female subject crucial to emancipatory goals of feminism? The second one can be formulated as follows: is female subjectivity founded on any stable and radical grounds? The answer to the second question divides feminist thinkers into two already-mentioned groups: essentialists (those who answer “yes”) and anti-essentialists, constructivists (those who answer “no”). These two groups, as Mitterer points out, usually formulate their claims in a dualizing manner. They just differ in the assumptions that are used in order to win cognitive battles. The negative answer to the second question can lead to the philosophical proposal in which we are trying to avoid the pitfalls of dualism. It can result in re-formulating not only the traditional way of understanding the role of the subject but also the very idea of emancipation, and in formulating conceptions in which we will be able to describe only certain processes of becoming subjects and reflect how they influence always-changing human practical actions. I will try to show that under certain interpretations, Braidotti’s and Butler’s theories can be read as such trials. These trials are anti-essentialist for sure, but they try to escape from the trap of being committed to one side of the dichotomy between the realist and the constructivist (anti-realist).

There are two theoretical strands that can be observed among anti-essentialist feminist theories dealing with the female subjectivity issue. The first strand, well represented by Braidotti’s work, can be characterized by its call for non-dualizing, that is to say opening the theoretical area to many varied modes of thinking about subjectivity and structuring of the self—to understand identity as a complex, dynamic, unstable entity that is constantly re-worked according to the cultural, political and historical surroundings (Braidotti 2003, p. 196). In a way, we are supposed to continue dealing with female subjectivity, but its understanding has to be radically changed. First of all, she treats the notion of “difference” as the most important one in describing sexual subjects and sexual identities, as difference lets us catch the features that allow us to make distinctions and distinguish one from the others (Braidotti 1994, pp. 146–172). She proposes to analyze the difference on three levels, each of which has to be taken into account in describing female subjectivity. The first level of sexual
difference concerns the differences between men and women, where Braidotti wants to criticize universalism and masculinity implicitly treated as a pseudo-universal in our culture. She also fights against the idea of otherness as devalorization (Braidotti 1994, p. 159). On the second level of sexual difference, she takes into account the differences among women emphasizing the very fact that the general notion of a woman refers to different kinds of women, different experiences and different identities (p. 162). The third level, the most interesting one for me, applies to the differences within each woman, where issues such as the multiplicity in one’s identity, unconscious elements of identity, levels of experience, living memory and imaginary relationship to class, race, age and sexual choices play a vital role (p. 165). It is obvious that in such a nomadic perspective one cannot formulate traditional theories of female subjectivity and provide the definition or even description of women, because all answers are valid only in a certain context and only for a while. Generalization is forbidden here and a constant multiplication of complexity is recommended. Nomadism as a concept provides “shifting locations for multiple female embodied voices” (p. 172). There is no place for philosophical totalities here (such as nature as such, the world in itself, etc.), for they are not useful in describing living women. What is needed is a reformulation of the theory in such a way that it can touch on the elements that have traditionally been situated on the practical side. Including the mentioned levels in the discussion of female subjectivity is clearly a step towards praxis while aiming at emancipation. In the second strand, represented by Butler’s approach, we can identify a call to abandon the whole female subjectivity problem with respect to its totalizing gestures. In other words, describing the female in any way will always end with a univocal view of female subjectivity that will not embrace many concrete, existing women. When Butler claims that the coherence of such categories as gender or sexuality is culturally constructed on a discursive level by stylized acts of repetitions, she seems to turn away from the dichotomy between language and reality. She seems to suggest that on the cognitive level, we can speak only about discourse and its consequences, nothing else and nothing more. In her book Gender trouble, however, she continues to speak of subjectivity and identity using the same old methodology in which the metaphor of constructing is built against the metaphor of something that is ready-made (see the role of the matter). When she underscores that sexualities or gender are not real and that they do not exist on the level most people would call reality, she refers to the notions connected with something non-discursive. Its existence has to be assumed and accepted as a non-problematized establishment. Trivially speaking, when we claim that the essence of female subjectivity exists and when we claim that there is no such thing as the essence of female subjectivity, we use the same method of thinking surrounding the formulation of theories: we refer to the instance, which can no longer be disputed. Such an attitude results in an endless discussion on the acceptable methods of dealing with the female subjectivity problem, which does not help to formulate or solve any concrete problems for women, which the reception of Butler’s work clearly shows. It is fair to add that Butler changed this perspective in her book Bodies that matter, where she wants to escape both from radical constructivist and essentialist approaches to subjectivity (Butler 1993, p. 8). She argues that on the one hand the subject cannot be treated as a stable notion or ready-made entity that has its universal natural or cultural grounds, and on the other hand it cannot be a pure construct made by someone’s choice. Rather, she shows that the subject is an effect of a long, changeable, complex process of repetitions and performative reiterations of norms (pp. 12–13).

It can be rightly shown that there is something utopian in the idea that philosophical statements can change anything in the real world, or that feminist views on females can change anything in the actual situation of women in the contemporary world. However, this claim can be accepted only if we assume that the distinction between theory/language (philosophy) and something that is outside the language (reality) applies. Following Latour and Mitterer, I have been trying to convince the readers that the idea of the possibility of putting all elements that take part in human knowledge production into two groups (language vs. reality) is a hopeless task to fulfill. Following Mitterer’s ideas, we can claim that philosophy can be understood as an activity of constructing and re-constructing certain totalities that consist of many different elements — words and things being just some of them. Both Braidotti and Butler show that it is cognitively more fruitful to describe female subjectivity as a process, action, performance played on many various levels and whose features can be negotiated and renegotiated according to the aims we have in mind while using them — especially if our aim is emancipation.

3. Beyond the female: From descriptions so far to descriptions from now on

Mitterer claims that we can escape from all conflicts in philosophical theories (hence particularly in feminist theories as well) by removing those descriptions from now on that cause the conflicts, and start once more from something more initial, start, so to speak, from the beginning (Mitterer 2004, §156). In other words, we do not have to establish what we have in common, the values we share, which are the most important aims of our theoretical activity. More initial does not mean more basic or more rudimentary in a sense that we have to dig for deep, commonly shared, metaphysical assumptions that have to be made and widely accepted among us. It means, rather, that we can establish a new, initial ground, that can be shared from now on in the process of conversation. Is a non-dualistic way of practicing philosophy possible at all in a practical sense? Can we survive without investigating the traditionally philosophical subjectivity problem at all? I will try to address these questions in this section.

As is suggested by Latour’s idea of emancipation, Braidotti’s nomadism, Butler’s performative subject, Donna Harway’s concept of cyborg and the notion of affinity of beliefs (Harway 1985), in order to achieve political goals in the feminist project, one does not have to start by establishing what “the female” is. One does not have to convince all participants of the dispute that her view on female subjectivity is a kind of a description so far, and as such is the only instance we can refer to at the moot points. Following Mitterer’s way of arguing, we can investigate the possibility of giving up the idea of adding undisputable and settled instances, like nature, culture or
history. Assuming that we will be able to develop a language that could qualify for a non-dualist way of thinking, we can start by fixing those concrete problems concerning women that we all agree are the most urgent to solve. We should therefore leave aside the general, disputable problem of female subjectivity about which nothing seems to be possible to settle once and for all. To put it simply, let me discuss the example of equality statistics in Europe. Looking only at European statistics concerning gender equality, one can easily see that, generally speaking, women are less independent economically, that there are more restrictive gender stereotypes about them, that they are victims of domestic violence in many more cases etc. (Report on Equality 2008). Let me present two possible scenarios in which we could try to explain this situation and try to find clues as to how to change it (if we decide that it should be changed). Let us consider for example the payment gap that discriminates against women. Firstly, we can claim that it is natural (biological) that women are always more committed to the domestic life of their families and that even when they undertake professional careers, in practice they are less effective than men when doing the same job. Hence, there is nothing wrong about the payment gap. Secondly, we can recall a long history of increasing male power in our culture and the history of the law-making masculinity and argue that it has been always connected with financial independence and economical domination. In this case, the payment gap looks like a logical consequence of the whole mentioned process and as such would not be possible to change in a short run. Both scenarios are not helpful in providing tools for changing this situation. They are not, because they operate with instances such as nature or male power in order to convince us of the validity of their explanations. These instances refer to very old, general and abstract philosophical notions, which are not clear at all, hence are not candidates that have the needed explanatory power. Also, in these scenarios we do not ask how such totalities as nature and male power emerge on a more detailed level – on the level of all possible events, connections, technological innovations, ideas and metaphors that had to be used in order to establish their obviousness (taking into account the so called theoretical and practical elements). We do not ask what kind of “becoming a subject” would be needed in order to start changing the whole structure that supports the system in which the payment gap is possible. It seems to me that only when we treat the female subject as a forming entity in progress (following Braidotti’s or Butler’s ideas) will we be able to build a common ground from now on – the ground that will be temporarily useful until new experiences of particular women, new levels of knowledge about female subjectivity and new changes in living women’s attitudes towards their aims are taken into account. On such grounds, solving concrete problems like the right to be on the pro-choice side, to have the same income as men when doing the same job, or to have the right not to be a mother and wife are more crucial and important than establishing what the female or the male is.

Is it justified to talk about solving the problems of women when we have not finally established what being a woman is? Let me use Wittgenstein’s famous analogy with the beetle in the box to answer this question. Let us imagine that we all have boxes with something inside which we call a beetle. Nobody can look in anyone else’s box and what is more, nobody can even look inside her own box. But we all talk about the beetles, we describe what these beetles look like, how they behave, how they should be treated etc., simply trying to deduce what we can from all possible available symptoms we deal with while we have these boxes. We use the word “beetle” in a sensible way and we can build a community to solve the beetle problems without looking inside and checking what a beetle is, or checking if the beetles in the different boxes look the same or not. To simplify, we can act with beetles without formulating theories about their nature. In a sense we tacitly assume that there are such entities and that they have certain characteristics, but it is not so important for our task. It is even possible that all our boxes are empty and it will not change anything for our daily activities. The same holds for our case. We do not have to agree on who a woman is, and how she should build her identity in order to talk about women’s problems. In order to achieve some political aims, we need to be loyal to other women, but we do not have to build this solidarity on the basis of a commonly shared univocal female subjectivity (Butler 1990, pp. 14–15). As is the case with all analogies, the beetle analogy cannot be taken too far, either. I do not want to suggest that there is a thing such as female subjectivity and though as a problem it has to be put aside for the time being, it should and can be elaborated in the future. I would prefer to change the description so far, which can be detected from feminist theories dealing with the identity and subjectivity problem. The description so far could be summarized in the following way: talking about the rights, emancipation, freedom, liberation, etc. of women forces us to talk about the subjects we are mentioning here. It is required by the old tradition of philosophy in which theories, conceptions, discourses, discussions and arguments always refer to something. Something which is other-than-thing, ontologically distinct from everything that resides on the level of language. Such roots can be detected in almost all feminist theories concerning female subjectivity. If we cannot agree about the status of the female, let us start from something more trivial and less abstract, such as, for example, the question of suffering and pain experienced by women that I know and observe in my closest environment. Referring to common sense notions can help us see that we validate certain actions or need for actions that have to be done in order to reduce the suffering. Maybe I will share some observations with my colleague in the department I work, with a saleswoman from whom I buy bread and milk every day, with the neighbor I live with in the same building. Probably we do not have in mind the same kind of the female subject, we do not share the same discourse in which we could elaborate the identity category as such, our dialogue is not general, abstract and sophisticated enough to be a good starting point for formulating a theory. But it can be a good starting point to go beyond the female in the direction of drawing the description from now on, concerning the problems all the members of the whole discussion would like to solve.

4. Conclusion

I see philosophy as an area of human intellectual activity whose force lies in the ability to produce and construct new, powerful metaphors that can change current and stabilized ways of thinking and acting, thus as the way in which our world evolves. I also believe that we can change something exactly because we use the notion of the world as a rhetorical tool hid-
ity, in which new and old metaphors can flow, as an unfinished process of human activity. Feminism, social theory and social construction bring us to consider Mitterer’s philosophy as an initial inspiration for a new constructivism or a new direction in the constructivist trend, understood in a way that has been lucidly presented by Latour in one of his works (Latour 2005, pp. 88–93). Both Latour and Mitterer emphasize in a different way that valid constructivism is not social or cultural constructivism. Firstly, because social constructivism is just the opposite of naive realism, and they are both dualistic notions. Secondly, because a philosophical totality such as “the social” does not cover a homogenous, stable, unchangeable, ready-made entity or object that is easy to grasp. Constructing is better understood as a difficult, painstaking process of formulating descriptions from now on; work that has to be done by using complex machinery of various tools (such as symbols, artifacts, things, technological innovations, cultural stereotypes, common sense opinions—among many others) – the work that we have decided to do in order to avoid a stalemate situation and in order to solve some painful problems of our time and interests. As Latour teaches us, when something is constructed, it means it is both artificially created and true, real and objective at the same time. Its origin and history can be documented but it does not change the fact that it remains an acknowledged and objective result obtained by collective human ingenuity (Latour 2005, p. 89). It applies to all possible facts in any area of science. It applies also to the notions, categories and terms we analyze and re-work in philosophy. Such an understanding of constructing can be found in some theories of female subjectivity, and marrying its ideas with inspirations taken from Mitterer and Latour seems to be cognitively useful for the emancipatory goals of feminism. As Butler puts it: “[Construction is] a process of reiteration by which both “subjects” and “acts” come to appear [...]” (Butler 1993, p. 9). In this view, however, philosophy cannot be treated as a set of conclusively elaborated theories, in which answers and questions have been stated once and for all; rather, it has to be seen as a flow, as an unfinished process of human activity, in which new and old metaphors can freshly appear. I believe that philosophy so construed could help to understand and change our situation in the information age. It could also contribute to achieving the emancipatory aims of the feminism movement.

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THE AUTHOR

Alexandra Derra has been an academic lecturer and researcher at the Institute of Philosophy, Nicolaus Copernicus University of Toruń since 1999. From 2005–2006 she was visiting fellow at the Centre for Logic and Analytic Philosophy at the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven. Her doctoral degree is based on the work A Wittgensteinian category of use in contemporary theories of meaning and was the result of her philosophical fascination for the philosophy of late Wittgenstein. Her research interests include Anglo-Saxon contemporary philosophy of language and philosophy of science, as well as theories of language developed in cognitive science and the problems of subjectivity in contemporary feminist theories.
Does Non-dualism Imply an Approach to Power?

Non-dualizing Epistemology and the Political

Mathis Danelzik <mathis.danelzik@gcsc.uni-giessen.de>

Problem – The question of the moral and social effects of non-dualism has not yet been clarified to the necessary extent. The relation of truth claims, power and violence has been simplified; critical questions of non-dualist practises have not yet been addressed.

Approach – By discussing relevant philosophy and political theory, this paper draws attention to non-realists towards the issues of power, conflict and discourse rules and asks to rethink the issue of the pragmatic justification of non-realist epistemology.

Findings – (1) Constructivists, as well as the non-dualist Josef Mitterer, are critical of the discursive effects of truth claims. Yet, neither constructivism nor non-dualism solve the power issues that are ascribed to realism by constructivists and dualism by Mitterer. Even if participants abstained from truth claims in discourses, many of the power issues would still be prevalent. (2) The question arises of whether a practical difference between non-dualism and dualism exists. (3) There is a tendency in constructivist and non-dualist theory to regard any form of influence on others as illegitimate. This tendency is not sound. Instead, the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate power is necessary in non-dualism as well.

Implications – Constructivist and non-dualist theory need to scrutinise statements about the moral implications of the respective theories and to emphasise power issues not solely by extrapolating from epistemology, but by acknowledging the social dynamics of discourses and conflicts. Non-dualist social scientists could contribute to the discussion through empirical analyses of the effects of the use and the debunking of truth claims.

Key Words – hegemony, power, moral, strategic essentialism, relativism, tolerance.

What about the politics of non-dualism?

When I think of Mitterer’s work, I remember the first time I read the passage on theories of truth in Die Flucht aus der Beliebigkeit (Mitterer 2001, pp. 82–85). I was and am struck by the unique straightforwardness with which Mitterer demonstrates the self-referentiality and incommensurability of theories of truth. This passage represents philosophy at its best and I admire Mitterer’s ingenuity as well as the clarity with which he poses his ideas. However, other people are better qualified to value Mitterer’s merits as a philosopher, and this task shall be left to them. Instead, this article will appreciate Mitterer’s work through a critical discussion of the one area of his writing in which I feel to be able to raise questions that hopefully will be interesting for Mitterer himself and readers: his pragmatic justification of non-dualism. This justification could be twofold: philosophical and social. I will not engage in the philosophical advantages, although I think that a good case can be made to try to dispense with the philosophical problems that have dominated Western philosophy from its start. (Mitterer 2001, p. 21). I will rather concentrate on the social balance of non-dualism compared to dualism. What does Mitterer propose as the purpose of non-dualistic interventions and what kind of politics – specifically uses of truth claims and debunkings of truth claims – does he suggest to non-dualistic thinking people?

This topic is central to all theories that do not rest the justification of their theories on claims of “being true.” Although most of the theoreticians in question would agree on the statement above and put forward social advantages as justification of their theories, the issue of pragmatic justification – of the advantages of abandoning the concept of “truth,” so to speak – has often been trivialised and has not received adequate attention in my opinion.

Mitterer gives the replacement of the “pursuit of truth” with “the pursuit of change” as one reason for non-dualism (Mitterer 1992, p. 110). Therefore, I will analyse Mitterer’s evaluation of the effects of dualistic and non-dualistic thought and discuss its soundness. In doing so, Mitterer’s position will be contextualised with that of other philosophers and political theorists that have dealt with the problem of how to cope strategically with the insight of the impossibility of objective knowledge.

The article sets out to discuss the following questions: How, in Mitterer’s opinion, does dualistic thought regulate discourse? How, in Mitterer’s opinion, does non-dualistic thought regulate discourse? Are there differences? Does Mitterer propose anything in regard of using and debunking truth claims in discourse? If so, what does he propose? Are Mitterer’s propositions sound?

On the effects of dualistic thought

Many of the theoreticians that have brought forth criticisms of the epistemology of realism have also criticised the assumed social implications of realism. Quite serious charges have repeatedly been levelled against the effects of realist thinking and realists themselves. Heinz von Foerster may serve as an example when he says that the concept of objectivity is the most...
ingenious strategy invented to avoid responsibility, and that it should come as no surprise that constructivism is less popular than realism, given that the epistemology of constructivism necessarily implies the embracing of responsibility. He goes on by stating that a realistic position causes an outlook on the world defined by fear and relationships between human beings that follow the logic of dominance and regulation (Foerster 2006, p. 44). He also relates the phenomenon of war to the notion of truth and alleges that realists turn into dangerous beasts as soon as they think they have found the truth (Foerster 1998, p. 30). This may be called a very bleak evaluation of the social effects of realist thought.

It is not the distinction between constructivist and realist epistemologies that Mitterer regards as crucial, but rather the more basic distinction between dualism and non-dualism. Mostly, it is assumed that epistemology deals with the question of how human beings gather knowledge of the world. However, non-dualistic positions do not operate with the dichotomy of a reality independent from language and observers on the one hand, and descriptions, experience and observations on the other. Non-dualism differs from constructivist theories in the sense that those constructivist theories that make use of a concept of viability or assume a biological brain as a non-constructed foundation or that speak of creating a world through language are considered as dualistic by Mitterer because they still operate on the above-mentioned dichotomy. Thus, to apply the term epistemology to Mitterer’s theory may be questionable, but the term will be used to signify miscellaneous theories that deal with the concept of truth and truth claims. Although Mitterer proposes a different fundamental distinction between theories than von Foerster’s, to analyse this distinction in terms of the social effects of the two options is no less worthwhile. It is important to do that in order to illuminate the pragmatic justification of Mitterer’s theory. Would he agree with von Foerster’s statement, if “realistic thought” were replaced by “dualistic thought”?

One does not find such strong vocabulary in Mitterer’s work as one finds in von Foerster’s. Mitterer does attribute negative effects to dualistic thought though: he alleges that dualistic thought aspires to stagnancy and the perpetuation of the status quo and calls theories of truth an epistemological camouflage of the rule of force (Mitterer 1992, p. 110) because they are supposed to defend, shield and immunise positions (p. 111). On various occasions in his work, he stresses that truth claims cancel each other out unless a new procedure of observation is introduced that may lead to a new description of the object in question from now on (Mitterer 1992, p. 79; Mitterer 2001, p. 24). If such a new procedure cannot be found, the dispute cannot be transformed in a consensus without use of power (Mitterer 1992, p. 136). Since most of our discourses – one may add, all societal relevant discourses – happen in unequal power relations, the “pursuit of truth” becomes problematic for Mitterer (Mitterer 2001, p. 101). This is the case because in the dualistic mode, the prevailing position does not present itself simply as prevailing in a specific social constellation – but rather claims to be transcendent and justified by a beyond of discourse. That is why he accuses dualistic positions of immunising themselves. The justification of prevailing positions is given by “authorities” that get ascribed a privileged position to judge conflicting positions by reality itself or some sort of viability understood as pre-discursive entities that decide about the truth and falsehood of statements (Mitterer 1992, p. 78; Mitterer 2001, p. 70). In a wonderful paragraph, Mitterer sarcastically comments that those authorities that in dualistic thought are seen as merely announcing the result of the “reality” check, just happen to be the ones involved in the dispute in the first place (Mitterer 2001, p. 24). Again, the same holds true for framework-relative theories that abandon universal truth (e.g., collectivistic relativism), but replace it with a relative criterion that regulates discourse in the same way that universal truth does (Mitterer 2001, p. 57).

It is this analysis that makes Mitterer such an instructive read for social scientists. He is after all – and among other things of course – a theoretician of techniques of hegemony. He makes a very powerful case against dualism and describes the role of authority in beautifully plain words. However, I also see problems with his characterisation of the effects of dualistic thought. He mentions that the principle of truth in dualistic thought aligns discourses to aspire to consensus but at the same time impedes actual consensus because of mutually excluding truth claims (Mitterer, p. 88). However, he – in my opinion – simplifies the difference between the logic of a given position that motivates and prescribes rules of behaviour, and the systemic effect that emerges on the meso level from the interaction of the variety of those positions in any given discourse. Because of social dynamics, stagnation and perpetuation of the status quo are not inherent characteristics of dualistic thinking, but just one possible outcome, depending on specific discourse constellations. Firstly, universalised truth claims also serve as powerful narratives for social change (Weber 2005, p. 306), as the histories of the labour movement and the feminist movement have shown. It therefore does not lead to stagnancy necessarily. Secondly, while it is impossible to evade power in discourse, I do not think that it is correct to see the regulative function of the concept of truth just as a camouflage for the rule of power. It can function like that. But if the pursuit of truth has been internalised properly by the individuals involved, it operates in two additional ways. Individuals enter discourses with the motivation to improve their own position and may be willing to be open-minded, thoughtful and responsive in order to get to that beyond of discourse and leave all the “bias” behind. They may also refrain from violence because they believe in the superiority of their argument and that it eventually will be convincing to the involved parties. Thirdly, there are liberal dualists that get along with each other despite dissent. Liberal dualists react to the problem of various truth claims that cancel each other out by internalising a high level of tolerance for other positions and a low level of insistence on one’s own metaphysical rightness. It is only some issues that are regarded as so important that the value of toleration ceases to make dissent socially acceptable. Only in these instances does non-symbolic violence occur. As further analysis will show, it is questionable whether non-dualism has different effects.

It is hardly possible to judge the impact of dualistic thought on a great scale, because it would involve establishing dubious causal connections. Being unable to evaluate, we are stuck with analysing the logic of the two ways of thought and extrapolating from them, which will be continued in the next section.

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agree with Weber (Weber 2005, p. 306) that the evaluation of the effects of dualistic thought would most likely be more ambiguous than that given by Mitterer and, of course, by von Foerster.

In this section it was my intention to show that dualistic thinking may not have as bad a record as Mitterer suggests. Nevertheless, Mitterer avoids the trap that von Foerster falls into. Von Foerster’s position is self-contradictory in the sense that the strong language he uses delegitimizes realists (who would want the company of someone whose outlook on the world is one of fear and who is only able to have relationships ruled by domination?), while at the same time blames realists for delegitimizing their opponents through the “beyond the discourse” trick. Mitterer’s position does not do that.

**On the effects of non-dualistic thought**

In Mitterer’s earlier work, it is suggested that non-dualism implies an embrace of responsibility because non-dualists have to decide whether to change their attitudes without referring to a beyond of discourse. This is put in contrast to the alleged denial of responsibility in dualistic thought (Mitterer 1988, p. 28). In Mitterer’s main publications (1992, 2001) the term responsibility does not appear anymore. Similarly, the term “pursuit of change” cannot be found in Die Flucht aus der Beliebigkeit (2001), but appears prominently on the finishing pages of Das Jenseits der Philosophie (1992). I am not able to decide whether that fact suggests a shift of Mitterer’s position regarding the pragmatic justification of non-dualism or is merely due to the different foci of his books, given that the ethics of non-dualism are not Mitterer’s main interest, but rather a topic that is touched upon.

Mitterer clearly is critical of universalistic ethics, and when he says that the splitting of the universal framework into different frameworks inhibits or at least complicates the discrediting of deviant positions (Mitterer 1992, p. 126), he seems to favour relativistic approaches. However, he also problematizes the positions normally pitted against universalism, namely collectivistic relativism (often called cultural relativism) and individualistic relativism. In another brilliant passage that anticipates the discourses of identity politics, he states that collectivistic relativist positions within their framework work just like universalistic approaches. Since there is no neutral way of defining the frameworks themselves, the question of a position's belonging to a framework can only be determined by the subordination of all parties to a dominant interpretation of the borders of the frameworks, which again includes the power issue that was the critique of universalistic positions in the first place (Mitterer 1992, p. 54). One could therefore come to the conclusion that Mitterer is a supporter of individualistic relativism. However, he does not spare this position from criticism either. In a critique of Maturana’s point that individuals have only themselves as a reference for their morals, he states that just one of the disagreeable effects of individualistic relativism is that the moral principles only self-referentially point to themselves, therefore creating a conservative feedback that eliminates the possibility of change in one’s own moral principles (Mitterer 1992, p. 128). In other words, if one evaluates one’s own moral principles using one’s own moral principles, the result of that evaluation is easy to foresee.

All of the three critiques regarding universalism, collectivistic relativism and individualistic relativism are well founded. I do not know if Mitterer would subscribe to any of these three positions or would propose another position that is missed in my analysis. But given the premises of his work, I would regard individualistic relativism as the one fitting his theory best. One has to bear in mind that the first two positions are criticised as conceptually flawed, while the critique of individualistic relativism is one of undesirable consequences, not of implausible assumptions.

But could Mitterer’s argument of a conservative self-referentiality in individualistic relativism not also be considered a flaw of all non-dualistic variants? Is the inertial reaction of self-referentiality not the result of the lack of an internalisation of the pursuit of truth in the sense that non-dualists have no incentive to engage in discourse while dualists may be motivated to listen to people and learn in order to get to the truth? And is it not also an argument against the premise that abandonment of the concept of truth would spark a pursuit of change? Contrary to Weber’s view, the intention to change a status quo does not seem to be a necessary consequence of abandoning the concept of truth (Weber 2005, p. 292) and a “pursuit” of inertia seems equally reasonable.

 Analogically, are regimes of truth not necessary to align individuals to a certain degree so that the probability that they can agree on a procedure to produce a description from now on becomes higher? In his media theory, Weber gives the example of media content that is proved or disproved not by a reality itself, but by indicators such as police statistics; that is, indicators that all involved parties see as authoritative (Weber 2005, p. 320). I agree with that view. But I am not sure what criterion could be given by non-dualists to argue in favour of a certain indicator such as police statistics and against others such as intuition or astrology.

Richard Rorty is reported to have said (replacing “art” with “truth” in a Marshall McLuhan quote): “Truth is what your contemporaries let you get away with.” But if everybody within a discourse internalised only such a procedural criterion, with what would people get away with, and why? How would the discourse be organised? And would we be happy about the ways such discourses would go? These are not trivial questions to me and it does not seem clear-cut that non-dualism wins out over dualism in the effects of everyday discourses.

**On different agendas: The ironic, the unmasking and the situational approach**

The goal of my previous analysis of the ambiguous effects of dualistic and non-dualistic arguments was to show that adopting non-dualism as the most convincing epistemological option (as I do) does not necessarily imply that one favours the exposure of metaphysical truth claims as erroneous unconditionally. My aim was to demonstrate that the question is political in the broad sense in which Chantal Mouffe understands it (Mouffe 2007, p. 16). It is a question of dealing with the potentially antagonistic character of the engagement of human beings with each other that has normative
and strategic aspects and that can be discussed independently from the issue of the soundness of the epistemological theory of non-dualism.

Before I have a look at Mitterer’s work regarding the politics of non-dualism, I will map out different agendas that can be associated with non-realistic epistemologies; Ian Hacking distinguishes different agendas by their political impetus (Hacking 2002, pp. 39–40). Two of them are of particular importance here. Hacking defines the ironic position as the belief that X is a contingent result of social processes and that X may change one day, but that for the time being cannot be dispensed with (p. 40). The unmasking agenda on the other hand strives to dispense with X through the strategy of “unmasking,” which is not so much about denying ideas and declaring them wrong, but aims to corrode its credibility by exposing the social functionality of an idea (pp. 87–88). Related to the previous analysis, the ironic position would rather be convinced of the potential functions of “truth” and fear a disintegrating effect of non-dualistic thought, while the unmasking position evaluates the effects the other way round.

Can Mitterer’s attitude towards truth and universalism be related to one of these agendas? As Weber correctly says, Mitterer clearly has no intention to embrace an unmasking attitude towards all distinctions and ideas. In that case, only silence and meditation would be left (Weber 2005, pp. 241–242). But regarding the concept of “truth,” he seems to have an unmasking agenda. He proposes that the non-dualistic way of speaking is – among other things – about exposing the attempt to secure statements through truth claims by the dualistic way of speaking (Mitterer 1992, p. 110). He also explicitly says that it is his goal to make the tricks of dualistic speech transparent and thus to weaken their effectiveness (Mitterer 2001, p. 21). It can therefore be safely concluded that he prefers the unmasking agenda regarding truth.

I would like to introduce a third agenda to the scene: The situational approach does not generally decide between ironic and unmasking strategies, but decides to make use of both of them on different occasions depending on the specific context of the intervention intended. It works analogically to what Stierlin says about psychotherapeutic intervention, when he says that in psychotherapeutic practice it is often the task of the therapist to soften intransigent convictions, but that there are also schizophrenic constellations, in which everything seems to be fluent and anchorless and the task becomes to harden convictions so that decisions can be made again (Stierlin & Pörksen 2002, p. 206). In postcolonial theory, this agenda is prominently associated with Gayatri Spivak, who introduced the concept of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 1988, p. 205) as a way of dealing with identity politics. Given the dilemma of being in need of a narrative that would unify and bring solidarity among oppressed people, but at the same time being stuck in a cultural vocabulary that has served to oppress the same people in the first place, Spivak proposed the idea of strategic interaction with such vocabulary. Although strategic essentialism has been criticised for the fact that the strategic essentializer has no control over the concepts essentialized once they enter the discourse (Butler 2003, p. 20) and Spivak has abandoned the term due to reasons negligible in this context (Danius, Jonsson & Spivak 1993, p. 35), such a context-dependent approach is appealing to those undecided as to the effects of using/debunking truth claims.

**Does it make a difference?**

**On the question of practical irrelevance**

So far, different assessments of the effects of dualism and non-dualism have been discussed. What has been presumed so far is that the decision in favour of one of the two epistemological options influences oneself and everyday discourses. In this section, this presumption will be scrutinised.

Ian Hacking self-reportedly coined “the ironic agenda” after Richard Rorty’s use of irony in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Rorty 2004). But when it comes to “truth,” Rorty, by Hacking’s definition, does not adopt an ironic position. He does not claim that the concept of truth cannot be dispensable with for social reasons. Rather the opposite, he proposes a change to a vocabulary that would stress self-creation and that would express the futility of the longing for a reality beyond one’s own descriptions. However, Rorty does not think that adopting a non-metaphysical stance would in fact change one’s politics. One of his preconditions is that the insight into the contingency of one’s convictions will not stop the convictions regulating one’s actions (the same position is held by Schmidt 2003). Some of those convictions, Rorty goes on, will still be worth dying for (Rorty 2004, p. 306). This is an interesting statement as it carries a sense of antagonism remarkably absent in most of the constructivist and non-dualist literature. One can read a lot more about the embrace of responsibility (as in von Foerster and the early Mitterer), an imperative to tolerance (Schmidt 2003, p. 127), and love (Maturana & Pörksen 2002) than one can about conflict, power and violence.

Do these claims go along with each other? Namely, the first claim that convictions will regulate the actions of non-dualists just as they would if they were thought of as grounded in a “reality,” the second that some of them might still be worth dying for, and the third that non-dualism implicates an imperative for tolerance?

To answer that question one has to illuminate the issue of motivation, something I find Siegfried J. Schmidt especially useful for. Schmidt stresses that individuals are emotionally invested in the moral principles they hold and that moral principles are automatically evaluated morally as well. One’s moral principles are – for the time being – necessarily morally right, otherwise one would not hold them (Schmidt 2003, p. 119). This thought is similar to passages in Mitterer. Speaking about the apparent possibility of erring, Mitterer adds: How else would one describe an object if not with the descriptions one claims to be valid? With descriptions one does not claim to be valid? (Mitterer 2001, p. 47, also p. 88). This observation has two effects: firstly, it gives a new perspective on questions that von Foerster calls undecidable. Undecidable questions are those that are not answerable by a predefined set of rules. In Thomas Kuhn’s terminology, undecidable questions are the opposite of puzzles. While puzzles have rules and a solution, undecidable questions lack those rules. Yet, within the individual, undecidable questions hardly appear as undecidable. They already
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On power and hegemony

The last issue that should be considered when speaking about the pragmatic justification of non-dualism is the implicit simplification that equates the use of truth claims with power in discourse per se. Heinrich Popitz (2004) distinguishes four different phenomena of power: the power to kill and hurt, instrumental power that steers behaviour through positive and negative incentives, authoritative power that shapes preferences, and the power to shape the natural environment. Given the reasoning of the article so far, the first three phenomena of power would likely be prevalent in non-dualistic discourses as well. The fourth can be neglected in our context. The incommensurability of two non-dualistic worldviews and sets of behaviours can amount to a violent conflict, as we have seen in Maturana’s example. Nevertheless, some authors that criticise the effects of realism even dismiss convincing somebody else as an illegitimate action (Maturana & Pörksen 2002, p. 49). The reasons for that are incomprehensible to me, because the second and third phenomena of power are mechanisms to decide a conflict below the level of physical violence or a way to align individuals to a set of principles and behaviours so that conflict does not arise so frequently and so fundamentally. And attempting to convince someone, understood as the attempt to align somebody else to one’s way of life by earnestly describing one’s preferences and reasons to enact such a lifestyle, would be less invasive than those forms of power.

Given the threat of the physical elimination of one another, instrumental power, authoritative power and attempts at convincing would likely be elements of discourses among non-dualists. All these phenomena can be executed without truth claims. The use of truth claims is just one way to exercise those forms of power and therefore is not to be taken as the issue of power itself. Additionally, symbolic violence, understood here as harm caused by descriptions so far, works through distinction pragmatics, not through the metaphysics of a discourse, and no author mentioned in this paper regards the abandonment of distinction pragmatics as desirable or even possible. But if discourses solely

meet a certain preference internalised by the individual. For example, either an individual is amoral – in this case, there is no preference, reason or incentive to become moral – or an individual has a specific morality, but in this case the undecided question of whether or not to be amoral or moral does not appear. The self-referentiality of convictions plays a prominent role once again. Secondly, even if one does not assume one’s convictions to be true in the dualistic sense, one still is as dependent on them as if they were, because one needs hypotheses about one’s environment as well as normative standards. That is why Schmidt says that a non-dualist is not a relativist. One’s convictions suspend the contingency of the options at hand, however contingent they themselves may be (Schmidt & Pörksen 2002, pp. 176–177). That does not imply that those convictions may not change over time, but once internalised, they fulfill the function of distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable behaviour and build rules of how to react to such behaviours at any given moment. But given this description, is it possible to rescue the claim that either constructivism or non-dualism imply an imperative to tolerance?

Humberto Maturana maintains that claim. He distinguishes between tolerance and respect. To him, tolerance is a temporary suspension of inhibition of another individual’s behaviour, even a temporary suspension of the elimination of the other (Maturana & Pörksen 2002, p. 47). To Maturana, tolerance is a symptom of a realist position. He pits tolerance against respect, by which he means what the author’s mentioned earlier understand by respect. Tolerance is to Maturana a symptom of constructivism. Tolerance in Maturana’s sense implies the inability to be empathetic, respect implies a real interest in the other’s way of thinking and accepting his or her basic legitimacy (p. 47). Again, as in von Foerster’s quotes mentioned earlier, Maturana uses the most pejorative vocabulary to describe the outcome of realism. Such accusations delegitimize realists and are therefore self-refuting in the sense that they exemplify what non-realists accuse others of doing, namely devaluing one’s opponent. Especially in the light of the arguments presented in this paper, constructivists should avoid falling into such rhetorical traps, since they are in no way substantial to constructivist positions.

However, when further questioned, Maturana answers that non-realists that entertain the maxim of respect may – in consciousness of their responsibility – end cooperation or even take up arms to engage in violence if the other tries to create a world one feels unable to live in. But he adds that respect would remain nevertheless. That difference in intention or perhaps just in phrasing the moment of violence may be insignificant. The imperative to tolerance (respectively respect) adds up to nothing more than the toleration of other ways of thinking and behaving until one really does not feel to be able to accept that deviance. Of course, that is a statement anybody, no matter what epistemology they adhere to and no matter how fundamentalist or narrow-minded they are regarded as being by others, can subscribe to. To rescue the claim of a moral advantage of non-dualism epistemology, one could try to argue that non-dualism inherently tends to enlarge the amount of convictions and behaviour one does not feel an obligation to oppress in one way or another. I would counter that argument by pointing out that to increase the number of behaviours and convictions one does not feel an obligation to oppress is not a good or bad thing per se. Rather the limit of acceptable behaviour is determined by our contingent morals once again. That is exactly how the conservative feedback of moral attitudes works. Tolerance, limits of tolerance, violence, rules of discourse, limits of free speech, and so forth seem not to be determined, not even be influenced by the epistemology opted for, but ruled by the principle of the contingent emotional investment in beliefs, moral principles, and discourse rules that are deduced from them: “Here I stand; I can do no other.”

The argument developed in this section may imply the practical irrelevance of dualism and non-dualism. However, the argument of practical irrelevance not only contradicts the imperative to tolerance, but is also mutually exclusive with the thesis of disintegrating effects of non-dualism on discourses that have been analysed earlier. Since it is my intention to open up different angles for further debate of the practical implications of non-dualism, this tension will be left unresolved in this article.

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entertained by non-dualists were still structured through popularity and authority, one would performatively exert influence on others, even if one abstained from truth claims (for both the performativity and the symbolic harm aspect see Butler 2003 and Butler 2006, respectively). Thus, the issue of power is more pervasive and ubiquitous than perceived by the literature criticising the effects of realism, which is in danger of developing a blind spot for the execution of power that is not based on truth claims. Two political theoreticians – Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau – have written extensively on the inevitability of power and hegemony from a non-realist perspective, which they call post-foundationalism. By post-foundationalism, they mean the acknowledgment of the uselessness of the assumption of a beyond of discourse and thus subscribe to a non-dualist position. Their work therefore is able to enrich the debate on the moral and social effects of dualist and non-dualist positions.

Mouffe states that it is impossible to reach a consensus that would not simultaneously exclude or inhibit other options (Mouffe 2007, p. 19). This impossibility is not based on the use of truth claims, but on the internalisation of positive and negative sentiments towards certain political goals and group identities. The possibility of antagonistic (mutually excluding) preferences is therefore also inherent in the post-foundational situation. This possibility is what she calls the political (p. 16). From these premises, which have been argued for in this paper as well, it follows that any societal order is political and inhibits, excludes or oppresses other ways of organising society. This is what Mouffe calls hegemony (pp. 25–26). The same holds for competing concepts on a less general level than the societal order. For Mouffe, the task of democratic politics is not to try to eliminate the possibility of antagonism in some sort of post-conflict unity. She accuses Beck and Giddens of adhering to such an idea and states that it would increase the probability of an antagonistic clash since it has no concept of how to deal with potentially antagonistic positions (pp. 48–49). She rather regards it as the task of democratic politics to transform as many potentially antagonistic constellations as possible into what she calls agonistic conflict (pp. 29–30).

In the vocabulary of Mitterer, an agonistic conflict is one in which the involved parties share a basic consensus on the rules of conflict that stops short of physical violence and secures the freedom to advocate one’s hegemonic project. Antagonistic conflict lacks that consensus. To my understanding, agonistic conflicts would involve Popitz’s second and third forms of power and would not be able to ensure that the first form of power would not occur. On the contrary, democracy in Mouffe’s view is itself a hegemonic project (what else could it be?) that can be drawn into antagonistic constellations if its contingent basic principles are opposed. In this case, the use of physical force is not ruled out by Mouffe (2007, p. 158).

Ernesto Laclau offers similar views to Mouffe’s and, once again, some of Mitterer’s ideas can be found as well. To Laclau (2007b, pp. 74–75), hegemony is an incarnation of a particular position as the universal one, thus agreeing with Mitterer in the diagnosis of dualistic reasoning. That incarnation is necessary for society. Laclau therefore proposes an ironic position in Hacking’s sense. He, just like Mouffe, thinks that any theory of power in democratic societies has to be a theory about legitimate and illegitimate executions of power. According to both authors, the elimination of power itself is impossible, because antagonistic constellations between contingent ways of life cannot be categorically circumvented. Thus, the exercise of power is inevitable and the authors propose that the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate power therefore is inevitable as well when a non-dualist perspective is adopted (Laclau 2000a, p. 162).

Hegemony and power as such are thus stripped of the negative connotations that have been ascribed to them by different authors described in this paper. Only specific hegemonies, power structures and uses are to be criticised from that standpoint. If these suggestions are correct, the differences in dualist and non-dualist discursive practises regarding the issue of power are less marked than commonly assumed by both sides of the epistemological debate. Furthermore, the sphere of the political seems to be governed by social principles of internalisation of sentiments through socialisation and the logic of social dynamics rather than determined by epistemological choices.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued from three different angles. The first angle was the attempt to scrutinise the suggested social benefits of non-dualism, and aimed at animating a discussion on the value and the dangers of the concept of truth as a discourse regulator. It also asked for a more detailed vision of non-dualistic practises. The second one questioned the asserted imperative to tolerance of non-dualism by focusing on the psychic processes of motivation and decision making. The third angle tried to do the same, but argued on the level of social dynamics that arise from the interaction of different positions and strategies.

In closing, I want to map out my intentions in writing this article. Firstly, I hope to have honoured the outstanding contributions of Josef Mitterer by engaging critically with his work. And hopefully I was able to produce at least a few ideas of interest to the honoured party and the reader.

Theoretically, the issue of the social effects of non-dualism seems to be more important than the rather modest attention it receives from constructivists and non-dualists today. I call for an emancipation of the issue of the political from the issue of epistemology. Although a discussion of the political emanates from epistemological reasoning, an analysis that tries to determine the political only by discussing epistemology falls short of the former’s complexities. Especially, non-dualistic and constructivist social scientists could contribute to non-dualistic discourse by conducting empirical research of the effects of strategic uses of truth claims and debunks of truth claims in various discourses. Those insights would be very helpful towards establishing a more profound evaluation of dualism and non-dualism.

I also intended to argue for a more sophisticated analysis of the concepts of power, violence and authority by constructivists and non-dualists. The rash denouncement of those concepts and even of the process of convincing may create a serious lack of awareness of theoretical issues and one’s own practices. The devaluing rhetoric towards realists by Maturana and von Foerster may serve as an example for symbolic violence and antagonising speech that contradicts the main points of these well-meaning authors. In my opinion, the arguments I have brought forward show
that power issues are inevitable, but that the very old distinction of legitimate and illegitimate power is still crucial in non-dualist thought, however contingent and contested any notion of legitimacy may be. There is simply no alternative but to make that distinction and struggle with each other in the interpretation of what is legitimate and what is not.

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THE AUTHOR

Mathis Danelzik has studied communication, politics and philosophy at the WWU Münster, Germany, and graduated with an M.A. in communications, culture and media from Coventry University, UK. He currently is a Ph.D. fellow at the International Graduate Center for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at the JLU Giessen. The Ph.D. thesis is concerned with strategies and dilemmas of culturally sensitive and participative campaigns against female genital cutting. His first contact with the work of Josef Mitterer came through studies with Siegfried J. Schmidt at the Institute of Communication Studies in Münster and has shaped the author’s outlook ever since.
Dualism Still at Work: 
On Wittgenstein’s Certainty

Sven Grampp ◊ Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen <sven.grampp@gmx.de>

**Problem** – A dualistic position faces considerable problems as Mitterer, inter alia, clearly pointed out. Mitterer not only wants to name these problems, but to provide a genuine alternative with his non-dualism. However, this non-dualistic alternative also contains severe problems. Thus this text suggests preferring Wittgenstein’s concept of a pragmatic investigation of language-games to Mitterer’s non-dualism in order to tackle the problems of dualism. **Solution** – With recourse to Wittgenstein’s pragmatic investigation of language-games, a fundamental problem of dualism can be solved. With the concept of certainty, Wittgenstein succeeds in avoiding an ontological grounding in an independent world – or, as Mitterer would put it, the assumption of a “beyond of discourse.” At the same time, the assumption of an independent world as a concept that provides a basis for our language-games is maintained on an epistemological level. This assumption, however, is not maintained as a phenomenon that requires to be substantiated but as a certainty that is constitutive for language-games and does not need to be substantiated. Such a concept is suitable for preventing epistemological operations such as knowledge, doubt, giving reasons, etc., from being made void, without having to provide an ontological basis for them. **Implications** – Wittgenstein’s point of view therefore provides an attractive alternative to Mitterer’s non-dualism. By getting rid of the “beyond of discourse,” Mitterer’s non-dualism faces the problem of not being able to explain how we can manage to understand epistemological operations within our language-games without referring to a “beyond of discourse.” From this point of view arises the consequence that it would make sense to analyze language-games from a pragmatic standpoint rather than to keep on honing non-dualistic vocabulary. **Key words** – dualism, pragmatic analysis, certainty, skepticism, language-games, Wittgenstein vs. Mitterer.

From its seeming to me – or to everyone – to be so, it doesn’t follow that it is so. What we can ask is whether it can make sense to doubt it.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1969), §2

In his posthumously published book *On Certainty* (1969), Ludwig Wittgenstein offered a very attractive solution to problems that dualism cannot deal with very well. It is a solution that differs in many ways from the solution Mitterer gives with his non-dualism (see Mitterer 1992). To put it bluntly: Wittgenstein’s pragmatic investigations of certainty show how to allow dualistic worldview without being a dualist. From this point of view, Wittgenstein’s concept of certainty can also be taken as an alternative to Mitterer’s non-dualism. In this respect, Wittgenstein’s concept can be accepted as a problem-solving modification of (radically) constructivist efforts because (radical) constructivism faces a number of problems. Mitterer does not cease to confront constructivists with one of them. He criticizes them for adopting constructivist concepts on the one hand, but on the other sticking to a fundamental paradigm of realism, which is a dualist position (see Mitterer 1992, pp. 115–149 or Mitterer 2001, pp. 120–128). Mitterer also describes more recent tendencies in philosophy that are similar to radical constructivism, which he refers to as “post-analytic neopragmatism” (Mitterer 1992, p. 16). Indeed, Mitterer finds some positive aspects in these post-analytic positions, as they have smoothed the way to moving away from dualistic positions. These positions, however, have – analogously to (radical) constructivism – not entirely overcome dualism or might, as, for example, in the case of Richard Rorty, unjustifiably consider epistemological questions obsolete (Mitterer 2001, p. 21). Contrary to this opinion, this text wishes to show that it would make sense to orient towards a “post-analytic neopragmatism” that includes a repositioning of constructivist standpoints. To me, a “post-analytic neopragmatism” seems very attractive in this context, which can be placed in the tradition of Wittgenstein and, especially, has to pick up his pragmatically-oriented analysis of language games to create an epistemological base. Thus the present text intends to lead the constructivist discourse not in a non-dualistic direction but in a pragmatic one. It is not, however, a “pragmatization of constructivism,” that is shown here, but Wittgenstein’s epistemological groundwork, which may serve such a pragmatization.

The bottom line of Wittgenstein’s analysis is fundamentally different from the traditional epistemology according to Plato. Wittgenstein, however, gives a completely different answer to epistemological problems. In the view of Plato’s tradition you can justify a belief according to the facts of the world and according to the reasons that are given for the believing. From that point of view, knowing something for sure means that somebody has good reasons to assume something and that this assumption corresponds with the reality of the world. Thus the bedrock of certain judgments is a world that is independent from one’s own views and judgments (Gabriel 1998, pp. 20–25). Wittgenstein instead thinks that, before you can have good reasons to believe in X or to doubt X, there is a reasonless certainty that comes first and presents what might be good reasons to believe, doubt or know. This certainty is not situated in an independent world and does not have good reasons.

“But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor
do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.

The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules” (Wittgenstein 1969, §94f).

Again, that certainty does not come from an independent world beyond anything whatsoever. It comes from what Wittgenstein calls language-games and what we could call descriptions so far to show the similarity to Mitterer’s project (see Mitterer 1992, pp. 206–265). It is just a certainty that someone learns in language-games that are embedded in a social field and that are exchangeable. The (certain) objects are given only with the descriptions/language-games; they are not independent and therefore they are exchangeable within the descriptions/language-games.

Wittgenstein’s position is not merely a rejection of a realistic point of view; it is also a rejection of a skeptical position because before there can be doubt, there must be certainty. Without certainty we cannot understand what doubt could mean. And thus Wittgenstein argues that philosophical skepticism takes practical doubt, which requires good reasons, as theoretical doubt of everything, without good reasons. But this theoretical doubting of all things is different to the doubt we learn in language-games and so in Wittgenstein’s point of view it is a misleading usage of the expression “doubt.”

“The idealist’s question would be something like, ‘What right have I not to doubt the existence of my hands?’ (And to that the answer can’t be, ‘I know that they exist.’) But someone who asks such a question is overlooking the fact that a doubt about existence only works in a language-game. Hence, we should first have to ask, ‘What would such a doubt be like?’ We don’t understand this straight off” (Wittgenstein 1969, §24).

I will attempt to clarify this point of Wittgenstein’s concept with a diagram (Figure 1) followed by a corresponding example.

At the basis of the language-game lies the certainty (C) that can be expressed in sentences such as, “The earth is a globe,” “In my head there is a brain,” or, more universally, “Physical objects do exist.” And here the certainty plays the role of an a priori proposition, or, as Wittgenstein puts it, certainty plays the role of a “logical proposition” (Wittgenstein 1969, §51, my emphasis). It is important to understand that the indicated sentences do not describe timeless and spaceless a priori.

And that is a big difference from traditional epistemology. The sentences merely describe certainties within specific language-games. And in principal, there could be many different language-games with different logical sentences that are incompatible even between themselves. And even in a single language-game, the basic certainties could also change by and by (Wittgenstein 1969, §96).

But back to the specific of the certainties: they are fundamental not just for our basic knowledge (for example “The earth is a globe”), but are also are essential for our epistemic norms, which regulate our approach to the world. These epistemic norms define at least the possibilities and the limits within which reasoning, knowledge, doubt and mistake can ever make sense. But the epistemic norms themselves are not in the field of reasoning, doubting and mistaking. They cannot be doubted within the language-game. Therefore to doubt the epistemic norms is a misleading application of the role that doubt plays in language-games (Wittgenstein 1969, §§237–242).

To be more specific, I will give an example. Standing in front of a statue in an ancient museum, person A might say to person B, “This statue is made of marble.” So there is a claim of knowledge Ux which is expressed implicitly. Then, person B might ask in reply, “Are you sure?” (He might guess that the statue could be made from a special kind of wood resembling marble.) In this case, a practical doubt is expressed. And person A might answer, “Yes I’m quite sure. The statue is hard and plain and cold.” So the claim of knowledge Ux is reasoned by Ux, person B could keep on asking, e.g., “How do you know that?” And person A could answer, “I was here just a week ago and I touched the statue with my hand.” So Ux becomes a claim of knowledge Ux and is reasoned by Ux. If person B were to ask afterwards, “What is a hand?” we could imagine that B, for example, is Chinese and therefore does not know the English word “hand.” Person A could explain to him with an indicating gesture that “this part of the body is called ‘hand’ in English.” The sentence “This part of the body is called ‘hand’ in English,” is expressed here with a claim of knowledge that is reasonable (for example B may look it up in a dictionary; he may ask other people, etc.). It is an utterance that shows how a reference was standardized. And B can give evidence of the utterance by looking it up in the dictionary.

Now imagine the case that B looks in a dictionary and finds out that what A calls a “hand” is described as an “arm” in there. Person B would then ask other people and it would turn out that in a certain place in Canada, where A used to live, people call “hand” in their dialect what the Standard English language would refer to as “arm.” Person B then would come up to person A and tell him about the difference and give him good reason to trust him (the dialect). Then afterwards A could decide whether he should modify his reference. Please note that in our example the discussion is about an explanation of the word “hand” and not about whether a hand exists or not (Wittgenstein 1969, §412). It is
perfectly clear to person A that there exist such things as “hand” or “arm,” even if he were to modify his references. If we now assume that person B is a skeptical philosopher, he probably would ask, “How do you know that there is a hand?” (Here he does not ask for adequate or inadequate references. He asks instead whether A can be sure of the existence of a hand or any physical object anyway). Then A would not understand him and would, for example, raise his hand and point at it. Every proof A gives for the existence of the hand will be no more certain than the certainty of a hand being there at all. (For example, A does not prove the existence of his hand by looking at his hand so that afterwards he will be more certain of its existence). In this case it seems there is neither reasoned nor even reasonable certainty. Person A would say, “We refer to things in this manner, we act in this way,” and so on.

Through conventions, person A acquired the certainty that his hand exists. Within a social field he grew up with the certainty that there was a hand. Before there can be any doubt at all, preceding certainties are required that are unincumbentable and that first and foremost set the norm for an expression such as “hand” corresponding to something existent in the world. Moreover, in that way, it is established that there must be an accordance between an expression and the world; and what “according” even means is also standardized (Wittgenstein 1969, §203).

Education does not work in such a way that someone tells a child, “You have two hands and you can trust me that they are a part of the physical world and my description corresponds with the laws of nature.” Instead the child learns the meaning of a word by practical uses (e.g., “Give me your hand.”). And thus the child develops a comprehension of how something could correspond with a certain expression. By using expressions such as “Give me your hand,” “This is a tree,” etc., it originates through what we can call a “logical container” (Wright 1986, p. 178; my emphasis) for possible utterances (for example, the logical container “There are physical objects,” Wittgenstein 1969, §§35–36). That logical container is the unincumbentable and unreasonable certainty.

But back to the example. Person A will not give up his certainty of the hand (or at least an arm) being there. And he will not accept any doubt concerning that certainty because it would not be so meaningful and would be, in a practical context, senseless. Concerning this certainty, he cannot make a mistake even though the certainty is not reasonable. So from Wittgenstein’s point of view, there is an unquestionable field that is linked to the language-game about the statue. And if person B doubts this certainty, he spoils the language-game and thus even the possibility of a discussion about the statue. Because to be able to speak about the statue, A and B must accept, and, moreover, must have internalized certainties such as “hands exist,” and “you can tell the material of a statue by touching it with your hand.”

With that example, I would like to show that certainty modulates and constitutes a field of possible reasons, knowledge, doubts and mistakes. In this respect, epistemic norms are certainties because they regulate the different epistemic operations such as doubting or knowing. And therefore they regulate conditions for possible utterances in a language-game. Without certainty, it is not possible to know or to doubt. Without the epistemic norms of certainty, you would neither know how nor what to doubt and know. But the certainty itself cannot be known or doubted and cannot be well-founded, just believed. “At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded” (Wittgenstein 1969, §253).

In my opinion, it is obvious that Wittgenstein’s concept of certainty has many things in common with Mitterer’s non-dualism. To me, Wittgenstein’s rejection of traditional realism, especially, seems very close to Mitterer’s view. Like non-dualism, Wittgenstein emphasizes that it does not make sense to think about an access to a world beyond and independent of descriptions and language-games respectively. Only through language-games can you learn the meanings of “hand,” “world,” “truth” or, let’s say, “according to something.” Only after the constitution of a special language-game is it given from now on that the world was given millions of years before. And as in non-dualism, the objects of the world are not just beyond and independent from the description; they can be modified, too. When the language-game changes, the a priori propositions change as well. And like Mitterer, Wittgenstein also says that there must be a basic consensus or, let’s say, a common certainty so that people have the opportunity to offer some new descriptions and perform some common investigations to generate the next basis for new descriptions etc. (Mitterer 1992, pp. 70–71).

But at this point, the first difference between Mitterer and Wittgenstein occurs very clearly. For Wittgenstein, the consensus lies so deep in social practice and social education that no one can overcome it. For Wittgenstein, what you take as the basis of the investigations is not a matter of decision. For Mitterer instead, it seems that it suffices that people can decide what should count as the common basis for their investigation and what should not (Mitterer 1992, pp. 71–74). These differences lead us to at least three main differences between Mitterer and Wittgenstein. I will focus on these differences because that way I can formulate a criticism of non-dual-
ism from (my interpretation of) Wittgenstein’s point of view. And thus I hope to show – at least sketchily – an alternative to the non-dualistic philosophy. In order to have a clear structure, I will put it in the form of theses.

**Thesis #1:** There are limits to continuing a language-game and a description, respectively.

Mitterer says that you need a necessary basic consensus to carry on with another description. But this basic consensus cannot be an example of the decision as to whether a new description is adequate or not acceptable, or wrong or right (Mitterer 1992, pp. 72–73). The people involved can decide to agree upon a common test procedure for the new description so they are able to build another object for another description and so on. In contrast, Wittgenstein argues that there is no decision to agree upon a common test procedure. The test procedure already exists before there is a decision and limits the possibility of a new description. The limits – of whether a description is adequate or not acceptable, wrong or right – are not given from the world beyond the decisions but from the epistemic norms of the language-games that build the basis for the test procedures and therefore universally form the basics of what it means to be adequate or right.

That does not mean that there is no possibility to change the language-games and the epistemic norms (with new descriptions). But someone has to show how the new description can be integrated into the worldview. Otherwise I will say he is mad, or at least think it, or that the worldview is too different to comprehend (Wittgenstein 1969, §§611.1–618). Think, for example, of the statement that the axiom of the excluded contradiction is not a good basis for our mathematical operations. Someone has to show that there are good reasons for this, which we can understand in principle from the basis of our epistemic norms; one may think of Gödel’s incompleteness theorems. Or think, closer to home, of the arguments the non-dualist Mitterer gives against dualism.6 In Wittgenstein’s concept, you can take more than one sentence as the basis of a new description (unlike what Mitterer’s examples suggest). There are many certainties and epistemic terms that surround and give a basis to new descriptions (Wittgenstein 1969, §225). This kind of holism implies that, on the one hand, many things can change when a new description is accepted. For example, if it were

proved that water does not normally condense at 212° Fahrenheit, it would imply not just a modification of thinking about water, but many changes in thinking about physical dynamics as well (Wittgenstein 1969, §§292–293). On the other hand, not everything will change with a new description. So the object of a description, for example the Aristotelian laws of logic, might change with a new description, for example Gödel’s incompleteness theorems. But not every logical norm and not every epistemic norm will change from this. Thus Wittgenstein’s concept of certainty and epistemic norms should not mistaken for what Mitterer calls an “independent base of operation” (Mitterer 1992, p. 73); it is, nevertheless, the “local content” where arguments and hence new descriptions can fail with reasons. And so there are – unlike what Mitterer suggests – limits to a new description.

**Thesis #2:** You can formulate a universal doubt; but this is a misleading use of the role that doubt plays in our language-games.

You need some things that are certain before you can doubt something. And you need reasons for doubting just as you need reasons for knowing. That is the way our language-games are played. But if you doubt everything, as the skeptical position implies, just because you can do it logically, then you universalize doubt without having a good reason. From that point of view, skepticism is merely a misleading use of the expression “doubt.” To some extent, Mitterer’s non-dualism also takes this misleading skeptical position. Indeed, Mitterer does not say – as Descartes puts it for example – that there could be a deus malignus, who deceives us about the world or about logical laws. But he does say that every certainty that is given by dualism is obsolete. And if these certainties are obsolete, then we have no point of truth, adequateness etc. From that point of view, Mitterer is a skeptical philosopher, and so we can reply to him as we can reply, with Wittgenstein, to every skeptical philosopher, “Before you can doubt something (for example dualism), you need some epistemic norms that are certain. Otherwise it is just a misleading use of the epistemic norm “doubt.”

**Thesis #3:** The dualism of object and description is an uncircumventable certainty in our language-games and does not need, or, more precisely, cannot have any explanation.

Unlike a traditional skeptical philosophy, non-dualism does not say that things might be different to what anybody seems to know. Instead, Mitterer insists that you cannot prove if something is given before a description: the difference between the world and the description is just given within the description. And thus it is misleading to speak of a world independent from descriptions (Mitterer 1992, pp. 97–101). In order to clarify this point of view, Mitterer does not take the epistemic norm in a misleading way. On that point, he gives good reasons for the doubt that there would be a world beyond and independent from the description. He points out very clearly that dualism itself would get into an infinite regress if it were to prove the independence of the world from the description (Mitterer 1992, pp. 90–91). But if we understand-dualism in the way Wittgenstein puts it, this argument fails because from that perspective there is no need to prove the independence of the world. Or more radically, you cannot prove the independence of the world because it is a part of our certainties and thus a part of our “logical content.” Incidentally, we have learnt that certainty in our language-games. And if the only reason against it is that dualism goes in an infinite regress, than this is just a misleading understanding of the concept of certainty. The certainties of our language-games are reasonless – and so it is the certainty that an independent world exists. From that point of view there is no necessity to introduce a non-dualizing mode of speaking as described by Mitterer in order to replace the dualizing mode of speaking. Until now, the dualizing way of speaking has just been founded in the wrong way, or more clearly, it has been considered foundable and requiring founding respectively.

The result of Wittgenstein’s point of view that he offers in *On Certainty* contains at least two curiosities. Firstly, dualism fails when it can be proved and succeeds when we leave it unproved. Secondly, there cannot be a world independent from language-games, but in some (our) language-games, there is a certainty that an independent world exists. So dualism still works, but not in a traditional way. Wittgenstein’s strategy goes beyond the difference between dualism and non-dualism to some extent, hence also beyond the difference between dualizing and non-dualizing modes of speaking. His point of view turns
against both the ontological claim of dualism that there is an independent world and against the epistemic claim of non-dualism that there is no independent world beyond descriptions. Consequently, this leads not to a development of a non-dualistic mode of speaking, but much more simply to a pragmatic analysis of uses of expressions and epistemic norms. Nothing else can be done.

“On the other hand, a language-game does change with time” (Wittgenstein 1969, §256).

Notes

1. Mitterer himself refers to Wittgenstein, but in a quite different way than how I will try to do so in my paper. He criticizes the point of view concerning the problem of semantic reference that Wittgenstein offers in his Philosophical Investigations (1971). But this is a completely different subject than the concept of certainty. In the passage of the Philosophical Investigations to which Mitterer refers, Wittgenstein deals with a semantic-reference problem. With the example of the so-called “duck-rabbit,” a picture that can be seen as either a duck or a rabbit, Wittgenstein tries to explain that someone can see, understand and describe something in quite different ways - in this case even as a duck or a rabbit (see Wittgenstein 1971, p. 309). Mitterer criticizes that position, because Wittgenstein – despite his relativization that phenomena in different contexts lead to different perceptions and understandings – assumes that a common basis is given beyond the descriptions (Mitterer 1992, pp. 23–29). So in this case, Wittgenstein’s position operates with the more or less unreflected relation of an independent world and the semantic interpretation of this world. In On Certainty Wittgenstein don’t write about semantic interpretations of “something,” instead he thinks about the possibilities to consolidate this “something” within or dependent on language-games, respectively. Insofar as Mitterer’s critique of Wittgenstein hits on what is perhaps a basic problem of the Philosophical Investigations, it does not hit on the central point of On Certainty. Hence, I do not want to refer to Mitterer’s critique on Wittgenstein.


3. More precisely, from Mitterer’s point of view the whole history of philosophy is the internalization of the dualizing manner of speaking and therefore a project to affirm a dualistic world picture by suggesting that a contingent assumption, i.e., that there is a basic categorical dualism between language and world, between subject and object etc. (Mitterer 1992, p. 11), is an uncontrollable and necessary one.

4. In this context it is also worth mentioning Robert B. Brandom. His work counts as postanalytic philosophy or, much more specifically, as normative (neo-)pragmatism. See Bertram et al. (2008), p. 223.

5. For the concept of the dynamic relation between description so far and descriptions from now on, see Mitterer (1992), pp. 96–101. And for a very clear reconstruction of that concept, see Weber (2005), pp. 260–265.

6. For a clear description of this, see the diagram in Weber (2005), p. 264.

7. See, for example, the “good reason” against dualism. Mitterer shows very clearly that the assumption that the world is independent from and given before our descriptions leads to a regressus ad infinitum (Mitterer 1992, p. 90).

8. This is not about confronting Mitterer’s non-dualism with some ontological remains that have simply not been thrown off yet. Mitterer’s standpoint is not that of a radical skeptic who wants to convince us of the alleged fact that nothing exists or that everything could be just a dream, no more than he claims that everything could just be a construct. His point of view is – just to emphasize it once more – that the world cannot be conceived prior to and independently from the description. To justify this fact he suggests using a non-dualizing style of speaking instead of the dualizing one (see Mitterer 1992, pp. 60–101). Nevertheless are there two problems that remain unsolved. Firstly, it is not clear what would replace the epistemic norms such as “knowledge” and “doubts,” which are very tightly and most probably even constitutively linked to the dualistic idea (see thesis #2). To express it more simply: how would one be able to make oneself understandable if the dualistic paradigm fell? Secondly, Mitterer misjudges the role that is played in our language-games by the dualistic certainty of the independence of the world. He believes that he can discredit the dualistic style of speaking by giving good reasons for its inability to be substantiated, but that is exactly what has been made unnecessary by Wittgenstein’s concept, and it results from a wrong idea of the way certainties are created (see thesis #3).

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Mitterer’s Travels

Matthias Kross  Einstein Forum and University of Potsdam (Germany) <mkross@rz.uni-potsdam.de>

**Situation** – Josef Mitterer is, among other callings, a philosopher of “traveling concepts.” As a leader of various travel groups, he has collected a rich range of material for the adventure of traveling – and has drawn conclusions from that material for his non-dualistic cognitive theory.

**Findings** – In Mitterer’s view, despite all longings for the “other,” the “strange,” and despite all “self-forgetful expansion of horizons,” in our encounter with the new we always remain systemically bound to our constructions of age and ego. Every putatively authentic encounter is crammed with “constructivist” preconditions.

**Implications** – Whereas in pre-modern times the voyage was understood as a “wandering between worlds,” Mitterer’s epistemology offers us an appropriate framework for the particularities of modern tourism – and with them, for a modern self-understanding in face of the foreign and strange.

**Key words** – constructivism, post-metaphysical epistemology, traveling concepts.

Joseph Mitterer is, among various callings, a philosopher of travel. His friends know this from direct reports and conversations; others will find it amply demonstrated in his short essay on “the reality of travel” (Mitterer 1996, henceforth WR). Granted, some of Mitterer’s colleagues may have overlooked the essay, which in any case does not come across as especially learned or philosophically specialized. His examples come from concrete experience as a tour guide, serving as a basis for general reflections over the precarious relationship of human beings to the reality that surrounds them and that they have nonetheless created. Initially, then, the essay casts some amusing light on the banalities of modern package tours:

- “After a very warm morning in the Vatican Museum Betsy Harter steps up to me in an excited state: ‘I didn’t see the Mona Lisa.’ – ‘Mrs. Harter, the Mona Lisa isn’t here, it’s in Paris, in the Louvre.’ – ‘But you told us we’re going to see the Louvre!’ – ‘Yes, but we’ll see the Louvre when we get to Paris, today we’re in Rome and we’ve looked at the Vatican and Sistine Chapel.’ – ‘The chapel was beautiful, but I’m a Baptist and if I had known we’re not going to see the Mona Lisa, I would have stayed at the hotel.’
- “We’re going to take in the Louvre up through the Mona Lisa; if it is not too full, we’ll also include the Winged Victory and Venus de Milo” (WR p. 156, original English-language dialog edited by Joel Golb).
- “But below the surface, such accounts quickly become paradigms of Mitterer’s philosophical approach. For in the tourists’ manifest ignorance regarding the visit’s highlights, their crassly false judgments and dilettantish interpretive efforts, what is revealed is not so much a cultural or human flaw within this particular group as a philosophical factor of greater resonance – a factor meriting acknowledgment, certainly not dismissal: ‘We cultivated middle-class Europeans share most experiences of the package tourists from overseas as little as their generalizations and blanket judgments – unless we’re speaking of the weather or other ‘culture-free’ impressions. We criticize the fact that the package tourists only perceive reality in an abridged, distorted, and falsified form, that they don’t experience the land and people as they really are... The distortion and falsification of reality through the tourists’ perspective is nothing else than the difference from our own perspective – the discrepancy from the know-it-all standpoint that grounds our critique’ (WR p. 158, my translation).

**Philosopher of viability**

To speak along with Josef Mitterer, the philosopher: in the end we can only say what and how the world is from our own perspective, even if we believe we’re saying how it is in reality, without our assistance. In his description of travel, Mitterer puts what he has presented to colleagues in books such as Das Jenseits der Philosophie (1992) and Die Flucht aus der Beliebigkeit (2001) to the test of praxis; and it would seem that it passes the test. For as we will see, one particular fact – highly confusing philosophically but all too familiar on an everyday, shoulder-shrugging level – reveals itself precisely in the context of travel: namely, that the travel-account often tells us more about the traveler than the places he or she has seen. This fact is philosophically confusing because especially modern travel is perceived as a flight beyond the customary, as a breakthrough into the other, as an opening up of the distant. This longing, and its fulfillment, are expressed as both spontaneous rapture and animated reports about what has been experienced. But at the same time, travelers remain entirely with themselves, integrating their experiences, as strange as they may be, into their own worlds. They undertake their voyages from longing for the unfamiliar, the (entirely) other, but this is then transformed into the entirely familiar, the selvesame.

This doubling can clarify why traveling fascinates Mitterer to such a high degree. His thinking centers on a process of exposing to the external world on interfaces, projections, and encounters. It is well known that Mitterer is an epistemological non-dualist, and thus a thinker of being en route, par excellence: where other than in today’s tourism can someone bring his entire daily household over cultural borders without paying any duty? Where else is he at once so self-centered and so abandoned as abroad? Where else can he reveal himself so recklessly as he is than when encountering the exotic “other,” safely ensconced in organized tourism’s
housing? The modern traveler – that silhouette of *homo viator* – is the ideal object for philosophical fieldwork of Mitterer’s sort. For the tourist already moves by definition along a dually structured discursive interface: a locus where two discourses perceive each other as occupying “the other world,” and that on their encounter pose the question of how that “otherworldliness” is constituted. When traveling, we always travel into the heart of Mitterer’s philosophy.

It should be no secret that this philosophy emerges from a reflective modernity, metaphysically-religiously dissonant and certainly not suited for arbitrary application to other historical epochs and cultural spheres. What it is eminently suited for is circumambulating around a group tourism often looked down on or ridiculed and comprehending it as a tense field comprising both dynamism and stasis: an enthused movement outward into what is estranged from the familiar and known; and a simultaneous adherence to the same familiar and known.

Those scorning such groups of tourists have misunderstood the philosophical point of tourism in a basic way. In mass tourism Mitterer discovers an essential quality of modern human beings, achieving its expression in a markedly non-dualistic experiential stance. As is well known, dualism as a philosophical paradigm was introduced by Descartes; we can thank Mitterer for pointing to this way of describing human interaction with the world as anything but *clare et distincte*, rather being, on the contrary, distorting and misleading.

Inspired by Mitterer’s analysis of late twentieth century group tourism, I would now like to consider two (seventeenth and nineteenth century) engravings, in order to assemble some philosophical arguments for the same non-dualism to one particular end: showing that from the seventeenth century onward, it has determined our sense of travel and what we can experience en route. In this framework, the arguments, it is hoped, will help us understand the sluggish figure of our own age’s group tourist as a late demonstration of the virtues of constructivism – and will thus illuminate the concept of *viability* introduced by Ernst von Glasersfeld. For Mitterer’s trans-dualistic thinking, that concept is central despite his well-grounded critique of its epistemological paradoxes in the appendix to his *Die Flucht aus der Beliebigkeit*. Freed from its cognitive-theoretical baldness, the concept of viability in fact precisely demarcates the “between” around which the two poles of touristic activity, as analyzed by Mitterer, oscillate: the search for the strange and the discovery of one’s own.

![Figure 1: Francis Bacon: The Great Instauration (1620), frontispiece.](image)
Bacon, or the philosopher as travel guide

For a very long time in Europe, travel was by no means viewed as a cheerful setting out for both new shores and an expanded personality. Roaming through distant and alien realms was reserved for warriors and the banished. An oath or the ostrakismos, the ban or proscription, forced a voyage away from home, pilgrimage, or entering service for foreign masters. Superfluous population groups were sent far off on colonizing migrations; climatic change imposed new homelands.

If any positive aspects were to be found in long-distance travel, this had to be in the context of return. Despite all wanderings, Odysseus always voyages homeward. The prodigal son comes back as well. As presented plastically in Augustine and Boethius, early Christianity’s homo viator wanders through this world’s vale of tears before finally returning home to the Lord. Moses leads his people forth out of Egypt to a new homeland in the promised land – but as that appellation implies, on divine orders and not from wanderlust. In this sense, the children of Israel are themselves led back to the Lord.

A profound shift in mentality only set in with the late medieval voyages of discovery: a development necessitating a philosophical reevaluation of travel.

If we consider the frontispiece of Francis Bacon’s Instauratio Magna (Great Instauration), we can gain a sense of the new spirit of the great sea voyages. Naturally these voyages were not undertaken simply for their own sake, but from a mix of curiosity and the desire for plunder, avarice and a will to discover the world. But the frontispiece also depicts a happy return – the ship in the foreground is not setting forth but magnificently gliding back to safe harbor, under full sail. Taken from Daniel 12:4, the frontispiece’s motto, Multi pertransibunt et augebitur scientia (in the King James version: “Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased”) signifies that the sciences will flourish when human beings take up the risk of adventurous sea-voyage and are rewarded with a happy homecoming.

Already in the High Middle Ages, the Hanseatic League had Navigare necesse est, vivere non est (“to sail is necessary, to live is not”) as its motto: both ferocious and defiant, it evokes the extremity of risks and trials facing the age’s merchant-seamen in their quest for treasure. (In rather more muted form, this is also evoked in the motto of the Bremen Hanse still visible on the portal of the city’s old merchant house, the Schütting: Buten un binnen: wagen un winnen – “outside and inside: risk it and win.”)

Since Bacon, the same principle applied to the proliferation of the sciences. Here as well, since his Great Instauration, what counted was voyaging outward, opening oneself to concrete otherness, the complex alien. Following millennia of a metaphysical top-down view of the world, with his avowal of induction, Bacon – the philosophical travel-guide – initiated his early modern contemporaries into the cognitive worm’s-eye perspective. Surrounded by individual things, flight over things would no longer be possible, the horizontal line receding in proportion to the determination to close in upon it. Tellingly, through the Pillars of Hercules, the frontispiece opens our gaze out to the infinitely wide horizon; it does not move from the rocking ship to a safe harbor-mole. Behind the horizon, there’s further movement to a “beyond” that we know exists but that lies hidden behind the water’s edge.

Flammarion’s wayfarer

I would like to now consider a famous woodcut by Nicolas Camille Flammarion, included in his popularizing book on the atmosphere published in Paris in 1888 (since it stylistically cites late medieval images, the woodcut has actually itself often been thought old). This work contrasts sharply with the frontispiece to Bacon’s book, offering a graphically highly charged idea of arrival whose locus would never be frequented on a trip with Bacon. Flammarion in fact depicts a Middle Ages in which our gaze can move past our own world to a view of divinely ordained cosmic harmony.
The caption beneath the woodcut describes its contents thus: “A medieval missionary recounts that he found the point where heaven and earth touch.” Produced in the age of positivism, the woodcut was thus meant as a caricature of the medieval wayfarer’s dolish world-view: naive in the notion that things are so but in that conceptual framework, plausible in the notion that the walking-staff itself penetrates the bell of heaven. Nevertheless, the idea being ridiculed here is a constitutive element of the dynamic of travel: the expectation of really meeting that for which we are underway, the other, the beyond. Expectations are meant to be fulfilled, edifices visited and illuminated; the explicative stream must flow. If we wished simply to stay put on our own estate, never opening ourselves to the other, setting out would have no sense.

In this manner, Flammarion’s woodcut thematically addresses a feeling of inadequacy attached to the concept of travel prevailing in Bacon’s age. Voyaging inductively means to his own world. Our being is indeed always land short.

Mitterer’s travels

To be sure: in view of the technical-logistic infrastructure of modern travel, today’s group tourist appears like a pyknic descendant of the once so athletic migratory tribesman. Nevertheless, even in the pre-stamped routines at work in current mass wandering through one after another country, the old motif of the search for something beyond, the effort to push one’s head through the shell of one’s own world, remains urgently present. Precisely in the wake of the collapse of the religious-metaphysical world-view, the tourist has to really seek out his desired place with his body, his entire being, all his preset notions, in order to return to himself at and through the place.

This ambivalence on the interface between one’s own and the other, ego-–alter and alter–ego, constituting the dualism of the other’s other-worldliness through encounter and opposition, is what motivates Mitterer’s idea of the viability of our worldly circumstances. Naturally he himself is traveling and observing with all the others, thus acting as a constructing agent in the field of events. Like everyone else, he is subject to the discursive framework of Bacon’s age of voyage. At the same time, he does enjoy a privilege: as an observer of the events who is able to re-construct the constructions of which they are comprised in a very essential way. And precisely because he is a re-constructionist, he can perceive that a Flammarian motif in fact guides the Baconian expedition’s participants: they hope to encounter a world that is at once accessible on an inner-worldly level and “other-worldly.”

THE AUTHOR

As a philosopher of reflected modernism, he can observe the ways in which the play comprised both of confirming other-worldliness and of dualism dovetails with the game of discursive construction; and how that game in turn dovetails with that of referential other-worldly constitution. He knows that we cannot arrive behind the mirror, but that in any event we repeatedly discover ourselves in the mirror.

Mitterer’s countryman Ludwig Wittgenstein described philosophy as a voyage to the limits of language. He explains in the foreword to his Logical-Philosophical Treatise (2001b) that he hopes to furnish thought with a border. Like Josef Mitterer later, he wished to be understood as a philosophical tour-guide and traveling companion. In the foreword to his late work, the Philosophical Investigations (2001a), he writes that his traveling landscape is that of language with its many largely incalculable paths – or that of a Wittgensteinian “ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses” (Wittgenstein 2001a, §18) full of nooks and crannies through which he strolls. As an outcome of both philosophers’ travels – hence a starting point for those that follow – we find the insight that, as Wittgenstein wrote in his Tractatus, the world is all that is the case. But what, in fact, is the case? Both Wittgenstein and Mitterer know that in the end whether what is the case is simply a datum or a construction must remain undecided. That constitutes the unreachable borderline of any conceptual horizon. Who would be able, Mitterer asks in his travel-essay, to conclusively answer the question of “what reality… is in reality?” “To offer such an answer,” he observes, “we have to designate reality as it (‘really’) is, represent it in our discourse. And such a designation always takes place with the help of one’s own views or with the help of the views and conceptions we share with experts and authorities” (WR, p. 158, translated by Joel Golb)

The voyage continues – but from now on we at least have a better sense of what we’re really doing.

Note
1. Unlike Georg Simmel’s (1908) “stranger,” the traveler and his philosophical companion try very hard to avoid the experience of being treated as strangers by not trying to adapt themselves to the culture of the guest country. The experienced tourist knows very well that such an effort would be of no avail.

References
Meaning and Description in Non-dualism: A Formalization and Extension

Martin Staude ◆ Free University Berlin <martinstaude@yahoo.de>

1. Introduction

The non-dualistic philosophy, elaborated by Mitterer (e.g., 1992, 2001) and continued especially by Weber (e.g., 2005) is an innovative, radical, and inspiring approach with great theoretical potential. Since the non-dualistic philosophy does not view itself as a Paradigma in the sense of a Paradigma, its descriptions “so far” explicitly invite further descriptions “from now on” that may change, extend, or specify the original descriptions “so far.” Consequently, this invitation is not, paraphrasing Mitterer (1992, pp. 109f), an invitation to truth and maintenance but an invitation to change and extension. The present article gladly accepts this invitation by tackling three problems or particularities of the non-dualistic philosophy “so far.”

Firstly, the key term description remains not only rather unclear and rudimentary but also isolated from relevant neighboring terms and theories of other disciplines. Secondly, a logical reconstruction and formal model of non-dualism is still lacking. Thirdly, there are hardly any extensions of philosophical non-dualism to non-philosophical disciplines and fields.

2. Description and meaning as a category

2.1 The relation between description and meaning

Non-dualism’s key term description may be fruitfully connected to one of sociology’s and semiotics’ key terms, namely meaning.

From a linguistic perspective, the terms description and meaning have several semantic-pragmatic similarities because in everyday language they often convey the same message and are frequently used in the same way:

(1) As in dualism, common sense considers both terms to be categorically distinct from objects. The term object is used here as a generic term that comprises such terms as

Secondly, how can non-dualism be formalized? Even though Mitterer has given a substantial-philosophical account, a logical reconstruction and a formal notation of non-dualism still need to be developed. A solution to this shortcoming, shown in section 3, is to use the definition of meaning-description in section 2 as the basis for the elaboration of a non-dualistic formalization and notation. This will be done by deducing non-dualism from dualism through the operation of re-entry.

Thirdly, how can non-dualism be extended to new domains? Non-dualism has barely ventured outside its philosophical-epistemological homeland, so there are hardly any extensions and applications to other disciplines and fields. One possible answer to this problem, proposed in section 4, is to extend the non-dualistic formalization in section 3 to the semiotic triangle.
(2) Consequently, the terms description and meaning are used in everyday language in a transitive or referential manner because they necessarily refer to and are oriented towards an object. Put in linguistic terms, they require a direct object such as the verbs to invite or to raise. Frequently, the word of fulfills this transitive or referential function as in the meaning of flowers or her description of Marseille.

(3) Descriptions and meanings are often portrayed as immaterial, mental, or unobservable, which distinguishes them from objects. For example, the description of Marseille as a French city and the meaning of flowers in terms of love and emotionality are usually viewed as psychic concepts or abstract representations that are not directly tangible by sensory perception or measuring instruments.

(4) Both terms are usually seen to be subjective, personal, or idiosyncratic, i.e., bound to and determined by a specific actor or system. For instance, the description the Gulf War is illegal can only stem from society’s legal system and the meaning of flowers in terms of love and emotionality may only be valid for one particular person but not for another.

(5) Accordingly, everyday reasoning portrays descriptions and meanings as contingent, multiple, and changeable because each actor or system may make and unmake her or its own descriptions and meanings. For example, Henry gives the description or attributes the meaning the table is round, whereas for Maria the table is nice. And tomorrow Maria may change her description to the table is ugly.

(6) Language is seen to be the prototypical medium in which descriptions and meanings are formed. Especially complex descriptions or meanings are based on words and signs, e.g., the description of Marseille as a blue-skied but crime-ridden French city or the meaning of a look as a subtle and warm invitation.2

From a linguistic perspective, these are six semantic-pragmatic similarities between the terms meaning and description – as used and conveyed in everyday language. In the same vein, both terms exhibit some semantic-pragmatic differences that I will not, however, address here because they are not crucial to the following discussion.3 Based on this comparison, I have found that the semantic spaces of the terms meaning and description are neither completely identical nor completely disjoint, but they are partially overlapping, i.e., both terms share many similarities but also exhibit some differences (similarly to other terms such as dog and cat). Within the overlap zone, the terms meaning and description are in fact indistinguishable (similarly to the words dog and cat, which are indistinguishable in their semantic overlap zone of animal and usually kept as pet).

In this view, description and meaning are “two sides of the same coin” – their distinction and differences are relevant from one particular perspective, e.g., the perspective of the “heads-or-tails player” who is only interested in the “sides of the coin”, whereas their distinction and differences are irrelevant from another perspective, e.g., the perspective of the “bank-account holder” who is only interested in the “coin” itself. In a similar vein, my argument is that the semantic-pragmatic differences between meaning and description, i.e., the non-overlapping parts of their semantic spaces, are irrelevant for the following discussion of non-dualism. Instead, my focus will be almost exclusively on the semantic-pragmatic similarities between meaning and description, i.e., the overlapping parts of their semantic spaces. This argument is based on two hypotheses: Firstly, the semantic overlap between both terms is so large that the semantic non-overlap can be disregarded and is hence irrelevant. Secondly and most importantly, even if the first argument is invalidated or rejected, I argue that it is only the semantic non-overlap that is relevant for the following discussion of non-dualism so that the semantic non-overlap plays no crucial role and is hence irrelevant. Due to this relative irrelevance of the differences between and non-overlap of the terms meaning and description, I will consequently use both terms synonymously and interchangeably in the remainder of this article (or I will use the compound meaning-description).

An important advantage of focusing on the semantic-pragmatic similarities between both terms while disregarding their differences is to make non-dualism’s findings and its key term description both connectable to and compatible with sociology’s and semiotics’ findings and their key term meaning. This connection and compatibility is advantageous for both “parties”, i.e., one the one hand, for non-dualism, and on the other hand, for other disciplines or theories such as sociology and semiotics: Firstly, each party may profit from the other party by tapping into the other party’s theoretical sources so as to provide itself with new resources and let itself be beneficially irritated by the other party’s arguments. Secondly, the particular advantage for non-dualism is that it may increase its scope of application and validity – not only by being extended and translated to other disciplines and theories outside its philosophical homeland, but also by being concretized and filled with more empirical or practical contents provided by other disciplines and approaches.

2.2 A definition of description and meaning

Let us now turn to a possible definition of both terms. Instead of an ontological, substantialist, or essentialist conceptualization, I propose a formal, structuralist, or distinction-theoretic conceptualization inspired by Spencer Brown (1969).

The beginning of Spencer Brown’s logico-mathematical calculus can be reconstructed as follows. In a first step, a distinction or boundary is drawn in an unmarked space, which creates two separate sides that are symmetrical. In a second step, an indication or marking is made of only one side of the distinction, whereas the other side is left unmarked so that the two sides of the distinction become asymmetrical. These two steps are summarized by Spencer Brown’s claim that “we cannot make an indication without drawing a distinction” (1969, p. 1), that is, an indication logically presupposes a distinction. For example, in a first step, one may draw a circle on a blank sheet of paper so that two equal spaces come into being, namely the inside and outside of the circle, and in a second step, one may indicate or shade only the inside of the circle, while ignoring or not shading the outside of the circle. According to Jokisch (1996, p. 87), this asymmetricatization of the symmetry, i.e., the indication of and preference for only one side of the distinction, is important because it guarantees the connectivity to and continuity of subsequent operations.

Spencer Brown’s approach has raised several questions and problems leading to controversies and refinements. Accordingly, I will base my conceptualization of the terms description and meaning on an aspect of his
For example, in a conversation a speaker communicatively indicates “something particular” such as \( M = \{ \text{OBEDIENT} \} \), so that she automatically excludes “something different” such as the antonym \( M_{\text{ELSE}} = \{ \text{DISOBEDIENT} \} \) and “all the rest” such as \( M_{\text{ELSE}} = \{ \text{FLOWERS}, \text{TO SING}, \text{THE TABLE IS ROUND}, \text{MARSEILLE}, \text{SUBTLE} \} \), etc.

This conceptualization of \( M \) as a category is a common denominator of non-dualism’s term description and of sociology’s as well as semiotics’ term meaning – rendering both terms compatible and connectable.

The conceptualization of meaning and description as category \( M \) applies to a continuum of cases, including the following two poles:

### 2.3 Rudimentary, intuitive, vague categories

At one pole there are \( M \) that are extremely rudimentary, intuitive, simple, unspecific, or vague knowledge. This includes Mitterer’s (1992) non-dualistic term rudimentary description or object indication such as \( M = \{ \text{TABLE} \} \). This also includes Wierzbicka’s (1996) semantic primes that are elementary and universal meaning components shared by all natural languages and constituting a kind of lexicon of human thoughts, e.g., \{TO FEEL, NOT, YOU, BECAUSE, or \|GOOD\}. Often such \( M \) are not or cannot easily be lexicalized into words or linguistic expressions: For example, when Pavlov’s bell-conditioned dog hears the bell ring, it instinctively actualizes the rudimentary meaning \( M = \{ \text{FOOD} \} \); a driver on a highway suddenly activates the vague description \( M = \{ \text{PAY ATTENTION} \} \); a Buddhist monk in meditation actualizes the intuitive feeling of \( M = \{ \text{WELLBEING} \} \); or in terms of Gestalt psychology, a baby looking at its surroundings makes out a particular \( M = \{ \text{GESTALT} \} \). These examples show that such rudimentary or intuitive \( M \) often relate to the semantic field of sensory perception – a point also noticed by Saeed (2003, p. 33).

This begs the question: Are these kinds of \( M \) always linguistic, i.e., based on language? Non-dualism’s answer “so far” is yes (Mitterer 1992, pp. 56–62; Weber 2005, pp. 18, 252, 324). In order to make the discussion more exciting and to test out another route, my answer from now on is no – trying, nevertheless, not to fall back into dualism. My answer is twofold:

Firstly, the examples given above were not described live by the first-order actor or experiencer in situ, e.g., by the dog, the driver, the monk, or the baby, but they were and can only be re-described retrospectively by a second-order observer or analyst ex situ, e.g., by me who can only re-describe the described. Re-description, as in these cases, implies language use. Consequently, the observer cannot not use language, i.e., he must use language and words such as food, pay attention, well-being, or gestalt, so that his \( M \) are necessarily and always linguistic (especially when writing an article). However, linguistic elements such as words or punctuation marks are but a special subtype (hyponym) of a category (hypernym). Accordingly, the actor or experiencer herself can make live descriptions in situ that are not linguistic, but categorical – i.e., not based on language but on categories. On the one hand, of course, saying that \( M \) may be non-linguistic is itself a language-based \( M \), namely \( M = \{ M \ \text{MAY BE NON-LINGUISTIC} \} \). For example, Weber argues that images and sounds are not distinct from language because they are themselves language-based categories, namely \( M = \{ \text{IMAGES} \} \) or \( M = \{ \text{SOUNDS} \} \) (2005, p. 324). But on the other hand, these are \( M \) of the observer and not of the actor.

Secondly, non-dualism’s stance may be led ad absurdum by pushing it to its extreme consequences. Non-dualism’s “so far” considers \( M \) to be always based on language. This presupposes that the \( M \)-maker actually uses – and is in principle able to use – language, i.e., words, grammar, syntax, etc. But babies, baboons, and bacteria do not use language. They would thus be unable to produce any \( M \). But \( M \) are necessary for cognitive processes such as thinking, knowing, wanting, or remembering. Lacking any such cognitive capacities, babies, baboons, and bacteria would consequently be unable to communicate, to learn, or even to survive! Despite my deliberate exaggeration, it seems clear that non-dualism’s “so far” is rather unclear about the relation between language, communication, and \( M \) – and, therefore, needs to ponder this relation further. My proposition is that actors – including babies, baboons, and bacteria – operate on the basis of categories that may sometimes take the special form of linguistic categories. Language is thus but a subtype of category, just as language is a sub-

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**Figure 1: Description or meaning \( M \) as a category.**
type of communication. The Language of Thought hypothesis supports such a view.\(^8\) Instead of a substantivist conceptualization that considers a category’s ontological status to be always linguistic, I prefer a formal and distinction-theoretic conceptualization that does not specify a category’s ontological status, e.g., whether it is a linguistic structure, a mental representation, objective knowledge, logical form, a material-physical entity, etc.

Chandler emphasizes the limits of language by remarking that words often fail us in adequately representing certain experiences, e.g., smell, touch, etc (2002, p. 3). Even though I agree that language may fail to express an experience, categories do not fail because a rudimentary, intuitive, or vague M is always activated in terms of some category, e.g., the actor spontaneously knows “something particular” such as \(M = \text{[I SMELLED THAT…]}\) instead of “something different” such as \(M_{\text{else}} = \text{[I HEARD THAT…]}\), or she intuitively knows \(M = \text{[I LIKED THE SMELL]}\) instead of \(M_{\text{else}} = \text{[I DIDN’T LIKE THE SMELL]}\). In conclusion, description and meaning M is category-bound, but not necessarily language-bound.

I hope to have shown that a category-based approach to description and meaning does not entirely exclude or reject a language-based approach, but includes and transcends it by bringing the focus down to a more fundamental and general level: This is the level of category M vs. \(M_{\text{else}}\) whose ontological status remains open and undetermined. Accordingly, a language-based approach to description and meaning may become integrated as a special and limited case into a more elementary and comprehensive category-based approach.

**2.4 Linguistic, elaborated, complex categories**

At the other pole of the continuum there are M that are highly linguistic, word-bound, elaborated, or conceptually complex. Two subtypes may be distinguished:

- Firstly, rudimentary M may be combined syntagmatically so as to create a compound M. For example, the four individual rudimentary descriptions \(M = \text{[THIS]}, M = \text{[TABLE]}, M = \text{[TO BE]}, \) and \(M = \text{[ROUND]}\) may be combined to form the complex description \(M = \text{[THIS TABLE IS ROUND]}.\)

- Secondly, Saeed notes that complex meanings often involve whole theories or cultural complexes, such as \(M = \text{[MARRIAGE]}\) or \(M = \text{[RETIREMENT]}.\) These meanings are lexicalized in a particular word, namely marriage and retirement, but there are numerous meanings that are not lexicalized such as \(M = \text{[A TOOL FOR COMPACTING DEAD LEAVES INTO GARDEN STATUARY]}\) (2003, pp. 33f).

Consequently, complex M depend on words and language in order to be conveyed and understood. From the point of view of language, “language is the system of meaning par excellence; it cannot not mean, and all of its existence is in meaning” (Lévi-Strauss 1945, p. 58). From the point of view of meaning, meaning is not necessarily language-bound, as I have shown in section 2.3, but it must be stressed, however, that the prototypical resource and principal source for making meaning is language (Halliday 1993, p. 113). Language hence becomes not only a prototypical medium for activating M in general, but is inevitable for activating elaborate, precise, or complex M.

**2.5 Conclusion**

An important conclusion from the preceding sections is that descriptions or meanings, in terms of M as category, are crucial for and omnipresent in communicative and psychic systems. Several authors and approaches have captured similar ideas:

- The cognitive linguist Lakoff argues: “There is nothing more basic than categorization to our thought, perception, action, and speech. Every time we see something as a kind of thing, for example, a tree, we are categorizing. Whenever we reason about kinds of things – chairs, nations, illnesses, emotions, any kind of thing at all – we are employing categories. Whenever we intentionally perform any kind of action, say something as mundane as writing with a pencil, hammering with a hammer, or ironing clothes, we are using categories” (1987, pp. 5–6).

Ethnomethodology and the sociology of knowledge argue that actors apprehend situations, behaviors, and other actors by putting them into typifying categories, e.g., \(M = \text{[IT’S A JOKE]}\) or \(M = \text{[HE IS AN ENGLISHMAN]}\), so as to grasp their meaning, to understand them, and to normalize them. This normalization by means of categorization especially occurs when such situations, behaviors, or actors seem to be strange, abnormal, or incomprehensible – such as those provoked in ethnomethodological breaching experiments (Joas & Knöbl 2004, pp. 233–234; Berger & Luckmann 1966, chapter 1.2).

And finally, for sociological systems theory, meaning (\(Simm\)) – or in my terminology \(M = \) – is the universal medium in which both psychic and communicative systems operate (Luhmann 1984, chapter 2).

**3. Dualism’s re-entry creates non-dualism**

In this section, I briefly review the central arguments of dualism and non-dualism as presented by Mitterer (1992, 2001). This is necessary to convey subsequently how non-dualism can be formally deduced using a re-entry operation of dualism into itself. Even though Mitterer has already given a substantive-philosophical explanation of non-dualism, a formal-logical explanation still needs to be developed. In so doing, I propose a formalized notation of non-dualism that may help clarify and refine non-dualistic terminology.

Mitterer compares dualism and non-dualism by means of the distinction between object vs description, or synonymously between world vs meaning. Dualism and non-dualism conceptualize the second side of the distinction almost identically, namely description or meaning, whereas they radically differ in their conceptualization of the first side, namely the object or world. Hence, the dualism-vs-non-dualism debate is concerned primarily with the object or world.

**3.1 Dualism**

According to Mitterer, dualism presupposes or produces a dualistic distinction, which I note as \(D_{\text{DUALISM}}\), with two sides: The first side of \(D_{\text{DUALISM}}\) is the object, a generic term that comprises such terms as world, reality, action, referent, event, thing, or fact. I note the object or world by the symbol W, for instance \(W = \) the table or \(W = \) this. The second side of \(D_{\text{DUALISM}}\) is the description or meaning, notated by M, of the object or world W, for instance \(M = \) [THE TABLE IS ROUND] or \(M = \) [THIS REMINDS ME OF MY CHILDHOOD]. Dualism’s distinction is thus \(D_{\text{DUALISM}} = W \neq M\), which has numerous lexical surface variations depending on the theory and discipline.\(^9\)
Within the distinction $D_{\text{DUALISM}} = W \text{ vs } M$, both sides are considered to be mutually exclusive and distinct, i.e., the object of the description is distinct from the description of the object (Mitterer 1992, p. 39). Figure 2 shows the ontological difference between $W$ and $M$ by depicting $W$ as a white rectangle and $M$ as a shaded rectangle.\(^{10}\)

Note that in Figure 1 a particular $M$ is distinguished from $M_{\text{ELSE}}$, i.e., $M \text{ vs } M_{\text{ELSE}}$. Consequently, there is an ontological heterogeneity in the sense that there are only meanings and therefore they all have the same ontological status. However, in Figure 2, the distinction $W \text{ vs } M$ implies that there is an ontological homogeneity because meaning and world have different ontological statuses. Within this distinction, $W$ is prioritized and apriorized with respect to $M$ because $W$ is the fixed starting point and exists before there are any $M$. In other words, $W$ is independent of and exists prior to $M$. Consequently, $M$ is always secondary, belated, and hence oriented towards $W$.

This may be expressed formally by the notation $M(W)$, i.e., a meaning of the world, a description of an object, reality interpreted as something specific, an object described as something particular. The words of and as presuppose that $W$ and $M$ are ontologically distinct, e.g., in Mitterer’s example someone gives a description of the table or interprets a triangle as an arrow (1992, p. 23). Consequently, it becomes possible to produce different or contradictory $M$ of the same $W$, e.g., Saint-Exupéry’s (1943, pp. 87f) little prince sees the $W = \text{stars}$ as $M(W) = \text{[STARS]}$, but the businessman interprets the $W = \text{stars}$ as $M(W) = \text{[WEALTH]}$. Due to their distinct nature, $M$ is not and can never be $W$, even if $M$ approximates $W$.

According to Mitterer, dualism comes in two versions — realism vs constructivism — because both versions presuppose or use the dualistic distinction $D_{\text{DUALISM}} = W \text{ vs } M$. The difference between realism and constructivism resides in the way they conceptualize the relation between $W$ and $M$: Whereas realism focuses on $W$ and analyzes $W$’s role in the creation of $M$, constructivism focuses on $M$ and studies $M$’s role in the constitution of $W$ (1992, pp. 11–12, 49).

### 3.2 Non-dualism

Mitterer considers dualism with its dualistic distinction $D_{\text{DUALISM}} = W \text{ vs } M$ to be optional and avoidable, but not a necessary and inevitable prerequisite. Instead of presupposing or using $D_{\text{DUALISM}}$, Mitterer not only ignores and circumvents $D_{\text{DUALISM}}$, but he also succeeds in deconstructing and unifying $D_{\text{DUALISM}}$. His main arguments run as follows (1992, pp. 89–98):

**Dualism asserts that $W$ as such is distinct from and free of $M$, formally notated as the distinction between $W$ vs $M$.** However, non-dualism argues that this assertion is inconsistent because in formulating this assertion, $W$ is already indicated by an $M$, namely by $M = [W \text{ as such is DISTINCT FROM and FREE OF } M]$, formally notated as the unity of the distinction $M = [W \text{ vs } M]$. For example, if I assert that an object such as my apple as such is undescribed and without meaning, I automatically describe the apple as $M = \text{MY APPLE AS SUCH IS UNDESCRIBED AND WITHOUT MEANING}$\(^{11}\).

At time $t_1$, dualism asserts that $W$ exists before there are any $M$ of it. This may be formally notated by $W$ before $M$. However, non-dualism argues that this assertion can only be made after there is an $M$ at time $t_0$, e.g., after there is at least an indication of $W$ by means of a rudimentary $M$ at $t_0$ such as $M = [W]$. Formally notated, before one can say or think $M = [W \text{ before } M]$ at $t_1$, one has to say or think at least $M = [W]$ at $t_0$. For example, before I can assert at $t_1$ that the apple exists before I make a description of it, it is necessary that I use at $t_0$ the rudimentary meaning $M = \text{APPLE}$, so as to be able to formulate at $t_1$ the above assertion $M = [\text{THE APPLE EXISTS BEFORE I MAKE A DESCRIPTION OF IT}]$. Before a particular $M$, there is no pre-M or M-free stage where dualism’s uninterpreted $W$ prevails: going back to previous stages or digging deeper into the world, Wittgenstein can never reach $W$’s bedrock where his “spade is turned”; because he will only reach $W$’s indication, namely an $M$ such as a rudimentary description.

The same argument applies to sensory perception, which is usually seen as a relation or medium between the subject or actor and the object or world. According to Mitterer (2001, p. 35) and Weber (2005, pp. 33f, 259f, 317–332), dualism argues that there is an unbridgeable distinction between perception vs $M$, more precisely, between the perception of the $W$ vs the $M$ of the perception of the $W$, and that perception is temporally prior to $M$. However, the same non-dualistic counter-arguments as above can be advanced: Dualism’s argument is a distinction and consequently a description, namely the unity of the distinction $M = [\text{THE UNBRIDGEABLE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PERCEPTION VS } M]$ and $M = [\text{PERCEPTION IS TEMPORALLY PRIOR TO } M]$. Moreover, dualism’s argument about the perception of $W$ is a description, namely $M = [\text{THE PERCEPTION OF } W]$. For example, in dualism’s perception I see a big $W$, but dualism’s allegedly M-free visual perception is already M-laden, namely $M = [\text{SEE A BIG } W]$ and this $M$ contains various rudimentary $M$, e.g., the subject of perception is indicated as $M = [\text{SEE A BIG } W]$ instead of $M_{\text{ELSE}} = [\text{YOU SEE A BIG } W]$, the mode of perception is described as $M = [\text{SEE A BIG } W]$ instead of $M_{\text{ELSE}} = [\text{I TOUCH A BIG } W]$, the property of the object is categorized as $M = [\text{SEE A BIG } W]$ instead of $M_{\text{ELSE}} = [\text{YOU SEE A SMALL } W]$ and finally, the object itself is indicated by $M = [W]$. Consequently, the perception of an object and the description of the perception of an object are ontologically identical, i.e., perception and $M$ form a unity. All of dualism’s assertions turn out to be category-based\(^{12}\).

There is an interesting analogy between non-dualistic description and linguistic negation. The starting point is an object $W$ such as an apple. In linguistics, in order to carry out the operation of negation $N$, i.e., negating or denying the existence of an object $W$, for example $N(W) = \text{This is not an apple}$ or $N(W) = \text{He has no apple}$, $W$ must necessarily be indicated by an affirmation $A$, for example $A(W) = \text{apple}$. Hence, negation $N$ is only feasible and possible by using a previous affirmation $A$. Consequently, a negated object $N(W)$
presupposes an affirmed object $A(W)$. In non-dualism, in order to be able to talk or think about $W$, for example $\text{WHERE IS THE APPLE?}$ or $\text{THE APPLE IS RED}$, $W$ must necessarily be indicated by a description $M$, for example $M = \{\text{APPLE}\}$. Hence, $W$ is only thinkable and discussable by using a previous $M$. Consequently, an object $W$ presupposes a description $M$. Summarizing both approaches it may be said that for an object $W$ to exist or to be negated, it must necessarily be indicated by a description $M$. I conjecture that this parallel between the non-dualistic approach to the existence of objects and the linguistic approach to the negation of objects is not accidental but is structurally closely linked.\(^\text{13}\)

In conclusion, non-dualism holds that dualism’s $W$ is only accessible and existent as $M$, that is, by being indicated, categorized, or described as some kind of category $M$. Other authors and theories have expressed similar ideas: systems theory holds that the “world is only accessible as meaning” (Krämer 1998, chapter 4); the theory of interpretative constructs argues that an action is and exists only as a description or interpretation (Lenk 1978, pp. 292–314); symbolic interactionism assumes that “an object is anything that can be indicated or referred to” so that objects are defined in terms of meanings for a particular actor (Blumer 1969, pp. 11f); and, especially for sorcerers, “reality, or the world we all know, is only a description” (Castaneda 1972, p. 8). To illustrate these arguments: There is no marriage without the actors having the idea of marriage and there is no murder without the actors knowing the meaning of a murder (Pharo 2004, p. 259). The prerequisite for describing, knowing, interpreting, thinking, or speaking about $W$ is thus the indication of $W$ by means of a rudimentary category $M$. Similarly, Schmidt argues that only by means of categories and distinctions can something be thought, perceived, and described as something (2003, pp. 31f, 95). If $W$ is not indicated by $M$, $W$ cannot be described, known, interpreted, thought, or spoken about because it is unclear what the thoughts, descriptions, knowledge, interpretations, or communications exactly refer to. Without indication, all is included and nothing is excluded.

Consequently, the $W$ is an $M$, namely $[W]$. The world is but a semantically indicated, described, categorized, or signified world, i.e., a meaning that is marked as the world – in a similar sense that attribution theory considers causes to be psychically or communicatively attributed causes, i.e., descriptions that are marked as causes. The world is a description, but a special description that describes itself and is marked as the world, i.e., as “something particular” that everyday language, the dominant discourse, or the common sense label as having the prototypical properties and attributes of the world.

### 3.3 Re-entry

In this section, I elaborate a more formalized reconstruction and logical deduction of Mitterer’s non-dualism. Even though never explicitly declared, Mitterer’s implicit strategy of deconstructing and unifying $D_{\text{dualism}}$ may be reconstructed as a re-entry.\(^\text{14}\)

Mitterer has cogently shown that $W$ is only accessible by $M$, so that $W$ is but a special $M$. This justifies the dualistic distinction $D_{\text{dualism}} = W \text{ vs } M$ re-entering as a whole into one of its two sides, namely into $M$ and not into $W$. Figure 3 shows this re-entry.\(^\text{15}\)

There are two results of this re-entry, namely the non-dualistic unity and the non-dualistic distinction. In the following, I discuss both results in this sequence.

(1) The non-dualistic unity is depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4 shows that dualism’s distinction $D_{\text{dualism}}$ is but a meaning, namely $D_{\text{dualism}}$, or synonymously, dualism’s distinction between $W$ vs $M$ is itself but an $M$, namely $[W \text{ vs } M]$. Moreover, during the re-entry process, a distinction has been transformed into a unity: The dualistic distinction $D_{\text{dualism}} = W \text{ vs } M$ has been transformed into the non-dualistic unity $U_{\text{non-dualism}} = [W \text{ vs } M]$.

On the one hand, this is because the first side of the dualistic distinction $D_{\text{dualism}} = W \text{ vs } M$, namely $W$, is theoretically ignored or left unused. Note that dualism’s $W$, depicted in Figures 2 and 3 as a white rectangle, no longer appears in Figure 4.\(^\text{17}\)

On the other hand, this is because the second side of the dualistic distinction $D_{\text{dualism}} = W \text{ vs } M$, namely $M$, is exclusively emphasized. Within the formula $M_{[W \text{ vs } M]}$, the $M$ is dominant and monistic because its structural position in the formula shows that it entirely determines and governs its subscript $[W \text{ vs } M]$.

A sociological translation of this non-dualistic unity $U_{\text{non-dualism}} = [W \text{ vs } M]$, may look like this $M$ as such are unavoidable, necessary, and omnipresent, so that any psychic or communicative attempt to reach dualism’s $W$ never leads directly to $W$ but only to $M$, which may then be semantically indicated as $W$.\(^\text{16}\)
Luhmann arrives at a similar conclusion (1984, chapter 2; 1997, chapter 1.III). On the one hand, meaning as such, i.e., as a general medium, is universal, inevitable, and non-negotiable for all communicative and psychic operations, so that it is impossible to reject it or not to use it. Even the sentence operations, so that it is impossible to reject it is senseless.

Ivan, allegedly meaningless ple, the category “full” because they use categories. For example, or “all the rest” such as non-dualistic unity between different types of meaning, which is between an M that semantically auto-describes itself as W – namely M – and an M that semantically auto-describes itself as M – namely M. Accordingly, two notational changes are made:

Firstly, dualism’s W is substituted by non-dualism’s MW. For example in dualism, the little prince sees W = stars, but in non-dualism, the little prince gives the description MW = [STARS] in contrast to “something different” or “all the rest” such as M_E = [EARTH], M_ELSE = [SUBTLE], M_ELSE = [TO SING], etc. Or, in dualism, the little prince is sure to “wahr”-nehmen (i.e., “truly” take in, “truly” perceive) W = stars and he thinks that the businessman interprets the stars as M_W = [WEALTH], whereas in non-dualism the little prince gives the description MW = [STARS] and the businessman gives the description M_W = [WEALTH]. At this point, there may be a similarity between non-dualism and constructivism: Both the little prince and the businessman give descriptions or make constructions that are unequal in that they may be differently connectable, viable, appropriate, robust, etc, but they are equal in that they have the same ontological status as descriptions or constructions and not as objects, world, things, or reality.

Secondly, dualism’s M(W) is substituted by non-dualism’s M_MW. For example, in dualism Henry sees W = flowers and interprets them as M(W) = [LOVE AND EMOTIONALITY]. In non-dualism, Henry gives the interpretation MW = [FLOWERS] and interprets this interpretation in terms of M_M = [LOVE AND EMOTIONALITY].

In summary, M_W is a meaning-description that semantically auto-describes itself as world-object and M_M is a meaning-description that semantically auto-describes itself as meaning-description. This argument can be made clearer by using and explaining the concepts of first-order observation and second-order observation (Foerster ed. 1981; Luhmann 1993a) and of auto-description and allo-description (Luhmann 1997, chapter 5; Kieserling ed. 2003).

The starting point is the expression M_W, or M_M are meaning-descriptions M that semantically auto-describe them selves as world-object W or as meaning-description M. I will proceed in three steps:

Firstly, I substitute the symbols W and M by the more general symbol X so that X = W or M.

Secondly, from the first-order perspective of a particular description or observer, this description or observer is X:

I am X.

Thirdly, from the second-order perspective of another description or observer, such as a particular theory or a linguist, things look different. On the one hand, as for the contrast between be vs auto-describe, the second-order description or observer cannot say that the first-order description or observer is X but that this first-order description or observer auto-describes it itself as X. On the other hand, as for the contrast between X vs description, the second-order description or observer cannot say that the first-order description or observer is X but that this first-order description or observer is a description. To put both arguments together, a second-order description allo-describes the first-order description as a description that auto-describes it self as X:

[ALLO-DESCRIBE YOU AS A DESCRIPTION THAT AUTO-DESCRIBES YOU (RSELF) AS “I am X.”]

For example, since I substituted the symbols W and M for the more general symbol X, let’s now look at the specific case of X = W:

From the first-order perspective, W is such-and-such, e.g., I am the world, I am prior to and distinct from meaning, I am an object, I am independent of subjective knowledge and will, I am constraining and external to the actor, I am material and tangible, I am objective, I am difficult or impossible to modify, etc.
philosophical–semiotic CONCEPTS

non-dualizing philosophy

**Figure 6**: Magritte’s 1931 painting “La Belle Captive.” With kind permission of VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, Germany.

**Figure 7**: Dissection of Magritte’s painting.

```plaintext
\[ \text{dualistic distinction} \\
D_{\text{DUALISM}} = W \text{ vs } M \]

\[ \text{non-dualistic unity} \\
U_{\text{NON-DUALISM}} = M (W \text{ vs } M) \]

\[ \text{non-dualistic distinction} \\
D_{\text{NON-DUALISM}} = M_W \text{ vs } M_M \]
```
However, from the second-order perspective such as non-dualism or sociology, this W auto-describes itself as W, e.g., it portrays or presents itself as |I AM THE WORLD|, |I AM PRIOR TO AND DISTINCT FROM MEANINGS|, |I AM AN OBJECT|, |I AM INDEPENDENT OF SUBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE AND WILL|, etc. In other words, the second-order descriptions also describe the first-order description as a meaning-description that auto-describes itself as world-object. That is, non-dualism functions as a second-order observer giving allo-descriptions of first-order observers’ auto-descriptions. Whereas W auto-describes itself as non-M = W, the second-order descriptions also describe W as M that auto-describes itself as non-M = W. Accordingly, W is an M but a particular M because it auto-describes itself as non-M and thus as W, namely MM.

The status of a particular M either as MM or as MM is not a priori fixed or predetermined because it depends on the perspective adopted by the observer whether she describes the M as world-object or as meaning-description. Also, the status of a particular M either as MM or as MM is not eternally constant and unalterable because an observer may change the status of an M within an utterance or a conversation. For example, Maria and Henry watch a scene from a movie. Maria may give the description MM = |SOMEONE WITH A GREEN JACKET| and then interprets MM = |POLICEMAN|, but Henry may give the description MM = |POLICEMAN| and then interpret MM = |DANGEROUS|.

Depending on the observer, |POLICEMAN| is categorized as meaning-description MM by Maria because she considers the policeman to be the interpretation of a prior object, whereas |POLICEMAN| is categorized as object-world MM by Henry because he considers the policeman to be the object of a subsequent interpretation.

In summary, the re-entry of the dualistic distinction D_DUALISM = W vs M into M yields two results: Firstly, U_NON-DUALISM = MM vs M denotes the non-dualistic unity of M. Secondly, D_NON-DUALISM = MM vs M denotes the non-dualistic distinction between M auto-describing itself as W and MM auto-describing itself as M. In section 2.2.1, I proposed the conceptualization of meaning and description in terms of category M vs M_ELSE, whereas in this section, I propose the conceptualization of the non-dualistic distinction MM vs M. Comparing both conceptualizations, it is obvious that they are not only compatible, but that MM vs M is but a special and dedicated case of M vs M_ELSE. This suggests that the discussion so far is internally consistent.

3.4 An artistic illustration

To render non-dualism’s abstract formulas and theoretical arguments more concrete and intelligible, I portray a visualization of non-dualism using one of Magritte’s surrealist paintings shown in Figure 6.

Let us dissect the painting non-dualistically. Three different levels can be distinguished: (1) The level of Magritte’s painting itself and as a whole, embedded within the text of the present article. (2) The level of the painting embedded within Magritte’s painting, i.e., the canvas put on the easel and depicting some houses and a horse pulling a carriage. (3) The level of Magritte’s painting that is neither (1) nor (2) but that depicts the “real world” of the large field and pasture, the big tree, some houses and people. Figure 7 gives an analytical overview.

On the left side, Figure 7 shows the dualistic distinction D_DUALISM = W vs M because dualism only takes two of the above mentioned levels into account, namely level (3) as the “real world” of the large field and pasture, the big tree, some houses and people (shown as a white rectangle), and level (2) as the canvas put on the easel and depicting some houses and a horse pulling a carriage (shown as a shaded rectangle).

In the center, you can see the non-dualistic unity U_NON-DUALISM = MM vs M. Because non-dualism argues that dualism has ignored level (1) as the level of the painting itself and as a whole, embedded within the text of this article: Firstly, level (3) as W is only accessible by using level (1) as M, i.e., you can only depict, indicate, think, or speak about W by using an M because without level (1) there would not even be Magritte’s painting in this article. Secondly, the distinction between level (3) and level (2) is only depictable by using level (1), i.e., the dualistic distinction must necessarily be indicated by the non-dualistic unity of the dualistic distinction. But since level (1) is but a painting, it corresponds - just like level (2) - to M (shown as a shaded rectangle; there is no longer a white rectangle). Consequently, the dualistic distinction W vs M can only be a description, namely |W vs M|.

On the right side, Figure 7 depicts the non-dualistic distinction D_NON-DUALISM = MM vs M_ELSE, which emphasizes that - from the perspective of level (1) - there are only descriptions, namely two different descriptions: a description that semantically auto-describes itself as world, i.e., MM, and another description that semantically auto-describes itself as description, i.e., M_ELSE.

3.5 Descriptions up to now and from now on

In this section, I turn to temporal and processual aspects of descriptions and meanings. Dualism and its distinction D_DUALISM = W vs M are rather static and synchronic. But even non-dualism and its distinction D_NON-DUALISM = MM vs M_ELSE were depicted in the previous discussion in such a static and synchronic manner. However, Mitterer’s original non-dualistic version (1992, 2001) does account for temporal and processual aspects.

The starting point is the non-dualistic distinction between MM vs M_ELSE. Even though this is not Mitterer’s original terminology, but my modified formalization, it can still be connected to his original terminology. MM and M_ELSE are two stages in a temporal process:

The first stage is MM, which is an indication of the world by means of a rudimentary description. Mitterer calls this stage the description so far, which I find more convenient to call the description up to now. It is the existent description that has already been made and that prevails up to the present. I note this formally as MM = |- – |, which is shortened into MM = |- |-- . From a non-dualistic perspective, dualism’s W is an M, namely MM. The object of the description – dualism’s W – is the description up to now – non-dualism’s MM (Mitterer 1992, pp. 56–62). For example, in a discussion among carpenters, Henry communicatively introduces his object of description by indicating it as MM = |- THIS TABLE |. The indication of the object by means of a rudimentary description up to now constitutes the base and starting point for further and more complex descriptions in the second stage.

The second stage is M_ELSE, which is the continuation of the previous description MM by modifying or adding something new to it. Mitterer calls it the description from now on. It
is the description that has not yet been made and that still remains to be made. I note this formally as \( M_0 = \emptyset \), which is shorthand for \( M_0 = \{ \emptyset \} \). The description of the world or of the object is the description from now on, which follows and continues the description up to now. In dualism, the meaning or description is directed toward and refers to the world or the object, whereas in non-dualism the meaning or description starts from and continues the world or object: Since the world is, as shown in the first stage, but the description up to now, the description from now on starts from the description up to now and continues it (Mitterer 1992, pp. 56–60). In other words, \( M_0 \) is a description-starting-from-and-continuing-a-previous-description. Resuming the above example of the discussion among the carpenters, Henry’s description up to now, \( M_0 = \{ \text{“This table} \} \), is taken up and continued by Brian who adds the description from now on, \( M_1 = \{ \text{“It’s round”} \} \).

These two stages taken together, i.e., the description up to now \( M_0 \) and the description from now on \( M_1 \), come to constitute a new description up to now. For example, Henry’s \( M_0 = \{ \text{“This table”} \} \) and Brian’s \( M_1 = \{ \text{“It’s round”} \} \) come to form the new description up to now, \( M_0 = \{ \text{“This table is round”} \} \). This new description up to now corresponds to the first stage, which I have already presented above, so that it serves as a starting point for further and new descriptions from now on. For example, Henry may resume the new description up to now, \( M_1 = \{ \text{“This table is round”} \} \), by adding a new description from now on, \( M_1 = \{ \text{“It’s nice”} \} \). Once again, both preceding descriptions taken together, i.e., the new description up to now and the new description from now on, come to constitute another new description up to now, \( M_1 = \{ \text{“This table is round and nice”} \} \). And so on. Figure 8 reviews the previous argument.

This leads to one of non-dualism’s principal arguments: Since objects are description-sensitive and description-dependent, the object of description is — by means of the description of the object — modified and developed into a new object of further description. In the above example, the object constantly changes: first there is a table, then there is a table that is round, and finally, there is a table that is round and nice. Put differently, the world or reality is but the latest state of affairs, the attained discourse positions, the descriptions up to now (Mitterer 1992, pp. 57, 60f, 67, 104, 110; Weber 2005, pp. 282, 318ff).

It is in this sense that the reformulation of Marx’s 11th Feuerbach thesis, given at the beginning of the article, is to be understood. Marx’s original thesis is “The philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, but the point is to change it.” This thesis is dualistic because “to interpret the world” is distinct from “to change the world.” In contrast, a reformulation of Marx’s thesis could be “The philosophers have interpreted the world differently and therefore changed it.” This reformulation is non-dualistic because “to interpret the world” is identical with “to change the world.” Any new interpretation from now on changes or extends the interpretations up to now and consequently the world up to now.

With regard to this argument, there is an interesting parallel between speech act theory and non-dualism. In speech act theory (Searle 1969), some speech acts and utterances are performative or declarative in that they simultaneously perform a particular action or automatically declare a particular state of affairs — instead of only describing or prescribing a particular action or state of affairs. In short, words change the world in that the uttering of words logically entails the changing of the world. For example, if a priest in a marriage ceremony says to Maria and John I hereby declare you to be husband and wife, his words automatically change the world, namely from a previous “world without Maria and John’s matrimony” to a subsequent “world with Maria and John’s matrimony.” A similar but more explicit and radical reasoning can be applied to non-dualism. All descriptions and meanings are performative or declarative in that they simultaneously perform a particular action or automatically

Figure 8: Non-dualistic process of descriptions up to now and from now on.
declare a particular state of affairs. In short, descriptions change the world in that the making of a description logically entails the changing of the world. For example, if a journalist reports that \( M_A = \{ \text{A NEW AIRPORT WAS BUILT} \} \), his words automatically change the world, namely from a previous \( M_W = \{ \text{WORLD WITHOUT THIS AIRPORT} \} \) to a subsequent \( M_W = \{ \text{WORLD WITH THIS AIRPORT} \} \).

Figure 8 may be used to draw a further conclusion. Since descriptions may be seen as operations (Weber 2005, pp. 351f) and since conclusions are often seen as actions, the series of successive descriptions may be seen as actions that change the world. For example, the Eiffel Tower is a result of a sequence of descriptions: from a prior interpretation (the Eiffel Tower was built) to the present interpretation (the Eiffel Tower exists).

The conclusion is that descriptions or meaning always continues or categorizes a previous meaning. Since descriptions may be seen as actions, the conclusion is that descriptions or meaning always continues or categorizes a previous meaning.

4. A non-dualistic semiotic triangle

In this section, I apply the non-dualistic approach to the semiotic triangle so as to elaborate a non-dualistic semiotic triangle. The goal is simply to extend the non-dualistic approach to new domains of inquiry so as to show that non-dualism can be fruitfully applied and used outside its philosophical or epistemological homeland. I will first briefly jump back to dualism and then turn to non-dualism.

4.1 Dualistic triangle

Within the dualistic distinction \( D_{\text{DUALISM}} = W \rightarrow M \), the world stands for a conglomerate of such terms as world, object, sensory perception, reality, and so forth. It seems fruitful to divide this conglomerate into two parts, which results in the elaboration of the classical, i.e., dualistic, semiotic triangle. That is, \( W \) is split into (1) some concrete entity of the world, often called the referent, which I notate as \( R \), and into (2) some mode of presentation or presentation of the referent \( R \) or of the meaning \( M \), often named the signifier, which I notate as \( S \).

This distinction between the referent \( R \) and the signifier \( S \) is neatly summarized by James’ statement that the word dog does not bite (1911, p. 85) and visualized by Magritte’s famous painting \( \text{La trahison des images} \) sub-titled \( \text{Ceci n’est pas une pipe} \) (This is not a pipe, 1929). For example, the referent could be the real-world object \( R = \text{the Eiffel Tower} \) and one of its signifiers could be the visual representation of the referent \( R \) or the meaning \( M \), often named the signifier, which I notate as \( S \).

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The justification for splitting \( W \) into \( R \) and \( S \) can be found in semiotic theory:

With regard to \( R \), semiotics and especially Peirce’s conceptualization clearly acknowledge that the sign cannot be analyzed into any combination of things which are not themselves signs (Goddard 1994, p. 7).

With regard to \( S \), semiotics casts the signifier too in terms of world and non-meaning. The signifier is the material-physical form of \( R \) or \( M \), directly apprehendable by sensory perception, that manifests itself to the actor (Chandler 2002, pp. 18f). Perception and sensation themselves are, as shown in section 3.2, usually conceptualized as distinct from and prior to meaning and description \( M \). Accordingly, perception and sensation – in terms of the relation between the referent or object \( R \) and the actor or subject – is clearly to be seen to belong to the level of \( W \) and not to the level of \( M \).

Moreover, sometimes it may be ambiguous whether “something” of the world or reality \( W \) is a referent \( R \) or a signifier \( S \). For example, a pair of scales may either be seen as a referent \( R = \{ \text{a pair of scales that are} \} \) or it may be seen as a signifier \( S = \{ \text{a pair of scales that} \} \) or the semiotic triangle as depicted in Figure 8. Note that both the dualistic and the triadic model remain within the realm of dualism because an unbridgeable ontological heterogeneity is assumed between \( M \) (depicted as a shaded rectangle) on one side and on the other, \( W \) and its component parts \( S \) and \( R \) (depicted as white rectangles).

This semiotic triangle is but one particular version among many, which have – depending on theory, discipline, and epoch – denominated and conceptualized differently the three angles of the triangle.
First, we obtain the non-dualistic unity $U_{\text{NON-DUALISM}} = M_S \lor R \lor M$ which implies that the whole classical dualistic triangle is but a meaning or description.

Second, we obtain the non-dualistic distinction $D_{\text{NON-DUALISM}} = M_S \lor M_R \lor M_M$, which implies several aspects: The signifier is always a semantically indicated signifier, namely $M_S$, i.e., a meaning that auto-describes it(self) as signifier. The referent is always a semantically indicated referent, namely $M_R$, i.e., a meaning that auto-describes it(self) as referent. The meaning is always a meaning semantically indicated as meaning, namely $M_M$, i.e., a meaning that auto-describes it(self) as meaning.

Non-dualistic transformation of the semiotic triangle is accomplished. To summarize: According to non-dualism’s second-order allo-description of the triangle’s angles, the angles are meanings $M$ (non-dualistic unity), but according to the angles’ first-order auto-description of themselves, the angles are either signifier $S$, referent $R$, or meaning $M$ (dualistic distinction). Combining second-order allo-description and first-order auto-description leads to the conclusion that the triangle’s angles are meanings that semantically auto-describe them(self) as signifier $M_S$, as referent $M_R$, or as meaning $M_M$ (non-dualistic distinction).

In the following paragraphs, I briefly allo-describe how the triangle’s angles auto-describe them(selfs). From an intuitive and common sense perspective it may sound odd to say that the triangle’s angles auto-describe them(selfs) but from a second-order and non-dualistic perspective, the angles are descriptions and therefore they can, and even cannot not or must, deliver auto-descriptions:

1. The referent auto-describes it(self) as a concrete entity or exemplar of the world or reality that is distinct from and prior to the meaning and the signifier. It views itself as being rather independent of subjective knowledge and will, constraining and external to the actor, often material and tangible, observable, objective or at least intersubjective, and difficult to modify. Typically, the referent auto-describes it(self) as an object, an action, an event or situation, a Durkheimian social fact, a person or actor, etc.

2. As already explained in section 2.1, the meaning auto-describes it(self) as distinct from the referent and the signifier; as transitive or referential; as immaterial, mental, or unobservable; as subjective, personal, or idiosyncratic; as contingent, multiple, or changeable; and as prototypically language-based. Typically, the meaning auto-describes it(self) as interpretation, signification, sense, construal, reading, construal, understanding, etc.
(3) The signifier auto-describes itself as the mode of perception or presentation of the referent or of the meaning, as the material-physical form of the referent or meaning, that is directly and intersubjectively apprehensible by sensory perception. The signifier stands for something different than itself since it always symbolizes a meaning or refers to a referent.

Here is a brief example of the relation between the three angles: the written French word M₅ = |AMOUR| or the perception of M₅ = |I SEE HIS RED ROSES| are meanings that auto-describe them(selves) as signifiers; they symbolize M₆ = |A STRONG FEELING OF CARING ABOUT ANDliking SOMEONE| that is a meaning that auto-describes itself as meaning; it refers to the particular case of M₇ = |HENRY LOVES MARIA|, which is a meaning that auto-describes itself as referent.

5. Conclusion

The goal of the article has been to tackle three problems or particularities of non-dualism “up to now” by proposing specific solutions “from now on.”

The first problem was the lack of an explicit and detailed conceptualization of the key term description as well as its isolation with regard to neighboring terms and their theoretical-disciplinary contexts. The solution proposed in section 2 consisted of connecting the term description to the sociological and semiotic term meaning by emphasizing their semantic-pragmatic similarities. Both terms were subsequently conceptualized as a category by means of the distinction M vs Mₑₜₑₛₑ. This procedure allowed both terms to be used synonymously in terms of meaning-description. It was also shown that meaning-descriptions, alias categories, can be located on a spectrum with two extreme poles: on the one hand, rudimentary, intuitive, and vague categories, and on the other hand, linguistic, elaborated, and complex categories. The advantage of the terminological-theoretical compatibility between the terms description and meaning was to make philosophical non-dualism connectable to social science approaches, especially to sociology and semiotics. This may be an important avenue for interdisciplinary cross-fertilization and co-operation. The common denominator and theoretical springboard for such endeavors would be the key terms description and meaning – including derivative or semantically neighboring terms such as category, language, signifier, discourse, sense, text, etc.

The second problem was the lack of a logical reconstruction and formal model of non-dualism. The solution offered in section 3 was to deduce non-dualism from dualism by using the operation of re-entry. In so doing, the dualistic distinction DUALISM = W vs M was transformed into the non-dualistic unity DDUALISM = Mₖ vs Mₗ – which emphasized the monism and inevitability of meaning-descriptions as such – and into the non-dualistic distinction DNON-DUALISM = Mₖ vs Mₗ – which distinguished between meaning-descriptions that auto-describe them(selves) as object-world and meaning-descriptions that auto-describe them(selves) as meaning-descriptions. Moreover, it was argued that the non-dualistic distinction may be viewed in terms of the temporal distinction between preceding meaning-descriptions “up to now” –|M| and subsequent meaning-descriptions “from now on” –|M|. The advantage of this formalization and logical deduction is that it helps to clarify and explicitize non-dualism’s main arguments and implicit assumptions as well as to assess non-dualism’s internal consistency and integration.

The third problem was the lack of extension of philosophical non-dualism to non-philosophical domains and fields. One possible solution proposed in section 4 was to extend the non-dualistic formalization to the classical dualistic semiotic triangle. The result was the elaboration of a non-dualistic semantic triangle based on the triad M₅ vs M₆ vs M₇, that is, meaning-descriptions auto-describing them(selves) as signifier-perception, meaning-descriptions auto-describing them(selves) as meaning-description, and meaning-descriptions auto-describing them(selves) as referent-object. However, apart from the semiotic triangle, non-dualism may be fruitfully extended to and used in a wide array of disciplines, theories, and fields. Among these, interpretive, linguistic, and discursive approaches in the social sciences may be particularly sensitive to non-dualism’s focus on description, meaning, and language.

THE AUTHOR

Martin Staude is a Ph.D. student in sociology at the Freie Universität Berlin. Having grown up in East Germany and with the high school diploma in the bag, I set off for the UK and USA to work and study. This traveling and the Castaneda books got me interested in other cultures and languages. So I began to study social anthropology and economics at the Freie Universität Berlin. My areas of interest were economic practices and structures in different societies as well as development processes and foreign aid, but also questions of methodology and epistemology. Field research and internships took me to Mexico, Senegal, Venezuela, and France – and sometimes to the hospital. The title of my M.A. thesis was Coffee Production and Commercialization: Decision Making among Indigenous Peasants and Rural Merchants in Oaxaca, Mexico. Working on my Ph.D. thesis, I became fascinated with sociology, linguistics, and semiotics, which revealed new worlds to me. The working title of my Ph.D. thesis is Meanings and Meaning Fields: A Theoretical Outline from Semiotic Sociology: Through the Example of Power and Law.
Notes

1. Semantically similar terms to description and, especially, to meaning are: sense, Saus-ssure’s signified, signification, concept, connotation, interpretation, Peirce’s inter-pretant, construal, understanding, idea, gist, typification, notion, categorization, definition, reading, discourse, narrative, statement, enunciation, utterance, text, word, speech, representation, model, classification, knowledge, systems theo-ry’s semantics, constructivism’s second-order reality, labeling theory’s label, or attribution theory’s attribution. However, to keep the terminology simple and coherent, I will stick with the terms description and meaning.

2. Other examples for descriptions, as proposed by non-dualism, include: table, this is a round, the earth is older than hu-manity, Africa, Africa is one of the five con-tinents, this is a triangle (Mitterer 1992) or the minister’s resignation, the denial of an accused person, a low suicide rate in the re-gion, the Gulf War, image, sound (Weber 2005, chapter 6.1).

3. Without aiming at a comprehensive or even exhaustive analysis, I will, neverthe-less, present some of the semantic-pragmatic differences between the terms meaning and description. Consider the sentences the description of the flower and the meaning of the flower. (1) The term description applies rather to those objects whose properties are easily observable and visibly on the surface, e.g., the description [THIS FLOWER IS RED], whereas the term meaning applies rather to those objects whose properties are difficult to observe and hidden in something deep, e.g., the meaning [THIS FLOWER REPRESENTS LOVE]. (2) Following from the preceding argument, the term description has a realist connotation evoking the notions of truth, neutrality, and impersonality. Therefore, the description of the flower [THIS FLOWER IS RED] can be tested and examined to determine its truth, appropriateness, or acceptability. In con-trast, the term meaning has an idealist connotation evoking the notions of subjectivity, multiplicity, and creativity. Consequently, the meaning of the flower [THIS FLOWER REPRESENTS LOVE] cannot be examined or tested to determine its truth, appropriateness, or acceptability. On a more general level, it may be said that the term description refers rather to statements that are context-, observer-, and use-independent, whereas the term meaning refers rather to statements that are context-, observer-, and use-dependent. For example, the description [THIS FLOWER IS RED] is supposed to be valid or appropriate in all or many contexts, for many observers, and in many uses, e.g., for a child or adult, in Algeria or Vene-zuela, in communism or capitalism, for a man or a woman, etc. In contrast, the meaning [THIS FLOWER REPRESENTS LOVE] is supposed to be valid or appropriate only in a particular context, for a partic-ular observer, or in a particular use, e.g., only for Sidney Miller but not for Maria Smith, only in Germany but not in Mongo-olia, only for an adult but not for a child, etc. It is in this sense that the sentences the de-scription of a meaning and the meaning of a description are to be understood. (3) The term description suggests that an actor or system can voluntarily and intentionally make, change, or abandon a particular de-scription such as [THIS FLOWER IS RED], which – after an examination of the flower – may be changed into [THIS FLOWER IS BROWN]. In contrast, the term meaning rather implies that actors attribute mean-ings involuntarily and often cannot inten-tionally change their meanings. For exam-ple, if I think that [THIS FLOWER REPRE-SENTS LOVE], I intuitively attribute this meaning without there having been a rational choice so that I cannot easily change it into another meaning such as [THIS FLOWER REPRESENTS FAMILY]. (4) The term meaning often implies a pragmatic, so-cial, or concrete message for the immediate future, which the term description does not. For example, if two people have a date and one gives the other a flower as a gift, the gift-receiver’s meaning may be [THIS FLOWER REPRESENTS HER LOVE FOR ME AND HER WILLINGNESS TO BEGIN A SERIOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH ME], whereas the description [THIS FLOWER IS RED AND COMES FROM HOLLAND] usually does not have such a direct and pragmatic relevance for the immediate future.

4. I will not elaborate on the controversies about and refinements of Spencer Brown’s approach. However, the following two as-

5. In a similar vein, Simmel (1903) argues that the frame, i.e., the recursive and loop-shaped border of a painting, has two func-tions: firstly, to distinguish the painting from the surrounding world, and secondly, to integrate the painting into a coherent entity. The frame proclaims that in its inside there is a world on its own that is not in-volved in the movements of the world out-side the frame. The conceptualization of de-scription and meaning as M vs M

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6. The illustration may suggest a realist reading in that the $M$ are "out there", pre-existent, observer-independent, like ready-made parcels, so that they can be discovered and transmitted. However, from a constructivist perspective, Foerster argues that "the world contains no information" (Foerster & Pörksen 1998, pp. 97f) and Luhmann adds that "information does not occur in the environment, but only in the system itself" (1990, p. 99). In accordance with such a constructivist reading, the conceptualization of $M$ allows that observers or systems "create" and "construct" the $M$, e.g., by drawing the distinction or boundary at different points, by inventing a single $M$'s contents, by combining several $M$, etc. Despite this constructivist reading, it is inevitable that observers use or produce $M$ and it is obvious that most rudimentary $M$ are socially or cognitively standardized and intersubjective due to sedimentation in language.

7. Similarly, in philosophy of art criticism it is often argued that for works of art — description and interpretation (or in my terminology: meaning) are indistinguishable and concurrent (Shusterman 1988, p. 403; Seigfried 1990, p. 590).

8. The language of thought hypothesis stems originally from Fodor (1975). It argues that cognition, i.e., thoughts and thinking, is distinct from and consequently possible without any natural spoken language. Instead, cognition is based on an innate mental language, called Mentalese, which is distinct from any natural spoken language but structured like a natural spoken language. Mentalese is a symbolic system of representational tokens or propositional attitudes such as $S$ desires that $P$ or $S$ believes that $P$. Mentalese can not only be found in humans but also in other species. I take these arguments to support my conceptualization of $M$ as category, firstly because the mental symbols, tokens, and representations such as $S$, $P$, desire, believe, etc are but categories, and secondly because the Mentalese-categories are not restricted to the human species.

9. Among the most important variations of $D_{dualism}$ are: reality vs definition of reality as exemplified by the sociological Thomas theorem; thing vs meaning as embodied in symbolic interactionism's premise that "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that these things have for them" where "things" may be physical objects, actions, other human beings, institutions, encounters, etc (Blumer 1969, p. 2); social structure vs semantics in sociological systems theory (Luhmann 1997, chapter 5); reality vs discourse in discourse theory; object vs interpretant in Peirce's Semiotics; first-order vs second-order reality or real vs constructed reality in constructivism; or perception vs interpretation in communication theory. See also Mitterer (1992, 2001) and Weber (2005, p. 271).

10. A similar illustration can be found in Weber (2005, p. 274).

11. Interestingly enough, internal inconsistencies, such as those found in dualism, can also be found in pragmatic everyday language use. For example, the idiom it goes without saying that $X$ is inconsistent because the semantic meaning of this idiom, i.e., it does not need to be said that $X$ (because $X$ is so self-evident or clearly true), contradicts the pragmatic meaning of the idiom, i.e., the speaker actually does say that $X$ (because $X$ is not so self-evident or clearly true).

12. Even dualistic approaches in psychology and linguistics argue that perception is category-based. For example, in an experiment scientists established an analog continuum of phonemes ranging from one extreme [du:] to the other extreme [tu:]. Then a large and continuous number of phonemes in between these two extremes were played to people, who surprisingly grouped each phoneme clearly and unambiguously in either the extreme [du:] or in the other extreme [tu:], but not in between both extremes. Hence, the continuous physical variation of the phonemes (the "in between") sharply contrasts with the discontinuous mental categorization of the phonemes (the "either-or") (Bassano 1995, pp. 413f).

13. A structurally similar argument is made in systems theory on the basis of the distinction between communication vs silence. Luhmann argues that society is made of communications, whereas society's environment is not made of communications but of silence. But Luhmann immediately recognizes that even the characterization of society's environment as "silence" is a communication because "silence" is not an operation that takes place in society's environment, but "silence" is an operation that takes place within society and society merely projects "silence" to society's environment (1989, pp. 16f). Let us apply this reasoning to non-dualism on the basis of the dualistic distinction between meaning vs world: conversation and thought are made of meanings $M$, whereas the world $W$ is not made of meanings $M$. But even the characterization of $W$ as non-$M$ or $M$-free is an $M$, namely $M = \{\text{the world } W \text{ is not made of meanings } M\}$. The exclusion or negation of $M$, i.e., saying that $W$ is not or does not contain any meanings $M$, presupposes the inclusion or affirmation of $M$, i.e., saying that $M = W$ is not or does not contain any meanings $M$. If one wants to exclude or negate $M$ (in Luhmann's terminology: $M$ as form), one must include and affirm $M$ (in Luhmann's terminology: $M$ as medium). If one wants to indicate or refer to some non-$M$, one must use $M$. Strictly speaking, non-dualism's refutation of dualism seems to be mainly based on logical and linguistic considerations because dualism is shown to exhibit logical-semantic inconsistencies and presuppositions.

14. A re-entry is a formal mathematical operation, originally proposed by Spencer Brown (1969) and later employed in constructivism and systems theory. Consider the following example: Firstly, there is an entry in the sense of drawing a distinction in an unmarked space, e.g., the moral distinction between good and bad, formally $D = \text{good vs bad}$, which may be interpreted as it is a good action or it is a bad action. Secondly, there is a re-entry in the sense of re-introducing the original whole entry with its two sides into itself, namely into only one of its two sides, e.g., into good. The original entry $D = \text{good vs bad re-enters into good}$, so that the new post-re-entry entry is $D = \text{good (good vs bad)}$, which can be interpreted as it is a good action to say "it is a good action or it is a bad action" or alternatively it is a good action to distinguish between good actions and bad actions.

15. Weber (2005, p. 210ff) uses a similar re-entry (and re-exit) operation. He does not, however, apply it to the dualism of $W$ vs $M$, but to the dualism of $W$ vs $M$-free.
17. Since non-dualism dispenses with dualism’s W, the question appears: What happens to W and what can be said about W on a theoretical-analytical level? There are three similar approaches: (1) Saeed’s “linguistic solipsism”, which leaves out and ignores reality-external questions of the ontological existence of some non-linguistic outside world W. Instead, it turns inward towards language to focus only on language-internal questions. For example, instead of discussing the relation between the meaning M = [DOG] and the real dogs running around in the world, it discusses the relation between the meaning M = [DOG] and other meanings such as M = [BITCH] or M = [ANIMAL] (2003, pp. 45 ff, 50). Frawley (1992, p. 20) argues: “Meaning cannot be strictly what an expression refers to in the world. What matters is the way the world is presented, the projected world, the world construed.” (2) Weber’s “non-dualistic agnosticism”, which neither asserts nor denies the existence of the world but simply adheres to an agnostic we don’t know (2005, pp. 282, 308). Mitterer explicitly proposes ignoring and abandoning dualism, renouncing any kind of W, and not presupposing or producing any W (1992, pp. 13, 42 ff, 80). In a similar vein, Saussure’s semiotic model focused on the signifier and the signified, largely excluding the level of W, in contrast to Peirce with his triad of representamen, interpretant, and object. If the existence of dualism’s W were denied, the result would be solipsism’s ego solus ipus. Foerster demonstrated the internal logical inconsistency of solipsism with his “gentleman with the bowler hat” (1973, fig. 20). (3) Another option is to be silent about W because “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”, as Wittgenstein argued. But even then, Zen-Buddhism has many teachings that “speak about being silent.”

18. The idea of unity between W and M or the idea of W being M has been captured in similar but less explicit ways by other authors: hermeneutic universalism assumes that meaning is universal because “interpretation is the only game in town” (Fish 1980, pp. 350f); semantic anthropology holds that “language is reality” (Ardenr 1982, pp. 11f); Lenk’s slogan for his interpretationism is interpretari necesse est (1991); Allport argues that cognitive categorization as an interpretative process is unavoidable (1954, p. 20); and distinct theory claims that the world is homogeneous in that it consists exclusively of cognitive distinctions (Jokisch 1996, p. 95). Consequently, non-dualism is not alone in its radical stance and may tap into these theoretical sources to resource itself.

19. A short review of these concepts, based primarily on Foerster and Luhmann, seems appropriate. First-order descriptions are realist and ontological because they are made by an observer describing a presumed external object, e.g., [THE TABLE IS GRAY]. Second-order descriptions are more constructivist because they are made by an observer describing another observer and her first-order descriptions, e.g., [THE DESCRIPTION “THE TABLE IS GRAY” USES THE COLOR CODE BUT NOT THE LEGAL CODE AND IS MADE BY A COLOR-BLIND WOMAN WHO COULD CONSEQUENTLY NOT MAKE THE DESCRIPTION “THE TABLE IS GREEN”]. Second-order descriptions seek to describe the characteristics of the first-order observer and description, e.g.: What are their blind spots? What communicative code is used? Who is the observer? etc. Auto-descriptions (Selbstbeschreibungen) are internal descriptions that a social or psychic system produces to present its own unity, operations, and intentions, e.g., Henry may describe himself by saying [I AM A KIND AND JUST MAN]. Auto-descriptions are always part of the system itself they are describing, so that the describing system and the described system are identical. Synonymous or similar terms for the verb to auto-describe could be to describe itself, to portray itself, to present itself, etc. Allo-descriptions (Fremdbeschreibungen) are external descriptions that a system produces of another system to present this system’s operations and intentions, e.g., Maria may describe Henry by saying [HIS IS A KIND BUT UNJUST MAN]. Allo-descriptions are not part of the described system, so that the describing system and the described system are distinct. Allo-descriptions may be first-order or second-order descriptions. Usually, auto-descriptions and allo-descriptions diverge.

20. Already at this point, it is obvious that these dualistic sentences are logically inconsistent: How can W make descriptions at all? How can W be distinct from description if at the same time it manifests itself only in descriptions? etc.

21. Similar versions of this painting or structurally similar photos are sometimes to be found on the cover of constructivist books (e.g., Foerster & Pörksen 1998). Provided that one agrees to consider constructivism to be a type of dualism and hence in contradiction to non-dualism, it is funny or strange to see that the same image is used to symbolize or support different hypotheses, namely constructivism and non-dualism.

22. Firstly, because description up to now goes lexically and aesthetically better with its counterpart description from now on since both expressions comprise three little words and contain the important word now. Secondly, because the word now better conveys the idea that the temporal reference point is the now, up to which or from which on descriptions may connect.

23. My usual synchronic-static notation M = […] is thus transformed into the temporal-processual notation M = ↑ […] or simplified M = […]↑. The idea behind these notations is as follows. The vertical lines symbolize the present now, left of which is the past and right of which is the future. The horizontal arrows or, simplified, the horizontal lines ←, symbolize the temporal movement: either a movement from the past up to the present now, as in the case of the description up to now M = […]↑ or simplified M = […]↑; or, as will be seen in the next paragraph, a movement from the present now to the future, as in the description from now on M = ↑ […] or simplified M = […]↑. Instead, Mitterer (1992, 2001) uses a different notation, which I find less clear, namely […] for the description up to now (i.e., so far)
and “…” for the description from now on. This distinction between a synchronic-static notation \( M \) and a temporal-processual notation \( M \rightarrow \) or \( \rightarrow M \) will be convenient: In arguments in which time and process plays no important role, I can use the synchronic-static notation, and in arguments in which time and process do play a vital role, I can use the temporal-processual notation.

24. A similar argument can be found in other theories. In discourse theory, objects can be modified by discourses, i.e., if the discourse changes, the object loses its old identity and adopts a new identity, the object transforms into another object (Jäger 2001, pp. 92ff). In symbolic interactionism, “objects are the product of symbolic interaction”, “out of a process of mutual indications common objects emerge”, and “objects […] must be seen as social creations – as being formed in and arising out of the process of definition and interpretation as this process takes place in the interaction of people” so that “people are forming, sustaining, and transforming the objects of their world” and “objects have no fixed status except as their meaning is sustained through indications and definitions that people make of the objects” (Blumer 1969, pp. 11ff). And in semiotics: “The world as we know it is merely its current representation” (Chandler 2002, p. 205).

25. For example: (1) The lower left angle of the signifier (a term from Saussure) corresponds to Chomsky’s surface structure, to Peirce’s representamen, to Luhmann’s message (action) or Mitteilung(shändeln) in his three-stage communication model, to Ogden & Richards’ symbol, to Earle’s expression, to Beacon’s word, or to Morris’ sign vehicle. (2) The upper angle of meaning corresponds to Saussure’s signified or concept, to Chomsky’s deep structure, to Peirce’s interpretant, to Carnap’s extension, to Ogden & Richards’ thought, to Potter’s sense, to Hege’s noems, and to common sense’s sense. (3) The lower right angle of the referent (a term from Ogden & Richards) corresponds to Carnap’s extension, Peirce’s object, Morris’ denotatum, and to Husserl’s thing.

26. My goal here was simply to re-conceptualize the ontological form of the triangle’s angles, in the sense that each angle is first of all a meaning \( M \) and secondly a particular type of meaning such as \( M_s \), \( M_p \), or \( M_e \). The goal was not to re-conceptualize the theoretical content of the angles as other scholars have done, e.g., Saussure’s dyadic model of signifier vs signified, Peirce’s triadic model of representamen vs interpretant vs object, Gotthard Günther’s trivalent logic, Johannes Heineich’s or Nina Ort’s reflexive-logical semiotics, Aristotle’s or Algidas Greimas’ tetradic square of opposites in semiotics, Paul Franceschi’s hexadic model, etc.

27. In a similar way to how non-dualism considers the referent to be a description that auto-describes it(self) as referent, semantics and semiotics consider persons or actors to be semantic actants or semantic roles: Persons and actors are not seen as ontologically existent and concrete entities in the non-linguistic outside reality, but they are considered to be semantic categorizations insofar as communications (e.g., fairy tales, discourses, texts, etc) portray and classify the different participants in an event according to their actorial function. For example, in the sentences John cleaned the house with the broom or The climate kills many people with its tornados, John and the climate occupy the semantic role of the agent, the house and the many people occupy the semantic role of the patient, and the broom and the tornados occupy the semantic role of the instrument. Other semantic roles include, for instance, giver, receiver, benefactor, opponent, subject, hero, villain, source, theme, experienter, location, goal, etc (see Saeed 2003, chapter 6).

28. It seems fruitful to conceptualize the signifier in terms of the linguistic notion of evidentiality as the “linguistic coding of epistemology” (Chafe & Nichols eds. 1986). Given a particular knowledge of a meaning or a referent such as \( M_R = \{ IT \ RAINED \} \), one might ask: How is the evidence for or the source of this knowledge linguistically marked? How is the mode of coming to this knowledge indicated? This corresponds to the function of the signifier as indicating the mode of perception or presentation of the meaning or referent. For example, the source of the knowledge of \( M_R \) may be indicated as \( M_S = \{ SHE \ TOLD \ ME \) THAT…\}, \( M_S = \{ SMELLED \) THAT…\}, \( M_S = \{ INFERRED \) THAT…\}, \( M_S = \{ EVERYONE KNOWS \) THAT…\}, \( M_S = \{ HEARD \) THAT…\}, etc.

29. There is a further advantage to combining non-dualism with the semiotic triangle: It would be possible to systematically theorize the different relations and processes between the three angles within one triangle or between several triangles by using the distinction of description up to now and from now on. For example, the process \( \langle M_{BC} \rightarrow \rightarrow M_{CL} \rangle \) or \( \langle M_{BC} \rightarrow \rightarrow M_{CB} \rangle \), or \( \langle M_{BC} \rightarrow \rightarrow M_{LC} \rangle \), etc. Such processes appear under labels such as semasiology, onomasiology, intensification, extension, etc.

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philosophical–semiotic

CONCEPTS

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Education towards Truth?
Reflecting on a Sentence of Josef Mitterer

Theo Hug ♦ University of Innsbruck (Austria) <theo.hug@uibk.ac.at>

Purpose – So far, the work of Josef Mitterer has not been widely recognized in philosophy and current debates in philosophy of education. It contributes to differentiated understandings of Mitterer’s sentence and it opens up a new field of discourse.

Methodology – The article seeks to make progress in these investigations through reflecting on Mitterer’s sentence in ten steps, beginning with translational aspects and ending with questions of power relations and inconsistency. The arguments are made through (a) reference to concepts that are currently being discussed in philosophy of education and constructivist discourses, (b) through contrasting various conceptualizations, and (c) through discussion of selected examples.

Findings – The article proposes a translation of Mitterer’s sentence that may be from Mitterer. It points out several similarities with and differences to positions related to (presumed) positions of Mitterer. Furthermore, it shows innovative options for argumentations in educational philosophy on that basis.

Benefits – The contribution sounds out some interfaces between Mitterer’s philosophy and current debates in philosophy of education. It contributes to differentiated understandings of Mitterer’s sentence and it opens up a new field of discourse.

Key words – philosophy of education, philosophical constructivism, contextualism, non-dualistic philosophy, politics of truth, governmentality.

Die Erziehung zur Wahrheit ist immer die Erziehung zur Wahrheit des Erziehers.
Mitterer (1983), p. 273

The work of Josef Mitterer offers many points of contact and connecting factors for epistemological, methodological, ethical, theoretical and also empirical questions. In my contribution, I want to focus on one sentence that relates to both education and philosophy. The sentence, quoted in its German version in the epigraph, struck me right away when I heard it for the first time during a talk that Josef Mitterer gave in Innsbruck in the early ’80s. From then on, it has not lost its inspiring character for me.

Even though it is not unusual in the context of philosophy to think and to write about a sentence over a long period of time, I want to mention briefly Mitterer’s style of writing. In contrast to common trends in the academic world – such as publish or perish, working for evaluation and career, thinking with a stop watch and imparting instant knowledge, valuing media presence more highly than thoughtful content, or putting financial success before critical thinking – Josef Mitterer rather rethinks a sentence thoroughly before writing it down and rethinks and rewrites it again before publishing it. The results of his judicious and sober-minded style has led to extensive paraphrasing and translations, and sometimes his work has been (mis)used by quoting his work without giving credit to the author (Mitterer 1992, p. 19).

1 First of all, how can the German sentence “Die Erziehung zur Wahrheit ist immer die Erziehung zur Wahrheit des Erziehers” (Mitterer 1983, p. 273) be translated into English? As far as I can see, there is not just one translation. One could say, “Education for truth is always education for the truth of the educator.” Another option is the following: “Education towards truth is always education towards the truth of the educator.” There is at least a third version: “Education of truth is always education of the truth of the educator.” Each of these translations places an emphasis on different aspects. “For truth,” for example, focuses questions about it in moral or imperative terms, whereas “towards truth” suggests various kinds of aiming for or directing to truth. “Of truth,” however, tends to imply that there is more a concrete truth at hand than has to be promoted in concrete ways. In recent email correspondence with me, Mitterer himself tended to favor the translation “education towards truth is always education towards the truth of the educator.” In my view, this translation puts an emphasis on bringing something in line with truth (whatever the concept, context and content of truth may be).

2 If we interpret the German version literally, half of the content seems to be missing because of the gender-related wording. How about the multitude of cases of “the truth of the educatress” or “the truth of the government?” Well, Mitterer is interested in the general relevance of “education towards truth” above gender-specific or other special aspects of “education towards truth.” Moreover, looking at the various contexts and examples Mitterer (1992, 2001) discusses in his books, his way of expressing himself is not only a philosophical kind of “undoing gender,” in terms of being sensitive to different structures of relevance, but also a kind of skepticism about all claims of omni-relevance of single categories or distinctions. In other words, in “truth of the educator” both “truth” and “educator” are used as placeholders for all sorts of strong beliefs, guiding themes, verities, trueness, rightness, etc. and for all kinds of caregivers – child or adult carers, educators, educatresses, legal guardians, parents – teachers, stakeholders, bosses, authorities, legitimized speakers or self-authorized players (Mitterer 2001, p. 67). The terms can be used figuratively and the meaning varies, depending on history, context, and situation.

3 The fact that Mitterer uses the terms “always” and not “sometimes,” “now and
again,” or “from case to case” attracts attention. Is this related to a logical or pragmatic necessity? Elsewhere, he uses the term “also,” saying “Education towards truth is always also education towards the truth of the educator” (Mitterer 1992, p. 14). It seems that education towards truth necessitates education towards the truth of the educator. Even if education towards truth is not only but also education towards the truth of the educator, an inescapable connectivity is postulated here.

(4) The way this relation is formulated reminds me of Maturana’s starting point for the use of language: “Everything said is said by an observer to another observer that could be himself” (Maturana 1978, p. 30). So, if something is said, willy-nilly, so to say, it is said by an observer on the basis of his or her perspectives and distinctions. This understanding points to a necessary relation known as observer theorem in constructivist discourse and not to an optional relation. Even though Maturana and Mitterer do not characterize themselves as constructivists, they seem to take coactive relations as points of departure in both cases — the case of everything said being said by an observer and the case of education towards truth. As I understand these types of relations, they correspond to concrete structures at a definite time. The necessity does not refer to a specific content in the sense of strictly deductive arguments, even though we can observe certain probable inferences, for example when educated people tend to tell the truth of their educators and educatresses. So, in the long run, the chances of education towards truth increase as long as there are no strong contrastive experiences; and an observer may easily have the impression of necessary inferences and coerced results.

(5) The sentence “education towards truth is always education towards the truth of the educator” may lead to the assumption that Mitterer has an intentional understanding of education in mind and that he is thinking of the classical pedagogical motif of the pupil who autonomously does what others want him or her to do. In fact, some examples he discusses deal with children, pupils, teachers, students, professors and popes (Mitterer 2001, pp. 66–68), and, at least partly, these examples seem to follow instructional understandings of upbringing or learning, and educational concepts of goal-oriented influence, preparation for “real life,” or acquiring the competencies for adult life. But if we take a closer look at the arguments and examples provided (pp. 66–75), we can easily see that Mitterer is thinking of wider concepts of education, too. For example, distinctions learned during early childhood or the use of expressions in everyday life are commonly referred to as contextual or developmental aspects in terms of socialization processes. So, the sentence does not refer to a special concept of intentional education but is rather open to various concepts of education, socialization, and enculturation. Mitterer’s critique of the widespread “objectifying mode of speaking [objektierende Redeweise]” (Mitterer 1978, pp. 3–4) speaks for this, especially.

(6) Concerning purposeful attempts at direct exertions of influence on the disposition of others, these are often announced in institutions’ programmatic statements. For example, on the website of the College of Education at Madonna University, which is “dedicated to providing high quality courses and programs for persons interested in becoming teachers,” we can find the following paragraph: “As an independent Catholic institution, the University remains committed to its belief in the spiritual, educational and service-oriented mission, education for truth, goodness and service. The College of Education explicitly works to develop teachers who care about their students and our nation’s schools. Faculty members nurture students through carefully planned instruction and thoughtful academic counseling.” Of course, there are more secularized versions, too, such as the Truth In Education program of the University of Alberta, which also is an institutional member of the Center for Academic Integrity. “Here we can find the following programmatic statement: “Without Academic Integrity, an educational institution would suffer complete failure. At the University of Alberta, our top priority is to maintain the integrity of the degrees we offer. To that end, we have created the Truth In Education program. It is designed to promote integrity in all educational activities, including learning, teaching, research and community events.” So, what difference does it make? And how about the widespread mixes of all sorts of -isms in the academic world, whose agents and exponents call for scientific work at the cutting edge of all developments and at the same time often act like exponents of dogmatic churches? Do educational institutions suffer complete failure if they don’t commit themselves to values such as integrity, honesty, and responsibility?

Well, on the one hand, Mitterer agrees with such commitments too, and every now and then he highlights harshly cases of academic Betrayers of the Truth (Broad & Wade 1982). On the other hand, he wants to point to those versions of problem-creating in the name of truth that think of themselves as solutions to a problem. Let me present an example. Nowadays a lot of money is spent in many institutions on plagiarism detection software, without taking much notice of the problems in understaffed departments or changing learning cultures. The chances of solving related socio-cultural problems by means of software technologies are not good, as experience shows. Needless to say, jittery plagiarism hunters are not much of a help, either, at least when they follow weakly-reflected programs of self-realization in the service of unconscious motifs rather than deliberate thinking or wisdom.

(7) Does Mitterer’s sentence express an anti-pedagogical position? Is it meant rather as a rejection or negation of education than a creation of a new positive educational model “beyond truth”? Well, Mitterer does not characterize his positions as “anti-pedagogical.” On the other hand, there are affinities, or at least compatibilities, with anti-pedagogical orientations, for example, in terms of questioning authorities, openness to future developments, and voting for a pursuit of change (Mitterer 1983, p. 276). Anti-pedagogical approaches have been characterized differently. As Smeyers and Marshall write:

“As knowledge can no longer be claimed to be applicable to a rapidly changing future, it is argued, the justification of present educational activities is called into question. For some philosophers of education this suspicion evolves into a full condemnation of all pedagogy” (Smeyers & Marshall 1995, p. 31).

I do not think that Mitterer would agree with a condemnation of all pedagogy. I assume he would rather problematize truth-oriented and also fundamentalist versions of it, as well as versions claiming validity anytime and everywhere.

(8) So far, the sentence comes across as a condensed form of critique of different ver-
visions of education towards truth. In this sense, there is a clear core of the argument that features a certain ambiguity and manifold options of literal and figurative applications. Accepting that, we may ask if there is a corresponding argument for education without truth in the sentence being discussed in this essay. Among others, Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Rorty and Jean-François Lyotard have brought forward arguments for education without truth: Nietzsche with his radical questioning of the value and objectivity of truth; Rorty for the strengthening of solidarity and consensus; and Lyotard with his critique of “grand narratives” and universalist claims and his brilliant in-depth investigation of disagreement. Since Mitterer differentiates his positions from all philosophical positions that talk of objects differently from the language that describes the objects (Mitterer 1978, 1992, pp. 21–22, 2001 pp. 16–20), his sentence cannot be simply subsumed under a collection of postmodern perspectives of education without truth. At the same time, he would not follow the widespread critique of such perspectives in terms of arbitrariness, irrationalism, or unrealized support of neo-liberal ideologies.

It’s quite obvious that he would not share the critique of Alexandra Deligiorgi (1998) either, when she says:

“that post-modern perspectivism and the individualistic or collectivistic logic which nurtures its scope can be transcended through the construction of hyperperspectivistic prisms based on a logic of interrelation animated by the interdisciplinary spirit prevailing in the field of modern science. This latter serves as the leading thread for the foundation of a new canonicity which, without losing its historical and cultural character, can make claims to truth and validity of general acceptance” (Deligiorgi 1998, p. 1).

So again, what difference does it make if it is not about homogeneity eliminating differences or heterogeneity eliminating similarities? I think that it is very likely that Mitterer would use the same argument here that he uses when looking at situations where we lie and infringe bids of truth: “If we told the truth under all conditions, we would probably end up in a mental institution or in jail” (Mitterer 2001, p. 66).

(9) As far as I can see, Mitterer’s core argument is quite in line with Frieda Heyting’s critique of the problematic role of ideals in education, especially of if they should be “passed on” in educational processes (Heyting 2004a, pp. 245–246). Is it also in line with her considerations about the problems of justification in the context of post-foundationalist concepts of social sciences (Heyting 2001, van Goor et al. 2004)? Both Mitterer’s non-dualistic philosophy and post-, non- or anti-founderalist approaches in philosophy of education (cf. also Smeyers & Peters 2006) question the foundationalist procedures in rationalist, transcendentalist, and empiricist traditions. Both criticize the distinction between founding and founded utterances, implying a “vertical” relation between them, and both ask for reconsideration of justification procedures. Furthermore, both deny any epistemological privilege for a certain position, which implies a conception of “horizontally” structured knowledge, and both attach importance to discursive and contextual aspects as well as to aspects of temporality. Mitterer puts an emphasis on the distinction of descriptions “so far” and “from now on” (Mitterer 1992, p. 72), and Heyting defends historical dimensions and thinks of justification as a two-sided procedure in which every justifying proposition can only work as such for the time being (Heyting 2001, p. 259). Although both positions search for ways beyond certain foundations and arbitrary allegations, and although both result in an open, context-sensitive, discursive, and learning-oriented view of justification with similar social practices, we should not overlook the different modes of reference to non-dualist philosophy, in the case of Mitterer (1992, pp. 49–86; 2001) and to a critical reading of philosophical constructivism, contextualism, and systems theory, in the case of Heyting (1992; 2001, p. 253; 2002; 2004b).

(10) In a similar way, some parallels could be made with reference to current debates on governmentality in educational sciences and educational philosophy (Weber & Maurer 2006; Bilstein et al. 2007, pp. 204–206). For instance, the search for new concepts and a new language of education that “articulates what is at stake in the care of oneself today” (Bilstein et al. 2007, p. 206) is in compliance with the problematization of education towards the truth of others by Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons look forward to “creative acts” of forming new techniques and practices to govern oneself, locating their efforts in the context of governmentality studies as follows: “Within a broader perspective, these creative acts can be connected to an ‘ethics of de-governmentalization’ and can contribute, more precisely, to a ‘governmentality of ethical distance’” (Bilstein et al. 2007, p. 206). But on the whole, the differences outweigh similarities, such as the abstract level of argumentation, awareness of power relations or the focus on critique rather than on design proposals. This is, to a lesser extent, owing to the fact that contemporary governmentality studies refer to the work of Michel Foucault and not to non-dualistic philosophy. It becomes obvious in view of the re-localization of the question of truth in terms of a critical ontology of the present which “refers to a kind of truth-telling and true knowledge that cuts into our educational present and how we live the present” (Bilstein et al. 2007, p. 205). Finally, Masschelein and Simons think of teachers as “truth-tellers for others” in the sense that “educational truth-telling takes care of others by opening up spaces to take care of oneself and to verify one’s life” (Bilstein et al. 2007, p. 205). In so doing, the analytical potentials under the auspices of Foucault are pruned and finally turned into moral stances. In other words, the concept of de-governmentalization emerges as concept of re-governmentalization on other levels.
Mitterer tries to avoid such traps and shortcomings. Moreover, he does not show the way out of the “escape from arbitrariness” (Mitterer 2001) of truth-oriented philosophy and education. Rather, Mitterer suggests disengaging from the search for truth. He shows that philosophy and education towards truth both try to avoid arbitrariness by creating general or universal (“non-contingent”) presuppositions on the basis of contingent assumptions. By contrast, his intention is “to make lines of argumentation, tricks, and principles of the functioning of dualistic modes of arguing transparent and thereby weaken them” (Mitterer 2001, p. 21).

These reflections on Mitterer’s sentence “education towards truth is always education towards the truth of the educator” show its connectivity to some other approaches in philosophy of education but also show its originality. I read it as an invitation to further investigations and elaborations on educational perspectives based on Mitterer’s non-dualist philosophy, the more so as there is a need for contemporary analysis of related forms of education towards autonomy, democracy, regard, respect, or towards technology. One may say that in all of these cases, problems of self-referential paradoxes are not solved or are not solvable. But who says that we have to think of these problems in terms of Aristotelian syllogism or modern forms of bivalent logic first and foremost? If one reduces thinking to the discourse of classical logic, one might rely on Epimenides’ paradox and remind us of his statement, “All Cretans are liars.” Is it a self-suspending statement since he came from Crete himself? Is Mitterer’s statement a self-suspending statement or is he lying and therefore his statement is meaningless? In my view the constellation is quite similar to Epimenides’ constellation. The self-referential paradox arises when one considers whether the truth is actually spoken and when one remains in the context of bivalent logic and does not take a tertium datur into account. But if we read Mitterer’s work carefully we are not tempted to stick to bivalent logic or Aristotelian syllogism. We are rather encouraged to think of all domains of knowledge and practices in terms of the “craft” or “art” that Aristotle has valued. Even if today’s discussions focus on new forms of what he called theoretical wisdom or science (epistémé) and practical skills (techné), he also appreciated intuitive understanding (nous) and practical wisdom (phronésis).

Especially, concepts of situated skillfulness and sagacity, context-sensitive intelligence and practical wisdom (phronésis) seem to be underestimated today. And this is how I understand Mitterer’s discourse: bringing together and thinking across these different domains of knowledge and practices in order to overcome descriptions so far or keep them for the time being (In Mitterer’s books there is no “either – or”, no categorical rejection of arguments for keeping or for overcoming). Mitterer probably would agree on the “Incommensurability of scientific and poetic knowledge” (Glaserfeld 1997). But at the same I think that his philosophy also aims at those spheres where poetic and scientific knowledge meet.

In the same vein as von Glasersfeld, Mitterer offers thoughts and concepts and does not try to proselytize to others or to establish a new paradigma. With his work and the prosperous way of living his philosophy, he shows fruitful ways of dealing with the relation between the reality of experience and the experience of reality. Although he does not explicitly formulate a philosophy of education or media theory, and although I do not know an explicit statement of his that refers to “Rashômon” (Akutagawa 2006),5 he seems to have found viable ways of dealing with the Rashômon problem, if not solutions to epistemological and ethical problems related to it (cf. Boyd 1987). But this may be discussed on another occasion.

Notes
3. Deligiorgi takes the philosophy of Rorty and Lyotard as examples of one-sided approaches (or “prisms”). In her view, one-sidedness “facilitates cynical or nihilistic relativisation of values of truth, justice or freedom and leads to their gradual weakening and elimination” (Deligiorgi 1998, p. 6). She argues for a multi-sided prism of hyperperspectivism that is based on the ideas of interdisciplinarity and interrela- tion and that can function as a theoretical measure against cynical or nihilistic tendencies: “Both interdisciplinarity and interrelation are interwoven together with hyperperspectivism; this latter as a telos of- fers them an epistemological ground of legitimation, being itself the outcome of the attempt of historico-critical, reflective and evaluative reason to overcome perspectivistic approaches” (p. 6). This critical relativistic spirit should help us to get beyond perspectivist approaches to hyperperspectivism, which acts as the “leading thread in the search for truth” (p. 6).
4. With the concept of “governmentality” Foucault aims at a new understanding of...
power beyond the problematic of consensus, will or conquest. He writes, “The relationship proper to power would not therefore be sought on the side of violence or of struggle, nor on that of voluntary linking (all of which can, at best, only be the instruments of power), but rather in the area of the singular mode of action, neither warlike nor juridical, which is government” (Foucault 1982, p. 221). Foucault advocates a concept of power that focuses on various forms of social control in disciplinary institutions (for example, schools or hospitals) as well as on different forms of knowledge in contrast to widespread conceptualizations of power in the sense of hierarchical, top-down power of the state. Accordingly, the concept of “government” is not limited to state politics alone. It includes a wide range of control techniques that apply to a variety of phenomena, from one’s control of the self to the “biopolitical control” of populations. So, Foucault defines governmentality as the “art of government” in a wide sense that includes organized practices (mentalities, rationalities, and techniques) through which subjects are governed, and that is linked to related concepts such as biopolitics and power-knowledge (Foucault 2006a, b). Mitterer’s and Foucault’s philosophy do not have a lot in common, but grosso modo, they have an interest in “politics of truth” in common.

5. See also “Rashômon” by Akira Kurosawa, Remastered Edition 2008 (DVD, subtitled) Triad Productions LLC (Org. 1951) or other filmed versions.

References

All translations from German are made by the author.


A Colorful Theory in a Black/White World
Mitterer and the Media: Parallels, Overlaps, Deviations

Roland Graf ◦ University of Applied Sciences, St. Pölten (Austria) <lbgraf@fh-stpoelten.ac.at>

Introduction
The parallels between Ludwig Wittgenstein and Josef Mitterer are manifold and obvious, consisting of rather formal (numbering of the paragraphs) as well as similarly laconic styles and even the "left out portion" of their main works. To be clear, this is not to introduce a panegyric passage right at the beginning of my essay but merely to refer to a methodological difficulty that could be pointed out in one way or another. For media philosophy and the influence of Das Jenseits der Philosophie (Mitterer 1992) in that discipline, it could be useful to read that small, but radical book, just as we already are accustomed to reading the Tractatus. The main reason for this interpretation lies in an important fact: Mitterer does not mention the media at all and the wider sense of his remarks on communication rests buried between the lines because his main purpose was to introduce non-dualism and its logical implications. That indirect methodology besides, Mitterer and the media are a combination of great potential, sharing more than their alliteration. While the possibilities, insights and limits of a non-dualizing way of thinking about the media were excellently elaborated in Non-Dualistic Media Theory (Weber 2005), media philosophy as a whole still tends to neglect the non-dualistic concept and does not include it in its own framework.

This seems surprising enough, as the main question – which ontological status do perceptions have: whether we made them on our own, or via fabricated world views – should be of common interest. And that concept of our understanding of the world indeed has a profound impact in a world where a great part of interpersonal exchange of meaning – to avoid the superlative "most of it" – gets transferred via various media channels.

To start with a personal reading experience, what struck me most about non-dualism was the versatility of the seemingly slight change in looking at objects and/or their descriptions in language. Obviously Mitterer's epistemology offers more than meets the eye, another point of similarity to Wittgenstein's thinking. In both cases, we cannot track back all the sources of their thoughts explicitly, even though both authors convincingly conclude long lasting debates in philosophy and, in consequence, shake the fundamentals of the discipline itself. In any case, they at least sharpen the borderline between what can be said about the world and where nonsense begins.

With analytic philosophy as a basis, Mitterer's work forms a systematic and ambitious effort to show that Ayer's notion about the linguistic, non-factual nature of the propositions of philosophy has to be considered for any proposition: "[T]hey do not describe the behaviour of physical, or even mental, objects; they express definitions, or the formal consequences of definitions" (Ayer 1967, p. 57). The legacy of analytic philosophy – given Mitterer's introduction via comments on Wittgenstein (Mitterer 1992, pp. 23–30) – is radicalised when he no longer draws any limiting line between propositions of Science and metaphysical sentences. However, two thoughts, implicitly already present in Ayer's book, are also of importance to non-dualistic thinking, especially concerning its effects on media-philosophy: the question of defining/describing, which is clearly time-bound and therefore socially variable, and the "formal consequences," which root our actions in these no-longer-simple theoretical (inter) personal linguistic questions.

Seeing versus viewing
In the following pages, I will firstly concentrate on this second consequence and its implications for film theory. This is the fact that Mitterer considers every description of
an object as constitutive of another description (Mitterer 1992, p. 99). This observation not only shows the parallel efforts of phenomenological and psychoanalytic theories of explaining the triangle between object-description-depiction in filmic representations but also transcends these concepts, which are still stuck in a dualist world-view. Films were chosen as my first subject. Mitterer obviously does not speak about them: his favourite examples, in a rather Platonic tradition, are apples or tables. Nevertheless non-dualism must also be useful for explaining “reality” in media (its content); otherwise, these descriptions must form a category of their own, consisting of a kind of second-order reality, totally different from (spoken) communication, as non-dualism so aptly explains. Besides this logical reason, the historical turn, marked by the last century’s radical rethinking of our way of regarding the world, started with the possibilities of film and transcended the normal way of looking. Whereas the rather technical way of looking at printed media did not produce a very fruitful philosophical output due to their merely topologic (i.e., spatial) link to events, the phantasmic and deliriously coloured moving pictures influenced many thinkers.

Phenomenological approaches towards the media share one important characteristic with non-dualistic philosophy, the high esteem for individual knowledge and its ever changing potential.1 The work of Mitterer not only offers a “beyond” of dualism, but also establishes the freedom to hold individual views. In opposition to an old tradition of consequently devaluing the own mind, which strives to understand the object world but never can succeed due to its own being in the world, non-dualism offers a tactic whereby the (sensual) perception does not change but its value is added to by the decoding individual himself.

The difference, on the other hand, lies in the prominent core term of Phenomenology, the “kinaesthetic horizon,” which bears a great similarity to the way we watch movies. Knowledge becomes carnal2 knowledge in Husserl’s writings (an idea later forming the cornerstone of Maurice Merleau-Ponty 1966) and thus the pre-theoretical foundation of any communication, discourse or even science.3 The body, rediscovered as a foundation of knowledge, reaches deep into our grammar (Fellmann 2006, pp. 52–53), in which transitive verbs show a direct interaction, whereas oblique cases indicate reflection, showing indirect relations to the object, wishes, possibilities and so on. On an artificial horizon, let’s say a projection in a cinema, we lose the carnal sphere or, at least, are tricked by the camera’s viewpoint, which does not cover the whole perspective (e.g., in an important shock effect in horror-films, when attacks come from objects outside the picture).

The two basic ways of film-making, different in their way of depicting real or non-existing sets, can be named after the two French pioneers; they show a early distinction between Lumière-like “documentation” (= claiming to show the truth) and Méliès-like “fiction” (= offering a perception open to alternatives). Film has always been regarded as a media presentation in dualist form, showing things that exist, while not showing reality outside. The outside half of the movies in most film theories therefore were treated as an important, determining part of the picture show. Structurally, we feel cinema as a suspension of reality, like other escapist media that provide us with insights outside our spatial everyday experience. Analyzing the concrete example of “King Kong and the white woman,” Noel Carroll (2006) pointed out the ontological difference between a wall and the great wall on “Skull Island”:

"Es ist mir nicht möglich, meinen Körper auf die Mauer auszurichten […] Der Raum, in dem sich die Mauer befindet, ist zwar durch den Film optisch erreichbar, aber phänomenologisch von dem Raum abgetrennt, in dem ich lebe. [It is impossible to focus my body on that wall … The space, in which the wall is situated, can be reached optically by the film, but phenomenologically it is cut off from the room, in which I live]” (Carroll 2006, p. 159).

Images in the film are projections before the eye of the beholder, but not always at eye level; uncanny experiences are projected by the cinematic technique.

Therefore, various theories from Husserl’s Phenomenology (elaborated as film-theory by Merleau-Ponty) up to Žižek’s interpretation of film as the spectator’s phantasm of alternative world view (Žižek 2001) circle among the changing “truths” via different conditions of perception. Psychoanalytic film-theory, especially following Lacan’s concept of the “point de capiton” or “quitting point” shows the impasse of symbolic and psychological understanding of the interaction between the signifier (film) and the signified (world). Deleuze’s claim that the continuity of a movie is the main difference from the photographic image (Deleuze 1989, pp. 117–118) and the time axis responsible for our updating of knowledge, called “glissement” in Jacques Lacan’s reflections on film (Lacan 1997), coincide with the core of non-dualism, the temporal dimension. Furthermore, Žižek’s use of Lacan’s concept locates the “wound” of the system exactly in the moment between the “up to now/from now on,” but remains blind to the categorical difference between the temporal frame, which eliminates the “real” outside language (synonymous with desire in Lacan’s view), and the possible “realities” going/gone by. The refutation of linguistics—which always seems guided by the own desires and hegemonic interference of the super-ego—and the introduction of a small but crucial link to the “real,” which guides our communication as a mighty but absent entity, show the problem of hegemony, which always dispenses with individual freedom and determines our reactions. Although the changing of filmic action is rightly ascribed to time lapsing, the “point de caption” has a rather static but clearly temporal function that gives the individual the possibility to reconsider the pictures seen retroactively and prospectively” (Lacan 1997, pp. 267–268). This dialectic change between Retention and Protention, to use analogous phenomenological terms for the temporal analysis of our perception, offers a similar concept to that which Husserl had in mind. His metaphor for media content is the vanishing single note in a melody:

“Jeder Ton hat selbst eine zeitliche Extensio, beim Anschlagen höre ich ihn als jetzt, beim Forttönen hat er aber ein immer neues Jetzt, und das jeweils vor- ausgehende wandelt sich in ein Vergangen. Also höre ich jeweils nur die aktuelle Phase des Tones, und die Objektivität des ganzen dauernden Tones konstituiert sich in einem Aktkontinuum, das zu einem Teil Erinnerung, zu einem kleinsten, punktuellen Teil Wahrnehmung und zu einem weiteren Teil Erwartung ist.”
Every piece of content of the serial media, acoustic or visual, always has a clear temporal structure running parallel with the listener’s or spectator’s own life-time. Our understanding, therefore, also has to be gradual in time but it does not necessarily bring us closer to the truth “outside” the media. How this gradual accumulation of knowledge in a media surrounding is done may be observed by looking at the possible ramifications of the storyline in a movie. Here, the spectator also keeps in mind the narrative possibilities, which have not actually been updated by the presentation on the screen. His “own film” consists of potential turns not (yet) seen and of course of his personal viewing habits (attention, knowledge of genres, regularity of film consumption, etc.). As – in a non-dualizing way of speaking – every description is only of concern “up to now,” every new filmic experience adds up to the viewers’ own understanding of the media system, not only its staging in various movies and their approach towards reality, but also its self-referential attitude towards tradition.

**Constructing versus comparing**

In this respect, this parallel between the phenomenologists and Josef Mitterer in how they look at the role of media also gives us a clue for the answer to the categorial question about non-dualism. I would, indeed, regard non-dualistic epistemology as a form of constructivism. The obvious reason has already been described in the individual’s constructing of reality, which shall also be explained in more detail in its temporal character later on.

The “reality so far” that is offered to media consumers does not simply introduce a kind of radicalized constructivism, but also gives the possibility that object, description and reality fall together. For me this seems to be the main (but slight) difference between constructivist approaches and non-dualism. The radical constructivists’ idea of the viability of our knowledge – derived from media, imagination or own experiences – in non-dualistic concepts is no longer the guaranteeing factor of our perception. Besides, in a strict sense, this distinction would also lead to another sort of dualism – constructed mind vs. world of object. Temporal concepts – or more precisely, the temporal status of the individual describing – are more important. Not how we will act, but when we act makes a difference. As everything seems to be permanently morphing, non-dualism also offers circular movement in the “quality” of understanding. Given the examples of babies or very old people, it was hard to explain on what kind of knowledge their constructed world views were grounded. A priori definitions were denied, so the *autoepoiesis* of the brain to a certain extent resembles a “creatio ex nihilo” (or its extermination in the case of the aged). In contrast, vanishing definitions – as Mitterer’s temporal concept proposed – or gradually changing insights may not only be explained by non-dualistic thinking, but in my opinion are the very core of it. The structure of knowing something in non-dualism is probably constructivist, the way of sometimes knowing things is certainly Mitterer’s original idea.

We also find an argument ex negativo for the family resemblance between constructivism and non-dualism: if one did not understand Mitterer’s thoughts as a constructivist attempt, we would only shift the alien determination from external factors (“reality”) to the act of communication itself. Shifting the truth criteria (the power of defining) from the world of objects into the realm of language does not itself solve the problem of a hierarchy of realities. They only become another category. If the success and quality of communication is judged only by its consequences i.e., provided by antagonism between individuals in a group, as Habermas (1981) proposed in his *Theory of Communicative Acting*, the concept of consent replaces individual standpoints:

“Dieser Begriff kommunikativer Rationalität führt Konnotationen mit sich, die letztlich zurückführen auf die zentrale Erfahrung der zwanglos einigenden, kon-sensstiftenden Kraft argumentativer Rede, in der verschiedene Teilnehmer ihre zunächst nur subjektiven Auffassungen überwinden und sich dank der Gemeinsamkeit vernünftiger motivierter Überzeugungen gleichzeitig der Einheit der objektiven Welt und der Inter-subjektivität ihres Lebenszusammenhangs vergewissern. [This notion of communicative rationality brings in some connotations that essentially go back to the the central experience of the unifying, consent-manufacturing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their initial only subjective views and – due to the community of rationally motivated convictions – make themselves sure about the unity of the objective world and inter-subjectivity of their relationship to life at the same time]” (Habermas 1984, p. 605).

In contrast my understanding of non-dualistic thinking not only accepts individual rudimentary descriptions (Mitterer 1992, p. 92) as necessary for beginning a dialogue, but also as legitimate, without giving them a worse ontological status, or – as Habermas implicitly does – calling them irrational because they are not validated by common consent. Information, knowledge and, by consequence, intelligence itself are determined by the individual Lebenswelt and social habits and cannot be measured by an absolute point of view.

Mitterer’s philosophy, on the other hand, and its distinction between descriptions “so far” and “from now on,” easily makes clear that only our description has changed and therefore nothing has happened to the world outside. The camera-angle, as a source of knowledge, only offers greater refinement to our descriptions, but has no unlimited freedom to show us things completely unknown. If I do not have a description “so far,” even negativity to it makes no sense: pictures in a weird, non-depicting way can only function as a sense-breaker if they are radically different from the descriptions we are accustomed to – within the medium and outside of it, in the “real world.” Once again, there is a clear parallel to the subject and its role in Husserl’s writings. The clear difference is that in non-dualism the sphere of our natural perception does not limit information to the concept of Lebenswelt: it still forms a constitutive element of communication – and also a stimulus to carry on exploring the world – as the some-
times rather vague, but only-available horizon of individual “reality so far.”

In our perception of the other(s), an important question for post-Husserlian phenomenology (e.g., Lévinas, Ricoeur), we only sense its/their contextual representation (Waldenfels 2002, pp. 135–156). In other words, if we can communicate about the others’ uttering, they have to be, at least temporarily, present in our field of perception. We can only deal with descriptions that are within the world, or the alternative would only consist of a use- and senseless meta-dialogue with no consequences for the individual life—every dialogue in such a world would be a private-language-argument.

In terms of communication, the fundament of any concept of society therefore rests on the differences between our descriptions of the world and the partial intertwining between them. We only find the other in a short moment of shared intimacy in communication, as a kind of reacting horizon for our own being in the world, but also forever different from us and our world-view—“[…] l’un séparé de l’autre par l’intervalle ou l’entre-temps de la différence que la non-in-différence n’efface pas […] one separated from the other by the interval or inbetween time of the difference, which the non-in-difference cannot erase” (Lévinas 1993, p. 214). This adds up to the practical (to avoid the word “political”) dimension of Mitterer’s importance for media philosophy. As all our descriptions are done from within the world—an idea not unfamiliar with phenomenological concepts—there are only descriptions (= individual knowledge) so far and from now on. There is no absolute truth to be reached gradually (metaphorically speaking, by stepping up), but in time we can gradually move on, which also allows cyclical “movements” of our knowledge, e.g., backlashes, regression—a good argument against ideological media theories and their linear models.

Neither total subjectivity, which would destroy any communication (etymologically going back to the Latin “cum,” meaning “together with”) and thus only leave constant misunderstanding, nor the universalisation of knowledge, whose absolute position facilitates totalitarian views and dogmatic positions of any kind, are a feasible explanation for our way of talking. This distinction, the idea of a temporal difference between our individual perception and articulation of the world, guiding our sharing of meaning, was introduced by Husserl. The temporal dimension of communication as a new paradigm, which I firmly connect with Josef Mitterer’s work, has already formed an important part of the synchronicity implicit in the concept of Lebenswelt. Tension between “I” and “you,” both in their attitude towards the world and towards one another, can only be eased in a shared moment, the basis even of diverging sentences “from now on.”

Mitterer introduced “a-chronic” as a permanent state of perception and communication, meaning by this a gain in individual freedom, which, as a consequence, may even be deviant compared to a global social scale, or, at least, the tolerated level inside a certain society. The concept of “Jemeinigkeit,” the personal conditions of existence and knowledge that forms a key part in Heidegger’s analysis of death (Heidegger 1986, p. 240), changes in non-dualism from a metaphysical construction and transcendental projection to the essence of our understanding of media, language and the world as a whole.

Tagging versus the absolute

Coming to the end of this brief essay in honour of Josef Mitterer, it might be useful to give an (imperfect) overview, of what might become of non-dualism if its ideas are discussed by a broader (non-constructivist) audience. Although this might temporarily mean introducing another dualism—theorists outside and inside non-dualism—I hope to give some glimpse as to the discipline and research fields that are fruitful, even in their (up to now) dualist approach. At the same time, in order to broaden the perspective and to stick to the limitations of this publication, I will look at two reasons only—a sociological and a technical one—why the critique on traditional thinking, started 16 years ago, still has a future in various contexts.

First, Mitterer’s way of looking at ontology has a sympathetic lack of ideology (maybe one reason for its lack of global review). Therefore, some of the crucial points about media production versus consumption, stressed in Marxist theories about “powerless” consumers of media (cf. Rossi-Landi 1974; more subtly, Hall 1980), simply disappear when treated with this concept, which denies an absolute and super-individual truth.

Critically one might object that I am only talking about the ontological status of perceptions we do not directly make ourselves but only know by hearsay (= media), and not their political (ab)use. Of course, sociological problems will not simply disappear by using new descriptions, but mediated communication loses its defining power when it is only one source of our everchanging descriptions. In fact, the changing and contradicting presentations in newspapers, TV and the internet are at best a mirror of the functioning of our own mind: truth only prevails as long as there is no new issue, breaking news or update, so that the “true” report has to be revised, changed or denied. In that respect, media consumption always means a strong selfreferential reading of our own non-dualistic possibilities of knowledge. The example of verbal “truth markers”—such as “in fact,” “in reality,” “you are wrong, because”—in TV discussions (Weber 2005, p. 266) shows this relativity of truth in the media, which tries to camouflage itself as the only possible world view for as long as possible.

In looking at the interpersonal communication of our perceptions, there is an interesting comparison between the political hegemony as described by Foucault’s discourse-theory and the rather apolitical epistemology of non-dualism. As the French philosopher put it elegantly, the world is no collaborator—it faut concevoir le discours comme une violence que nous faisons aux choses, en tout cas comme une pratique que nous leur imposons [We have to design the discourse as a violence that we do to things, in any case as a practice that we impose on them] (Foucault 1971, p. 55). This does not necessarily mean that we are forced to listen only to the defining discourses, backed by strong (social or material) means, which itself is only another way of dualist describing; it could also be seen as an approach to use communication itself as an emancipatory tool. As there can be no heretics—if we non-dualistically deny orthodoxy—the question arises of whether sociology understands the importance of the social exchange of descriptions better than philosophers describing the “real world of objects” as an ideal in a transcendent sphere.
Quite recently Anton Amann (2008) bid farewell to the remnants of sociology’s dualistic concepts in the political sense. Media and their “doctrinary power” (Amann 2008, pp. 15–17) decide how we see things, whereas the facts are always “socially constructed” (Amann 2008, p. 16) and do not mirror or rebuild real objects, not even in mental or metaphorical images. There is also a strong objection against the worth of any hierarchical organisation of information. In other words, we do not have “corporate wording” for the whole world – not even for the corporate world, as I argued some time ago (Graf 2005). In the World Wide Web and the blogosphere the creation of new descriptions, even involuntarily, happens all the time, and – as a subversive tactic – undermines the one, official, favoured “truth”:

“Now we can see for ourselves that knowledge isn’t in our heads; it is between us. It emerges from public and social thought and it stays there, because social knowing, like the global conversations that give rise to it, is never finished” (Weinberger 2007, p. 147).

Therefore, looking at the Internet, which nowadays seems to attract much more ontological interest than film, the significance of Mitterer’s thinking will perhaps be even more striking. In studying the “social web,” David Weinberger (2007) tried to analyze, philosophically, what kind of status tagging, the technique behind successful online business-models such as Flickr, Amazon or Wikipedia, has. Using cybernetic classification he developed a model of how we organize our knowledge in time so we can find things again. Starting from real things to meta-data (= descriptions), separating information about objects from the objects themselves, everything changes when machines interfere with the way we look for things:

“Content is digitized into bits, and the information about that content consists of bits as well. […] The third order removes the limitations we’ve assumed were inevitable in how we organize information” (Weinberger 2007, pp. 17–18).

Even if we do not share cyber-theoretician Howard Rheingold’s enthusiasm, that “[…] the ability to tag and search extends human knowledge the way mathematics and the alphabet did” (Rheingold 2007, p. 117), technological progress converges significant (tagging) and signifié (described object). This has various implications, not only that of the seemingly nonsensical notion that made abstract descriptions in coded languages, that are only readable by machines, are not only tags but gatekeepers to information and literally to objects. From that point of view, the online search for a certain description of the world, let’s say a non-fiction book, becomes an ontological matryoshka. Our search starts with a vague description of that certain description that we are looking for. This /content of book/ cannot always be properly argued, but there are other criteria for whether the /book/ we choose will be a viable solution to the scientific problem we need it for. Exactly that criteria as well as social links – such as Amazon’s phrase “customers who bought the article also…” – or the probability that heavily sought after books also will be useful for me, matter for our decision. It is not exactly the more we know, the better (being the main criteria in dualist view), but the more different items of knowledge and viable solutions we have. Statistics, a picture of the cover and written reviews by customers plus an abstract rating system seemingly offer us a better impression than twenty reviews would have done.

Conclusion

Whereas a physical object could only be found at one place a time, but described in various ways (just think of the difficulties of filing library books in a catalogue), the descriptions now add up to the “object” itself and become part of it. The only variable criterion is time: passing time, which changes descriptions and enriches the archived media, and the time I am willing to spend on a subject. It is legitimate to stay on the surface, if this makes sense for the moment, as long as the user has control over the important three components of free communication: channel, code and circumstances of decoding (Rossi-Landi 1974, p. 252). Exactly this freedom has been abnegated by classical media theory, and in nondualism comes back not only as a media-related phenomenon but as the essence of every epistemology.

For some of us, it did not take technological devices to make the structures behind public construction of meaning visible because we already thought of media as a non-dualistic describing system. The others can still retreat with a small, but not outdated, volume from 1992 and read their Mitterer carefully. Non-dualism may not be the “unified theory” that media theory dreamed of for a long time, but its approach solves a lot of problems, affecting any (re)construction of things that happen.

THE AUTHOR

Roland Graf studied psychology, philosophy, Latin and pedagogics in Vienna. The long-standing journalist works as a lecturer at the University of Applied Science in Sankt Pölten, Austria, teaching semiotics, media theory and philosophy of the media and marketing. He is also one of the external Austrian evaluators for the European programmes for teaching adults (GRUNDTVIG) and for promoting mobility of learners (Leonardo). Currently he is working on his Ph.D. thesis in philosophy, A Phenomenology of Viewing.

(Photo: Michael Baumgartner)
Notes

1. For Husserl, we have to get rid of the world as our system of perception first through the phenomenological operation or “epoché,” in order to find it later again “in universal Selbstbesinnung (in universal self-reflection)” (Husserl 1963, p. 161).

2. The individual body also acts as part of a social community, shared by other bodily-determined individuals: “Die menschliche Geistigkeit ist ja auf die menschliche Physi gegründet, jedes einzeln-menschliche Seelenleben ist fundiert in der Körperlichkeit, also auch jede Gemeinschaft in den Körpern der einzelnen Menschen, welche Glieder dieser Gemeinschaft sind. [The human mind is founded on the human physis, every single human soul-life is based on physicality, therefore every community is founded on the bodies of the individual people who are members of this community]” (Husserl 1995, pp. 21–22).


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“Walking and Falling”
Language as Media Embodiment

Sibylle Moser ◇ LOOP. The Institute for Systemic Media Research (Austria) <sm@loopmedienforschung.at>

► Purpose – This paper aims to mediate Josef Mitterer’s non-dualistic philosophy with the claim that speaking is a process of embodied experience.
► Approach – Key assumptions of enactive cognitive science, such as the crossmodal integration of speech and gesture and the perceptual grounding of linguistic concepts are illustrated through selected performance pieces of multimedia artist Laurie Anderson.
► Findings – The analysis of Anderson’s artistic work questions a number of dualisms that guide truth-oriented models of language. Her performance pieces demonstrate that language is both sensually enacted and conceptually reflected through the integration of iconic signing (e.g. sound play, dance) with symbolic communication. Moreover, Anderson’s artistic practice demonstrates that media such as voice, gesture and recording technologies realize different forms of embodied language.
► Benefits – Media aesthetics in the vein of embodied cognition can overcome a number of the dualisms that inform analytical philosophy of language, linguistics, and communication studies, such as perceptual/conceptual meaning, iconicity/symbolicity, emotion/cognition, body/technology and voice/script.
► Key words – language, embodiment, media, aesthetics, performance art.

The know-how of speaking

Josef Mitterer approaches language in a way that consequently defies simple dualisms such as the ontological distinction between language and world, between a linguistic statement and the object it refers to. According to Mitterer, a dualistic point of view inevitably raises the question as to whether a linguistic description accords with the object it describes. Thus, dualistic reasoning addresses the mediation of nonverbal experience with linguistic description. A speaker has to mediate experience A (e.g., an object she perceives) with experience B (e.g., a linguistic statement about the perceptual qualities of the object).

If a speaker equates experience A to B then the truth of the statement is derived from the identification (correspondence, etc.) of A and B. If a speaker equates B to A, then the truth results from the coherence (viability, etc.) of statements B about A. Yet, in both cases the correctness of the mediation is based on the belief that the separation and thus the dualism between the statement and the object are inevitable. In Mitterer’s view proponents of both positions are stuck in truth-claims of their description and hold a fundamentally static point of view that “extends the present position of judgment into the past and future” (Mitterer 2001, p. 53). Moreover, both positions are directed towards the object rather than towards the embodied process of speaking, which seems to be irrelevant to the quality of mediation.

So far, my understanding of Mitterer’s non-dualistic alternative to the dualistic separation of language and world reads as follows: linguistic reality is a process, which fundamentally depends on different perspectives, that is, on different experiential positions and the mediation between different descriptions of experience. The mediation of different articulations of experience establishes a temporal difference and therefore is held responsible for both the procedural nature and the semantic openness of reality construction. In this paper I will elaborate – from now on – the final statement of Mitterer’s book Die Flucht aus der Beliebigkeit: “In der Rhetorik geht es darum, ein Publikum von beliebigen Auffassungen zu überzeugen. Zum Unterschied davon geht es in der dualistischen Argumentations-technik und Philosophie darum, ein Publikum (Leser, Hörer, Diskurspartner) von der Wahrheit zu überzeugen. Dieser Unterschied kann nicht oft genug betont werden…” [Rhetoric aims at persuading an audience of any assumption. Contrary to rhetoric, the dualistic technique of argumentation and philosophy aims at convincing an audience (reader, listener, discourse partner) of the truth. This difference cannot be emphasized often enough…]” (Mitterer 2001, p. 119).

In Mitterer’s view it is rhetoric, the art of realizing language through figures of speech and significant forms of speaking respectively, that seems to allow for a non-dualistic mediation between different points of view. Thus, the key to communication is not what a speaker says but the way she speaks, the know-how of language cannot be separated from the know-how-to-speak: “Während ich den Tisch beschreibe, während ich über ihn reflektiere, kann ich zwischen dem Beschrei- ben des Tisches und dem Tisch nicht unter- scheiden [While I am describing the table, while I reflect on it, I cannot distinguish between describing the table and the table itself]” (Mitterer 2001, pp. 97f). Since differences – between individual experiences, cognitive worlds, and social contexts – are at stake in any act of articulation, speaking inevitably implies a moment of persuasion, a transgression of boundaries between a speaker and a listener. Accordingly, Mitterer emphasizes that social conflict is the site where the battle for truth is fought (p. 85). The communication of conflict makes obvious that the ways in which a speaker articulates her position are as important as what she speaks about. It is the sensual aspect of communication, the material design of language, that challenges the attention and stimulates or disrupts the exchange of different views between speaker and listener. In his constructivist media theory Schmidt formu-
that undermine dualistic views on language.

In what follows, I will sketch two key aspects of the aesthetic know-how of speaking that undermine dualistic views on language. Drawing on arguments from enactive cognitive science (McGee 2005), I will show how key ideas on the embodiment of cognition translate into the media aesthetic observation of language and the procedural enactment of linguistic meaning. Varela, Thompson and Rosch have defined embodied cognition grammatically as follows:

"By using the term ‘embodied’ we mean to highlight two points: first, that cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities, and second, that these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural context" (Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991, p. 173).

Both aspects, the bodily dimension of meaning and the contextualization of meaning through body, psyche and culture stand in sharp contrast to the tenets of the “conceptual-propositional theory of meaning” (Johnson 2007, pp. 8ff) that guides the dualistic discourse questioned by Mitterer. While Mitterer’s focus lies in communications in the tradition of analytical philosophy, the cognitivist idea that “sentences get their meaning by expressing propositions, which are the basic units of meaning and thought” (Johnson 2007), underlies a number of dualistic misconceptions of language in other disciplines, such as Saussure’s distinction of linguistic system (langue) and individual use (parole) and Chomsky’s distinction of internal language (competence) and external language (performance) (Kramer 2002, pp. 98ff). Furthermore, the cognitivist assumption of disembodied propositions relies on the distinction between percept and concept, which is perpetuated in media theoretical distinctions such as sensual voice and disembodied script (McLuhan 1997; Ong 2002). In order to question these dualisms, I will discuss the kinesthetic and metaphorical enactment of language by a selection of artistic works of multimedia performer Laurie Anderson. I will introduce gesture and metaphor as often-neglected dimensions of speech and argue that a focus on gesture empirically supports Mitterer’s objection against the dualistic separation of linguistic description and the object described. I will furthermore show that metaphorical reasoning re-translates the object of truth-claims, the conceptual meaning of statements, into the bodily experience of the world.

By drawing on Anderson’s artistic practice I follow Johnson’s hypothesis that “the processes of embodied meaning in the arts are the very same ones that make linguistic meaning possible” (Johnson 2007, p. 207).

In her piece Walking and Falling (1981), a short vignette from the 8-hour performance United States I–IV, Anderson poignantly recites a simple short text (Figure 1). Her recitation is accompanied by a minimalist electronic melody, which is rhythmized through rhetorical pauses and sounds as if it were caught in a continuous fade out. The way Anderson enacts the text is precisely what the piece is about. The lyrics, performed by a contemporary of Mitterer who celebrated her 60th birthday last year, therefore excellently suits the goal of demonstrating the aesthetic embodiment of language. In many of her digital art works she produced in the late 1970s and 1980s, parallel to the emergence of “second-generation cognitive science” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, pp. 77ff), she has emphasized the sensual nature of human communication, both enacting and reflecting on the embodiment of language through artistic performance. In view of and by listening to a selection of Anderson’s works I will finally argue that the non-dualistic implications of embodied cognition coincide with the idea of intermediality as outlined in the media theories of Marshall McLuhan, Niklas Luhmann and Sybille Kramer. In line with Mitterer, these authors demonstrate that the relation between a description and the object described can be interpreted as the temporal mediation of different forms of experience. Consequently, I will concretize the embodiment of language as media embodiment, thereby focusing on the fundamentally non-dualistic nature of the process of mediation itself.
enacts her verbal articulation not only as a means of conceptual understanding but also as a means of iconic presentation. The way she enacts the linguistic signs resembles perceptual qualities of what they refer to. Moreover, in the recording of Walking and Falling on her famous album Big Science (1982) she opens the recitation with the lines “I was looking for you / but I couldn’t find you” thereby associating the threat of falling with the risk of unsuccessfully addressing the social other.

Walking and Falling operates on dimensions of language that often remain neglected by analytical philosophy, linguistics and communication studies. By implying a rhetorical “you,” Anderson indicates the social relatedness of verbal articulation. By turning language into a sound gesture, the piece explores the interdependence of movement, perception and conceptual interpretation. By associating and integrating different experiences such as walking, sounding and speaking, Anderson’s piece introduces metaphor as a mode of signification that goes beyond the traditional understanding of metaphor as an exclusive means of poetic language. Qualities such as these normally remain unobserved in philosophical and scientific discourses that investigate the appropriateness of linguistic descriptions. Most often the discussion of intermodal metaphoric association and social mutuality in language has been left to disciplines in the humanities such as literary criticism or political philosophy. Yet, since, for example, authors discussed in poststructuralist discourse such as Kristeva, Cixous and Bachtin have focused on the bodily dimensions of language mainly through the hermeneutics of textual interpretation, “most of the Continental discussions have proceeded without taking into consideration scientific research on cognition” (Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991, p. 150). In contrast, media aesthetic studies in the vein of enactive cognitive science take into account research results from cognitive linguistics and the evolutionary study of language. From a dualistic perspective, these different disciplinary approaches might appear as mutually exclusive options. In my view, Mitterer’s philosophy suggests not only overcoming the divide between the two cultures (Snow) but interpreting the exchange between different theoretical descriptions as an intellectual opportunity. Accordingly, I will show how a non-dualistic understanding of language can benefit from findings of enacted cognitive science.

Language as movement

In focusing on movement (“you are walking”), implicit knowledge (“and you don’t always realize it”) and the dynamic relation between cognizing system and environment (“you are falling and then catching yourself from falling”), Anderson’s piece draws on a number of key topics that have been associated with the term enactive cognitive science. It is the moving body as portrayed in her performance text that appears as a medium of experience by authors such as Francisco Varela, Humberto R. Maturana, Mark Johnson, George Lakoff or Raphael Núñez. In Walking and Falling Anderson succinctly demonstrates by aesthetic means the basic experience of walking upright under the conditions of gravity. She both perceptually shows and conceptually reflects on the freeing of hand and mouth through upright locomotion as a salient condition of linguistic articulation (Jäger 2001; Leroi-Gourhan 1993). Anderson seems to reenact the act of walking and falling acoustically by means of her vocal chords, whose specific vibration enables her to enunciate the sound of language in a hesitantly and yet proceeding fashion. Moreover, she simulates the act of balancing through the dynamics of music that changes between strong and weak frequencies in the background. In doing so, she demonstrates in a sensually comprehensible, aesthetic fashion the cybernetic process of regaining temporary stability through the compensation of perturbations. In presenting the simultaneity of walking and falling, she establishes the comparison of different experiences as the cognitive operation through which the world comes into being.

Anderson suggests that the practice of movement works especially well when performed “without realizing it.” While speaking and performing she cannot permanently be conscious of the conditions of speaking and performing. Accordingly, Johnson notes on the sensorimotor knowledge of balancing, “It is crucially important to see that balancing is an activity we learn with our bodies and not by grasping a set of rules or concepts” (Johnson 1987, p. 74). Although the practical know-how of coordinated movement depends on training and experience, it does not require explicit knowledge of algorithms or rules. Similarly, Mitterer points out the impossibility of distinguishing between the process of description (the know-how) and the object of description (the know-that) at one and the same moment. Anderson’s enactment of vocal technique therefore shows that linguistic expression encompasses non-conceptual dimensions, which rather present the know-how-to-articulate than propositional states of the world.

Von Glasersfeld has argued pointedly in the tradition of Piaget that sensorimotor behavior and perception mutually define each other (Glaserfeld 2002, pp. 150ff). Accordingly, Anderson elaborates on the intrinsic co-evolution of perception and action through movement in many of her works. In her piece Drum Dance (1986) she wears a jumpsuit whose inside is wired with computer sensors that translate tactile stimuli into drumbeats (Figure 2). Whenever she touches her “second skin” she produces various drum-sounds (snare, bass drum, claps, etc.), which in turn inform her rhythmic

You’re walking and you don’t always realize it, but you’re always falling. With each step you fall forwards slightly and then catch yourself from falling. Over and over you’re falling. And then catching yourself from falling. And this is how you can be walking and falling at the same time.

Figure 1: Walking and Falling (1981).
body movement. The interplay of movement, (self-)touch, and acoustic stimulation appears as a precisely timed choreography that enacts Anderson’s electronically extended body as an instrument of self-referential transformation. Thus, like a media aesthetic echo of Mitterer’s non-dualistic mode of reasoning, Anderson demonstrates that we do not bring forth the world through transcendental foundations but through immanent modification. As Mitterer points out, truth-claims are usually grounded in some metaphysical instance that lies “beyond” the discourse in which the claims are raised. This instance most often is the (always already described) object as such that provides the grounds or presumption on the basis of which descriptions are judged (e.g., reality; evolutionary necessity). Anderson illustrates that in losing this ultimate ground of description, the interrelatedness of subject and world becomes apparent: objects such as the instrumental body become the subjects of experience and vice versa.

In Glasersfeld’s constructivist model of language, the cybernetic feedback mechanisms exemplified through Anderson’s piece, lay the ground for creative comparisons of experience that result in the construction of cognitive schemas through assimilation and accommodation. Following Saussure, von Glasersfeld thus emphasizes that linguistic meaning emerges within the mental realities of individuals, thereby abandoning the idea of the external referent. Yet, similarly to Saussure he neither focuses on the effects of perceptual qualities of sound images nor does he explore the significance of the sensorimotor enactment of speech. By ignoring the sound image and focusing on conceptual schemas instead, von Glasersfeld implicitly perpetuates the dualistic division of body and mind in linguistic reasoning.

In view of Anderson’s performances it becomes obvious that gesture, that is significant bodily motion, is crucial to linguistic communication. While the piece Walking and Falling operates on acoustic gestures, the performance of Drum Dance enacts the moving body as a meaningful sign. In White Lily (1986), a piece which reflects the nature of time, Anderson synchronizes the lines “days go by / endlessly / endlessly pulling you into the future” with movements of her arm (Figure 5). As the gestural variety in her work shows, gesture can either be realized visually through the hands or through the modulation of sound in speech and music. Accordingly, a number of authors have pointed out the intrinsic interdependence of speech and gesture (Leroi-Gourhan 1993; Iverson & Thelen 1999; Núñez 1999, p. 43; Roth 2002; Gallagher 2006, p. 107ff.). Most of these authors draw on McNeill’s studies on the interdependence of gesture, language and thought. The “temporal anatomy” (McNeill 2005, p. 29) of gesture synchronizes the moving body with the meanings expressed through speech. This temporalized enactment of gestures becomes most evident in “beat gestures” which rhythmically punctuate and emphasize segments of speech. But even in more elaborate forms of iconic, deictic and metaphorical gestures, gesture strokes coincide with the prosodic emphasis of words. Accordingly, Iverson and Thelen argue that the self-organization of speech and gesture is based in rhythmic movement (Iverson & Thelen 1999, p. 27). Crossmodal rhythmization plays a key role in the first social interactions of human beings. The first “proto-conversations” between caretakers and babies are enunciated in a rhythmically modulated fashion accompanied by highly exaggerated facial expressions and gestures (cf. Dissanayake 2000, pp. 34ff). Thus, the first verbal communication takes on a “proto-rhetorical” expressive form that lays the ground for artistic expression and focuses on the modes of speaking rather than the propositional content of words. The structured modification of voice and body movement in the poetics of baby talk both evoke strong feelings of pleasure, marking the first verbal articulations as a primarily emotional form of communication. As the word emotion indicates, there is a motoric quality to emotional states. Emotions literally move the emoting organism, which in turn behaves/moves according to emotional states (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 1999).

This fundamentally emotional nature of the “imagery-language-dialectic” (McNeill) leads us right back into the center of non-dualistic reasoning. Empirical studies on the crossmodal interdependence of speech and gesture vividly illustrate that the object described (the conceptual meaning) cannot be separated from the process of description.
Language as metaphor

Yet, complex cultural phenomena such as Anderson's artistic performances cannot sufficiently be described and explained in terms of emotional movement only. As a media schema rooted in the aesthetic developments of the late 1960s, artistic performance is highly self-reflexive both in terms of conceptual reflection and in the bodily awareness of the performer, thereby demonstrating that artistic processes operate way beyond the dualism of concept and feeling that informs philosophical aesthetics in the vein of Kant (Johnson 2007, p. 216). Anderson's visual and sonic movements figure as cultural signs in a postmodern performance piece enacting and relating various media in the tradition of the historical avant-garde. The analysis of the communicative meaning of her artistic behavior therefore requires a semiotic analysis that takes into account perceptual and reflexive dimensions of signing alike.

Another example of Anderson's works from the 1980s, the performance *White Lily*, will serve as a case in point for the integration of perception and the cultural construction of linguistic meaning. *White Lily* opens with a projection of a computer-animated figure running on the spot accompanied by a minimalist electronic melody (Figure 3). Anderson emerges out of the darkness dressed in a white suit, her body's silhouette duplicated by a shadow play on the canvas behind her. She mimics the movement of the figure in the animation while reciting a softly-spoken and yet distinct short poetic text (Figure 4) that deals with her memory of a film sequence by filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Reenacting a dialogue between two characters from the film, she accompanies her speech with punctuating gestures of her right arm. While her hand moves up and down when articulating "days go by / endlessly pulling you into the future? Yet, on the other hand, Anderson's piece is quite simple in terms of lexical choice. Expressions such as "days go by" can be encountered in everyday language as well. From this view, the assumption that linguistic metaphors "are intended to point beyond experience to a world of imagination" (Glaserfeld 2002, p. 135) seems to be shortsighted. As Danesi has argued convincingly, in Vico's view, metaphor is a basic mental faculty that cannot be refined to poetic language only but permeates linguistic practice as a whole. Metaphor then does not figure as an exception to human cognition but seems to be the rule (cf. Danesi 1993, p. 76). Accordingly,
Anderson’s interplay of iconic and symbolic signing in *White Lily* reflects on the common sense expressed through everyday metaphors of time. A number of authors, some of them assembled under the umbrella term enactive cognitive science, have pointed out the power of metaphor in the construction of conceptual meaning. According to Lakoff and Johnson’s well-known theory, metaphor operates by means of mapping or projecting experiential domains onto each other. Experiences associated with a perceptually-based source domain, such as, for example, salient qualities of the moving body, are projected onto a conceptual target domain, such as, for example, the conceptual understanding of time. This projection is realized through image schema, which are rooted in the situatedness and corporeality of the cognizing system. Image schemas such as CONTAINER, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, CENTER-PERIPHERY or ITERATION (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1999, p. 35), organize subjective experience with regard to the structural and operational features of sensorimotoric interactions into patterns (cf. Johnson 1987, p. 28ff.). They serve as the basis for primary metaphors that can be detected throughout the world in cultural variations.

The theory of conceptual metaphor suggests that the performance *White Lily* explores the primary metaphor TIME IS MOVEMENT, which is based on the projection of sensorimotoric spatial experience onto the subjective experience of time (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1999, p. 52; Núñez 1999). Time is analyzed in terms of qualities that are derived from the experience of movement in space. The structure of this primary metaphor can be realized in different ways depending on whether it appears to be time-based or ego-based (cf. Núñez 1999, pp. 46ff). In the time-based variant, speakers assume the existence of objects moving horizontally and sequentially in one direction, the movement being directed either forwards or backwards. The ego-based variant provides this schema with an observer standpoint. Experiences are interpreted relative to an observer, who can be conceptualized as either static or dynamic. The static ego-based variant applies to Anderson’s line “days go by endlessly”: days can be interpreted as objects, passing by the observer and moving horizontally, “facing” forwards. The dynamic ego-based interpretation of the primary metaphor TIME IS MOVEMENT lies at the heart of Anderson’s line “endlessly pulling you into the future.” The narrator marks a dynamic standpoint, which moves through time as a landscape towards the future. So far, the theory of conceptual metaphor has been substantiated by a number of linguistic and neuroscientific studies (Johnson 2007, pp. 160ff). The theory provides a strong argument for the embodiment of language in that it defies a simple separation of sensory experience and conceptual abstraction. Moreover, it deepens the understanding of the crossmodality of speech and gesture, thereby refuting the idea that the linguistic and sensorimotor domains of information processing are organized as neatly separated, domain-specific cognitive modules. Since perception permeates language by means of crossmodal image schemas – as multimedia performances vividly bring to mind, kinesthetic schemas can occur in musical melody as much as in visual performance and vocal articulation – linguistic meaning seems to emerge from sensorimotor experiences as much as from generalizing abstraction: “[…] image schemas are not to be understood as either ‘mental’ or ‘bodily’, but rather as conours of what Dewey called the body-mind” (Johnson 2007, p. 139).

The integration of body and mind realized through the metaphorical nature of language becomes most evident in Anderson’s reinterpretation of the concept of time through the metaphorical use of words and gestures (Figure 5). While the Western tale of enlightenment would have it that human development and knowledge progress in a linear and teleological fashion, the multimedia performance explores the possibility that time is a circular movement. Thus, *White Lily* serves as a vivid example of Mitterer’s idea that descriptions of time and change respectively to a new conceptual understanding. So far, as long as time has been interpreted as a sequentially moving object, it seemed to progress; whereas from now on, when time is reinterpreted through a gesture pointing backwards and described as “pulling you into the future,” temporal experience converges in the present.

As von Glasersfeld argues in the vein of Peirce, the emergence of a new conceptual schema such as “time is a circular movement” relies on the creativity of abductive inference, which enables the cognizing system to connect seemingly diverse experiences through the construction of similarities (Glaserfeld 1998). In contrast to the dualistic assumption that similarities define objects independently of their description, the generative dynamics of schema formation suggests, “if anything, the similarities are a result of experienced correlation” (Johnson 2007, p. 197). Thus, abduction allows for a creative description that relies on the comparison of descriptions so far with descriptions from now on. Abductive inference takes the form of a prospective argument that reads as follows: “if time were to operate like a backwards-moving human body, a lack of progression and a focus on the present would be a matter of cause.”

The non-dualistic implication of the theory of conceptual metaphor becomes even more evident when integrated with Peirce’s concept of iconicity. While many structuralist authors focus on the conventional and arbitrary nature of symbols only, thinkers in the vein of embodied language emphasize the integration of iconic, indexical and symbolic signs (Ruthrof 2000; Sebeok & Danesi 2000; McNeill 2005; Brier 2008). This integration

![Figure 5: "Pulling you into the future." Crossmodal metaphors in *White Lily* (1986, video still).](image-url)
becomes most apparent in artistic multimedia performances, which aside from conventional meanings work both with the reflection on the perceptual qualities of signs and the presence of the performing body. Similarly to Walking and Falling, Anderson’s piece White Lily enacts iconic sound play based in phonetic figures of speech such as assonance, alliteration and anaphora. On the other hand, the piece introduces the white lily as an arbitrary symbol employed in religious discourses of origin and death. In doing so, Anderson illustrates that signs can be both iconically motivated and conventionally constructed. Moreover, the gestural counterpart of Anderson’s vocal recitation, which is duplicated by a shadow projection, points to the speaking performer as the source of articulation. The artistic demonstration of the fact that any speech act figures as an index illustrates that Mitterer’s distinction between descriptions so far and descriptions from now on points to the situatedness of the speaker. Any verbal articulation inevitably requires a temporal and spatial location of the speaker whose statement realizes the moment before and after her current description. Putting the traces of enunciation as a shadow on the stage, Anderson forces her audience to take notice of the here and now of performing.

Iconicity, indexicality and symbolicity do not designate mutually exclusive options but can be integrated as different dimensions of reference in one and the same sign (cf. Ruthrof 2000, p. 96). In drawing on the multifaceted references of linguistic signs, artistic pieces such as White Lily disprove the structuralist assumption that language consists in arbitrary symbols only, a disembodied view that defines linguistic meaning as a system of cognitive distinctions that take on arbitrary material forms. In doing so, artistic forms of expression vividly extend the analysis of meaning beyond a focus on propositional meaning only.

Language as intermedial relatedness

So far, Anderson’s performances have illustrated the embodiment of language with the enactment of verbal signs through voice and gesture, thereby equating the embodiment of experience to non-technical bodily media-

tion. Yet, Anderson’s performances are grounded in the application of complex technologies that range from all sorts of sound recording and editing to audiovisual technologies. Accordingly, Mitterer’s focus on the process of description, the know-how of speaking, implies the operational knowledge of speakers as much as the means of their descriptions. In dualistic reasoning, technologies are most often theorized in contrast to non-artificial nature, which figures as the ultimate ground of experience or, in Mitterer’s words, as the “beyond discourse.” Yet, in the non-dualistic view of embodied cognition, tools of linguistic discourse by no means abandon or replace the feeling body but rather extend and confine (“scale”) its range of experiences (cf. Hirose 2002). In her opera Moby Dick (1999), for example, Anderson extends her acoustic latitude through the “Talking Stick,” a wireless instrument for audio recording and replay. In moving the stick with her arms her body fuses with the iconicographic multimedia space. Thus, Anderson’s know-how-to-apply her digital gadgets effectively extends her performance body in such a way that it enlarges the range of possible interactions with her environment. Her artistic practice overcomes the dichotomy of nature and culture as much as of body and technology.

Anderson’s relation of body and communication technology takes the metaphorical form of “experienced correlation” outlined above. Media practices such as vocal recitation and sound recording are compared and related to each other, defining each other through enacted differences and similarities between possible forms of expression (cf. McLuhan 1997, p. 26; Schmidt 2000, p. 194). This intermedial comparison is crucial not only to media practice but also to the cultural description of media practice. It seems no accident that media philosophy originates in a fundamental dichotomy, namely in Plato’s praise of the authenticity of speech, which he puts in sharp contrast to the estranging effects of script. Most proponents of the Toronto School of Communication, McLuhan among them, have hypostasized voice into the (paradox) medium of bodily immediateness. They associate oral communication with the supposed otherness of “children, women and colored persons” (cf. McLuhan 1997, p. 17), sharply contrasting the irrational “oral” mind with the propositional clarity of the printed knowledge of modern white man. Thus, the first media-theoretical distinction of speech and script entails a number of dualisms such as body and mind, archaic and modern society, and, furthermore, female and male gender.

Obviously, communication technologies most often serve as ideologically charged metaphors for cognition and communication alike. The mind is described in terms of digital architectures as much as the computer is described in terms of the print-dominated idea of the archive. Neural processes are described as like the one-way transmissions of a telegraph (McGee 2005, p. 23), as much as the Internet is described in terms of neural networks. Media prophet McLuhan noted lucidly, “All media are active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms” (McLuhan 1997, p. 57). The idea that media retranslate experience meets with Mitterer’s non-dualistic credo that descriptions do not relate to objects as such but to already existing descriptions of objects. Likewise, many constructivist thinkers such as Schmidt or von Glaserfeld have emphasized that experience can only be mediated through mediated experience. The creative dimension of cognition relies on the ever-new contextualization of interpretative forms of experience such as cognitive schemata. As Anderson’s performance shows poignantly, the experience of verbal and gestural signs is mediated through the sensorimotor structures of the human body. Speech may therefore already be termed as the media embodiment of language in that it mediates the process of embodiment perception with the social construction of linguistic signs. As Krämer has pointed out, the re-contextualisation of experience through media is responsible for the generative dynamics of human knowledge:

“Menschliche Kreativität besteht nicht einfach darin, gottesebenbildlich ‘etwas Neues zu schaffen’ (creatio ex nihilo), sondern das, was wir vorfinden, in neue Zusammenhänge zu übertragen und damit auch anders sehen und/oder anders gebrauchen zu können. ‘Veränderung durch Übertragung’ ist hier die Maxime. […] Intermedialität ist eine epistemische Bedingung der Medienerkenntnis.

[Human creativity does not simply consist of creating, in the image of god, ‘some-
thing new’ (creatio ex nihilo) but to transfer the things we encounter to new contexts, thereby also enabling us to see and/or use them in a different way. ‘Change through transferal’ is the dictum in this regard... Intermediality is an epistemic condition of media knowledge)” (Krämer 2003, p. 82).

Similarly, Luhmann’s distinction of medium and form as contingent sets of “loosely and fixed coupled elements” (Luhmann 1990) elaborates on the connection between intermediality and creativity. The medium as a set of loosely coupled elements bears the structural complexity of a wide variety of expressive possibilities, which are reduced to meaningful forms in the actual realization of communication. From the unlimited possibilities of sounds, for example, words are selected; the unlimited possibilities of words are reduced to sentences, and so forth. Accordingly, art forms figure as selections of the formal possibilities of artistic media. The medium then is not an essential substance to which a form is applied, but rather figures as an experiential field for the potential enactment of cognitive and communicative distinctions. The crucial point of Luhmann’s media theory is the fact that the distinction between medium and form is temporal and can be distinguished in turn. Forms can turn into media and media can turn into forms. A final view on Laurie Anderson’s body operates as a medium at the sociocultural space of her artistic performance. Thus, Anderson’s artistic work alike, the distinction between mediated experiences can be distinguished through new mediations, thereby changing into the temporal description of a mediated experience so far. What appears as a defining characteristic of bodily mediation at one point may well be observed in recording technologies at a later point and vice versa. Anderson’s printed performance texts operate on so-called oral stylistics based in rhythm and iconicity. Complementary, acoustic recordings of her oral texts are based on temporal and spatial manipulations associated with print. Whenever media metaphors such as “the oral mind” are grounded in dualistic media ontologies, dichotomist media stereotypes are the consequence. The intermedial relatedness and the simultaneous occurrence of nonverbal, verbal and technological forms of communication defies a model of linear development but suggests the co-evolution of various media of linguistic embodiment instead (cf. Schmidt 2000; Jäger 2001).

Conclusion

Josef Mitterer’s philosophy teaches us to focus on the temporality of linguistic description and to critically examine dualistic presumptions that underpin the truth-claims of verbal statements. When re-examining the notion of conceptual meaning (“the object of description”), the material embodiment of language (“the process of describing”) comes to the fore. Accordingly, Laurie Anderson’s artistic multimedia work resonates in many-voiced ways with Josef Mitterer’s non-dualistic philosophy. In focusing on the rhythms of language Anderson transgresses the dualism of perceptual and conceptual meaning and the neglect of iconicity in linguistic analysis. In integrating gesture and speech she overcomes the dualism of body and mind inherent to the dualism of emotion and cognition. Finally, in extending the body through digital gadgets, Anderson puts the dualism of body and technology into question. Anderson’s personal statement, “My work is always about communicating,” (Goldberg 2000, p. 6) echoes the non-dualistic nature of the media embodiment of language. While making communication the object of her artistic work, Anderson always already communicates.

Notes

1. Schmidt uses Luhmann’s term “Sinn,” which has been translated as “meaning” in the English edition of Luhmann’s opus magnus Social Systems (Luhmann 1995). Luhmann’s notion of “Sinn” refers to the selection of information in a self-referential social or psychic system and therefore fundamentally differs both from Frege’s “Bedeutung” (meaning), which addresses the object a terms refers to and from “Sinn” (sense), the subjective cognitive meaning (“thought”) of a term.
2. For a canonical overview of the dualism between orality and literacy see Ong (2002).

The Author

Sibylle Moser has a PhD in comparative literature and media studies from the University of Vienna. She had visiting fellowships at the Institute for Empirical Research in Media and Literature (LUMIS) in Siegen and at the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology in Toronto. Her research interests include cognitive aesthetics, empirical studies in literature and media theory.

In 2006 she received a three-year grant for a project on the aesthetic use of language in art from the Vienna Science and Technology Fund (WWTF). In 2007 she founded LOOP. The Institute for Systemic Media Research in Vienna with Katharina Gsöllpointner. 
Homepage: http://www.sibyllemoser.com
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It, the Nameless God of Dualism
Some Remarks on St. John, the First Non-dualist, and His Renowned Follower, Josef Mitterer

Peter Strasser ◇ University of Graz (Austria) ◇ peter.strasser@uni-graz.at

1 As to the very beginning of the world, there is a widespread misunderstanding. It says that there was a big bang more than twelve billion years ago. This big bang, called “Big Bang,” is conceived somewhat metaphorically as a huge explosion of a very, very hot something that quickly became energy and matter, which, after a very, very long cooling-off period while the universe expanded, were also eventually described as energy and matter.

2 But how could this be? Time doesn’t exist in itself. Of course, you may say, “The world is older than I am.” Yet be aware, the world is older than you are because, and only because, there is someone – in our example you yourself – who looks, somewhat metaphorically speaking, at the world and says: “Oh, look at the world! It is older than I am!” That is interesting, isn’t it? For if there were no one who would observe/ describe the world as being older than she herself – the observer/describer who (as we presuppose for reasons of demonstration) observes/describes the world as being older than she herself – then the world couldn’t be older at all; and besides, it couldn’t be either older or younger. Since in any case we would have to ask: “Being older or younger from what point of observation/description?” and the answer would always have to be the same: “There is no such a point!”

3 What, however, does this mean? If the world were in a state of being neither younger nor older, then the world, so it seems, couldn’t exist at all, could it? No, it couldn’t. For look at yourself: If you couldn’t, at least in principle, be older or younger than something else, then this would be the best proof that you didn’t exist. And now look at the very beginning of the world. Imagine the very beginning of the world as a cosmological state that couldn’t be either older or younger than something else, especially someone who could – at least in principle – observe/describe this state of the universe as being younger or older than she (the observer/describer) herself. Can you imagine such a non-observable, un-describable state?

4 I bet you can’t. Since the very beginning of the world depends on the existence of the beginning of the world. But the existence of any beginning depends on the time at which there is something that comes into existence, for instance the so-called Big Bang. However, time itself cannot come into existence without any observer/describer who could, at least in principle, observe/describe that something begins to happen. Sounds somewhat trivial, doesn’t it?

5 There are trivialities that hide abysses, and as the biblical saying goes, abyssus abyssum invocat (Psalm 41), “deep calleth on deep.” Therefore, you have to be aware of the following paradox that indicates, so to speak, an ontological abyss: First there happens – bang! – the beginning of the world. Yet at this time, there obviously cannot be some kind of natural observer/describer who would be able, at least in principle, to observe/describe the beginning of the world (“Bang!”). For natural observers/describers will come into existence not earlier than billions of years after the very beginning of the world. Secondly, as we know today, billions of years after the beginning of the world there will be, in fact, observers/describers who are able, at least in principle, to describe the beginning of the world. Assume they say, for instance: “The world happened to begin more than twelve billion years ago.” Now you may ask: “And the ontological abyss? Where’s the abyss?”

6 Here’s the abyss: What about the description saying “The world happened to begin more than twelve billion years ago”? How could this description be true? Time doesn’t exist in itself. Time is bound to the existence of some observer/describer. Sure, in our present time, there are more than enough observers/describers. And it’s true that human beings already existed some hundred thousand years ago, though they didn’t know anything worth mentioning about the universe. But not even such dumb people were around at the beginning of the world because back then there were no people at all. Now, what follows from that? It’s obvious, isn’t it? It follows – you may believe it or not – that in the beginning of the world there couldn’t have been any time at all. Therefore, there couldn’t be a beginning, either. It follows that if there is a world at all, it cannot have begun as yet. However, science tells us that there is, of course, a world and that it had a beginning – the very beginning of our world being called (and described as) the “Big Bang.”

To solve the paradox of the very beginning of the world one has to reject dualistic ontology. Dualistic ontology requires, on the one hand, observer-neutral facts whose existence would be independent of any describer and, on the other hand, descriptions being true or false depending on whether they adequately or inadequately represent observer-neutral facts. The correspondence theory of truth has to be totally abandoned. It is a myth. For it makes us believe that there could be a world independent of description – a “wordless world”, so to speak.

Therefore, we have to follow the path to a non-dualistic worldview as is nowadays outlined by Josef Mitterer; but as is usually the case with paths, some steps must be taken in the right direction. Let us say our goal will
have been reached as soon as we have recognized that every world that could possibly exist must be a description-based or, even more explicitly put, description-born world, ranging from all of the descriptions made so far to all of the descriptions to be made from now on.

Let us assume there is a dog called “Fido” and, at the time being, Fido is sitting on his mat. Now we have to ask: How does the dualistic worldview reconstruct this very, very simple fact? Answer: It says that there is, on the one hand, Fido sitting on his mat and, on the other, the possibility of a true description of this very, very simple fact saying “Fido is sitting on his mat.” But is this true? Can Fido be sitting on his mat without, at least in principle, being described as sitting on his mat? The unsophisticated dualist says: “Sure, why not?” But take a more sophisticated view of the situation! If the dualist says that there is the very, very simple fact – namely Fido sitting on his mat – then she does make a description, doesn’t she? Of course she does. For in stating the very, very simple fact that Fido is sitting on his mat, she says that Fido is sitting on his mat. Otherwise she couldn’t say that there is, in her opinion, a very, very simple fact that is, speaking in unsophisticated dualistic terms, completely independent of its being or having been or going to be described.

Yet given the non-dualistic view, what about the truth of the meta-fact we are referring to by talking about “the very, very simple fact that Fido is sitting on his mat”? Consider the fact: “Fido is sitting on his mat.” And now consider the meta-fact: “There is a very, very simple fact consisting of Fido sitting on his mat.” Does this latter description not imply that there is a fact independent of its being or having been or going to be described? No, it doesn’t! It doesn’t at all. For the meta-fact, “a fact being existent independent of being described” doesn’t exist in itself.

Like the phenomenon of time, facts that are said to be independent of an observer/describer depend nonetheless on their being described (or having been described or going to be described) as description-independent, or not description-based, facts. From that follows that Fido can only sit on his mat if there is or has been or is going to be a description saying that Fido is sitting on his mat. What Fido is doing outside the framework of his description-based world seems to be, from the sophisticated non-dualistic viewpoint, one of those typical pointless questions that all too often are asked in philosophy. For this question is metaphysical and, therefore, void of sense. There is no ontologically transcendent Fido that would be sitting on his not description-based mat.

In the history of philosophy, there are, of course, some famous non-dualistic doctrines to be found. Take for instance the well-known doctrine of Bishop Berkeley: It says that the notion of an outer world that would be really independent of being perceived is an ugly, misconceived idea. In Bishop Berkeley’s view, only our perceptions are real. There is no ontological gap – or should I say abyss? – between the real world and its state of being perceived. The subjective contents of our perceptions are the real world. This is Bishop Berkeley’s idealistic main point, which is at the same time the non-dualistic point of his philosophy. But now we have to attend to another point: Bishop Berkeley naively accepts the distinction between the purely sensory contents of our perceptions and our perception-based knowledge that is the result of conceptualizing and describing the purely sensory contents of our perceptions. No doubt, Bishop Berkeley accepts, within his idealistic framework, the correspondence-theory of truth.

Seen from Mitterer’s sophisticated non-dualistic view, Bishop Berkeley’s idealism is – what else? – the consequence of another misleading worldview that leads to a somewhat eccentric form of dualism. Take for instance the so-called Antipodeans, a word used by Bishop Berkeley to refer to the funny inhabitants of Australia and New Zealand. As long as you stay in the Northern hemisphere you cannot perceive Australians, can you? Nevertheless, we are prepared to concede that the Antipodeans exist in the full sense of the word. Of course, says Bishop Berkeley, they exist in the full sense of the word insofar as they are continuously represented in the mind of God. God’s mind contains all of the perceptions and ideas, whether factual or possible, from the very beginning to the very end, whatever could be considered to be the very beginning and the very end of all things ever being perceived and thought of. According to his somewhat extravagant doctrine, Bishop Berkeley asserts to us (and asserts to himself) that if he were traveling to the opposite side of the globe, he would finally have perceptions that would reveal to him the real Antipodeans.

At the opposite side of the globe, my perceptions would be completely independent of the descriptions I would write down to inform my fellows at home about the Antipodeans’ funny appearance, life and culture. My descriptions would logically imply that the Antipodeans exist in the full sense of the word. From this follows, then, that the subjunctive description “If I had traveled to the opposite side of the globe, I would have perceived the real Antipodeans” (though, in reality, I was staying at home, somewhere in good old Europe) is true if and only if there is a finite, well-formed, and coherent complex of perceptions (or, respectively, ideas) in God’s infinite mind concerning the appearance, life and culture of the Antipodeans. This is interesting, isn’t it? For the subjunctive description’s truth depends on something that is completely independent of the description itself, namely the perceptions and ideas represented in God’s infinite mind. This is a provoking case of dualistic ontology. It must be rejected without mercy, given Josef Mitterer’s sophisticated view of how real things can be really real. Mitterer’s view is that things can be really real only by having been described so far and/or coming to be described “from now on”.

But now we have to ask a further question, which must not be taken lightly: Bishop Berkeley believed in God’s existence. He was a
devout believer in the Catholic Credo. This Credo entails, according to the Holy Father — who doesn’t ever lie, does he? — the only and absolutely true belief. Therefore, how could it be that such a virtuous thinker as Bishop Berkeley should have delivered such philosophical nonsense to his devoted auditors? And more than that, we have to face the following challenge: How could a true believer like Bishop Berkeley hold such a shamefully erroneous opinion about God’s mind that is the dreadful consequence of a dualistic hodgepodge?

14 Calm down, dear reader, for the right answer is: Bishop Berkeley couldn’t and therefore hadn’t! (Weil nicht sein kann, was nicht sein darf, as the Germans say, quoting their Weltweisen, world-class sage, Wilhelm Busch: “If something mustn’t be so, then it can’t be so.”) Since Josef Mitterer’s non-dualistic procedure is based on his non-dualistic worldview, the wicked description that referred to Bishop Berkeley’s allegedly dualistic philosophy must only be identified as a wicked description “so far.” Then the way will be open for transforming the wicked description, which has been true so far, into a description “from now on.” The description from now on will be — according to Josef Mitterer’s sophisticated version of non-dualism — true from now on. From now on, correspondingly, Bishop Berkeley can be said to have said the contrary to that which he was said to have been saying as yet. If this revelation happens — and why shouldn’t it? — then the right answer to the question of how Bishop Berkeley could have held a heretic opinion about God’s totally non-dualistic mind will be as clear as spring water: “From now on, he hadn’t because he couldn’t!”

17 This is a happy end, isn’t it? By changing the description of Bishop Berkeley’s philosophy (from “so far” to “from now on”), Bishop Berkeley’s philosophy has changed, too, and along with Bishop Berkeley’s philosophy, dualism has disappeared like morning-mist under the rising sun. From now on, all of the perceptions and ideas embedded in God’s mind have never been anything other than descriptions so far and from now on.

18 And here we go! We are at the very heart of Mitterer’s non-dualism: It is the post-modern version of the famous opening lines of the Gospel according to St. John. These lines are, as everybody knows, about the very beginning of the world:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
The same was in the beginning with God.
All things were made by the Description so far and from now on, and without the Description so far was not any thing being described from now on that had been described so far.
In the Description so far and from now on was life;
and the light was the light of men.
And the light shineth in darkness;
and the darkness comprehended it not.
(John 1,1–5.)

There it is! From now on, we are entitled to say that there is St. John’s & Josef Mitterer’s non-dualistic credo that we can believe in without being enslaved by superstition and submitted to fetishes. For there is, from now on, an ingeniously updated version of St. John’s opening lines as they appeared in the King James Version:

In the beginning was the Description so far and from now on, and the Description was with God, and the Description was God.
The same was in the beginning with God.
All things were made by the Description so far;
and without the Description so far was not any thing being described from now on that had been described so far.
In the Description so far and from now on was life;
and the life was the light of men.

19 There is nothing more to say, is there? There isn’t. However, one frightening question remains: What about the darkness? Remember: And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. Where does this darkness come from? It obviously doesn’t come from the light, because the light “shineth in darkness”. Without darkness, there would be no light at all. This is interesting, isn’t it? For it proves that the light which is not comprehended by the darkness needs darkness to enlighten the world. And since the world is, from its very beginning on, nothing but the light that is called “the Word” (St. John) or “the Description so far and from now on” (Josef Mitterer), we have to be aware that there is something that not only cannot comprehend the light but also cannot be comprehended by the light itself — this non-comprehensible something is neither a description so far nor a description from now on.

20 This something, St. John’s Darkness, is the deepest source of all things, the whole being as well as the whole non-being. It is the all-pervading, all-embracing nightmare of St. John’s & Josef Mitterer’s non-dualistic credo. It is, in one word, the nameless God of dualism. It is the It.

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The Beyond of the Theologians

Adolf Holl  Independent writer

“...the ‘Beyond’ of the theologians,” to which Josef Mitterer alluded in a footnote1 in his 1988 essay “Farewell to the truth,” can be understood as an offer of ultimate self-perception – albeit with a high conflict potential. To demonstrate this, it suffices to pull up the well-known passage from the Confessiones of Aurelius Augustinus, which ascribes a restless heart to mankind: “Tu excitas, ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te” (1934, Confessiones 1,1,1). According to the translation of the “Bibliothèque Augustinienne” (1962): “C’est toi qui le pousses à prendre plaisir à te louer parce que tu nous a faits orientés vers toi et que notre cœur est sans repos tant qu’il ne repose pas en toi.” This, at least, avoids translating the requiescat of the original in the indicative present tense, as it is the case in the German translation: “Es ist dein Antrieb, dass dich zu loben erquicht, weil du uns zu dir hin erschaffen hast, und unser Herz kommt nicht zur Ruhe, bis es ruht in dir” (Perl 1964).2

Augustinus’s requiescat is difficult to translate because it opts for the present conjunctive rather than the more obvious future tense. The choice between faith (fides; in Augustinus fundamentissima fides) and hope remains suspended.

To go one step further, exactly this matter of fact found its expression in the Proslogion [Discourse on the Existence of God] of Anselm of Canterbury in the frequently quoted formulation: “Nisi credidero, non intelligam [Unless I first believe I shall not understand]” (1962, p. 84), or, respectively, in the originally intended title of the treatise: “Fides quaerens intellectum [Faith seeking understanding].”

At first sight, the act of faith, which is supposed to provide thinking with a direction, is presupposed to include a beyond by the invocation of God in the first chapter of the treatise. However, this is accomplished by choosing words with a mournful rather than confident effect: “Amaricatum est cor meum sua desolatione [Mournful turned my heart in its desolation].” One has to keep in mind that here is an author at work who was spending several hours in the monastic choir stalls every day. That is to say, the beyond of this monk theologian of the High Middle Ages proves problematic at second sight precisely because it cannot be experienced: “Numquam te vidi, Domine Deus meus, non novi faciem tuam [Never I have seen you, Lord, my God, your countenance I do not know].” What Anselm did subsequently in order to gain terra firma again, i.e., to formulate his famous ontological argument [for the existence of God], is well known in the history of philosophy.

If, however, the Proslogion is read as belles-lettres, then in the text there is a sort of unrest at work, which is also characteristic of the “tearful book” of the Confessiones. In the beyond of the theologians, after all, one may weep.

Notes

1. In translation, this footnote reads as follows: “The ambiguity of the expression ‘the beyond of discourse’ is intended. It includes the extra-linguistic reality of the realist, the constructed/constituted reality of relativists and constructivists, and a certain closeness to the “Beyond” of the theologians that is not unwanted. God as an impartial judge between good and evil and Reality as objective judge between true and false have more in common with each other than the need for their representatives to pass and carry out their judgments within our discourse and our lives. In the case of God, theologians, including the pope, may serve as such representatives, as may leading scientists or Nobel prize winners when it comes to reality” (Mitterer 1988, p. 28, translated by the editors).

2. “You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you” (Augustine 1991).

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