

# Faith as the Prime Epistemological Virtue

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The purpose of this article is to reveal the extent to which knowledge claims in communication that purport to be true should always be supported by the human virtue of faith. When not so supported, it is argued that they are dependent on a blind, even unconscious, trust. Truth or objectivity or certainty and the like are not to be thought of as the principal ethical criteria of speech, but, rather one should accept a single principal one—human faith.

It will be seen later in what way this faith is not to be identified as divine in the normal acceptance of that word. In view of faith thus being a vital element in dialogues involving truth and knowledge, in all instances of their occurrence, this interlocks epistemology with ethics, with consequent implications for both, particularly as regards the inescapability of sacrifice in human dealings. As the source of dialogue, language is argued to be the ground of what had been regarded as 'divinity' as such, and, when properly theorized, that 'divinity' loses nothing of its ethical power but gains by the loss of the superstition that enfeebles it. As the final step, I shall indicate why these ethical implications have tended to keep the key proposal out of philosophical attention.

## **(Step 1) Sensory and Perceptual Relativity**

The initial premise is the fact of the differences at the sensory and perceptual level between one agent and another, any of which differences, depending on the circumstances of mutually projected understanding, may become relevant to action. All our statements to each other are characterized by both sensory and perceptual relativity. For a survey of the extent of the sensory relativity of vision, see Larry Hardin's book *Color for Philosophers* (1986). Similar cases can be made for the other senses. As regards perceptual judgements, the psycholinguist Ragnar Rommetveit has shown that human subjects use markedly different criteria in identifying what they call 'the same entity' (Rommetveit 1974: Ch. 4; see also Watzlawick 1977, chs. 5 to 7). Kant acknowledged this: 'To one man . . . a certain word suggests one thing, to another some other thing; the unity of consciousness in what is empirical is not, as regards what is given, necessarily and universally valid' (*CPR* B140). The history of our personal learning of what selections from the real to fit to words plays its part here. Notice that, though this appears to be an uncontentious claim, its implications have gone unexamined, and this disinclination deserves analysis.

Wilhelm von Humboldt, the eminent German anthropologist and linguist, was thus not uttering nonsense when he asserted that 'All understanding is at the same time a misunderstanding; agreement in thought and feeling is also a parting of the ways' (Humboldt 1971: p. 43). He put it this way because he wanted to foreground the fact that the genesis of speech can be traced to a felt need to update another person, to improve some selection they are making from their field of experience, and the presupposition behind that assertion is that there would be no impulse to speak unless speaker and hearer did have *different* understandings of some portion or portions of the world (although the core argument here is confined to the Statement, it has been extended to the Question and the Command; see Wright 2005, 142-7).

## **(Step 2) The Idealization of Reciprocity as a Mode of Coping with that Relativity**

Wilhelm von Humboldt, the linguist Fritz Mauthner (1923: II, 117), and the sociologist Alfred Schutz (1962: 11-12) can be taken as representative of a number of thinkers who, aware of this fundamental relativity between persons, have made a particular proposal about the Statement which is a key reference here. They all, like Humboldt, regard the differences mentioned in Step 1 as the source of the desire to try to update another: whether or not that updating is successful is, of course, moot. They see their proposal as necessarily called for because of the Humboldtian 'misunderstanding'.

They see the Speaker as faced with the problem of directing the Hearer's attention to the portion of the real about which the former hopefully wishes to correct the latter. The situation involves a peculiar difficulty therefore, for the Speaker believes that the Hearer has a wrong take on that portion, and, in spite of that, will have to use that focus of misapprehension as the means by which he directs him, namely, the very word or phrase that, in the Speaker's view, the meaning of which requires readjustment.

Donald Davidson called the situation a 'Triangulation', in which the two people and the object they are confronting are at the three corners of the triangle (Davidson 1991, 159-60). The anthropologist Gregory Bateson used a similar metaphor, a 'stereoscopic' or 'binocular' relationship, in which there is an 'interplay' between two differing perspectives that can, hopefully, produce an enhanced interpretation of the sensory evidence (Bateson, 1978: 79-81). The metaphor of Triangulation connotes an attempt to arrive at a reliable map of a problematic terrain, and thus provides a good analogy for what is in progress when two people compare their experiences of the real (for this reason I originally called this theory 'Triangulation Theory', although, in the final analysis, I have come to prefer 'Faitheism'). Sometimes we do repeat to hearers what they already know, but that is usually with the aim of ensuring they keep it in mind—which still falls under the definition of a problematic situation from the Speaker's point of view (though that may not be the Hearer's judgement).

So the challenge for the Speaker is to effect a transformation of the Hearer's understanding. Alfred Schutz's solution was to recommend that the Hearer could be induced to share that of the Speaker in a blending of their perspectives, and the means by which this is to be achieved is by both Speaker and Hearer engaging in an 'idealization of reciprocity'. He explained this by adding that this could also be described as 'the idealization of the interchangeability of the standpoints, the taking for granted that, if I were in your shoes, your standpoint would seem to be the same as mine, and you and I see things with the same typicality' (Schutz, 1962: 11-12). This being an idealization, it is not real but imagined; hence the use of the phrase 'taken for'. What is imagined is the supposed coincidence of the desires and fears of the partners in dialogue in the future with regard to the 'item' and the equally supposed coincidence of their perceptual selections upon the portion of the real which they are trying to bring into 'common' focus. *A supposed convergence of motivations* is thus at the core of this mutual process. Paradoxically, once this double agreement has been accepted as a mutual hypothesis, the Speaker with a new clue to context updates and thus changes the 'reference'. As valuable as Schutz's insight was, he made, as we shall see, a significant omission: he did not inquire into the part faith should play in this mutual performance. He should have been stirred to ask the question since his very phrase begins with the word 'idealization', which makes plain that the reciprocity of perspectives upon the presumed singular 'item' is *not real*.

### **(Step 3) The Idealization of Reciprocity in Language**

In jokes, stories and games, including the language-game, the trick — and I do mean 'trick' — is to challenge that 'reciprocity', to induce in the hearer, reader, audience to accept another interpretation of the same sensory evidence.

An example (those familiar with the present argument will forgive my using an example I used before [Wright 2008, 3]): As regards language, consider this interchange between two bird-watchers engaged in a bird-count:

A: That bird in that tree you just counted.

B: Well, what about it?

A: It was two-and-a-bit leaves.

It seems that B should not really have been so confident in his use of the singular pronoun 'it'. What is noteworthy here is that A did use the singular form 'that bird' —to get B's attention fixed on the fuzzy region about which she wishes to update B. At the beginning of a statement these two engaged in dialogue have assumed that they have selected the same *singular entity* from the real continuum. But this mutual assumption was really only

something in the nature of a catalyst in the process of transmitting information, for at the end of the statement the 'entity' was not the same for B as it had been before.

One may call the bird phrase the 'pragmatic subject', and A's last sentence the 'pragmatic predicate' (there is no necessary tie between these and the grammatical subject and predicate, since what updates the Hearer can be in any part of a sentence—see 'The cat is on the mat' as an answer to the question 'What is on the mat?'). This distinction was first pointed out by the logician John Cook Wilson (1926: 123-6).

In the example above, the 'entity' had not even preserved its singularity, 'one' bird becoming 'two-and-a-bit leaves', but B had nevertheless been updated by A about his perception of the world. The 'reciprocity of perspectives' was transformed. As Dinnaga, a 6<sup>th</sup>-century Indian Buddhist sage, put it, 'Even "this" can be a case of mistaken identity' (Matilal, 1986: 365-7), a fact not realized by Bertrand Russell'. In Russell's philosophy of language, 'this' as an unshakable singularity and should be viewed as such when it appears as a basic 'referent' in a statement (Russell 1923, 120-3), which can now be seen as actually believing that the 'reciprocity' is complete.

A defensible interpretation can be put on this claim, one which Russell did not foresee. The core of any informative statement is that the two participants begin by mutually *assuming* that they have 'the same entity' in view—yet this assumption is no more than that, an assumption, a taking-for-granted, which is useful nevertheless in bringing two differing perceptions into enough of an overlap of understanding to allow the updating to go through (that there is no necessary actual overlap in perception can be readily seen in our example). But this is no surprise, for the phrasal verb 'to take for granted' contains the same indication of suggesting a tentative hypothesis. 'To take for' means *to accept one thing AS IF it were another*, that is, it is used in situations both parties recognize as having an element of ambiguity or illusion (compare—'It was so foggy I *took* him *for* his brother'). Examine the parts of this phrasal verb 'to take for': 'to take' here means to accept a percept as reliable, as no illusion, no *mis-take*; and 'for' implies that the percept was wrongly interpreted. 'Granted' means *allowed, permitted, exposed to no expectation of opposition of will and desire from the other*. So 'to take for granted' means *to accept an illusion of real agreement as a perfect agreement, an apparent blending of motivation with another as a perfect fusing*, as if there no violent disagreement was possible in the future. And what is this illusory agreement the illusion of which is to be temporarily ignored? —that a *single* object is before the agents concerned—and they are concerned agents. Not the important feature of this fusing of hypotheses, that both agents are undoubtedly attempting to handle *the real* with something that is *imagined* — separately by each of them.

In order to obtain a rough-and-ready mutual fix on a portion of the real, a *partial* overlapping of their differing selections, they have to behave *as if* they have a *perfect* one. My own way of describing this trick by which we get a rough mutual grasp on the Real has

been to say 'It is by a PRETENCE of *complete* success that we *partially* capture THE REAL'. This could be said to explain Saussure's hybrid view of language as a fixed system, the 'synchronic', and as a developing one, the 'diachronic' (Saussure 1977, 81). He used these terms because the Idealization is *timeless (syn-chronic)* as something imagined, whereas the updating clue, as the adjective implies, moves *through time (dia-chronic)* to a new idealized state. One might almost say that there was the logical on the one hand and the figurative on the other. Saussure himself had no explanation for the relation of the two. So language is 'hybrid', but certainly not in the way he imagined.

Objectors may protest that such an extension of their position is a fanciful exaggeration, but to believe in the perfection of the singularity of objective reference implies precisely that. A divine uniqueness invades the claim of mundane objectivity, but the 'commonsense' defenders of it cannot see it. When they typically protest "You are not telling me that that is not a book here in front of us both!", you can counter with drawing attention to their use of the word 'telling': what this implies is that (i) language is all to do with narrative *telling*; (ii) their prohibition of one's telling is a sign of their believing in the imaginary perfection of the 'commonsense' reference they are making—while ignoring how the commonality of mutual sense is achieved by the Idealization of Reciprocity, and thus, implicitly, *forbidding me to speak*; (iii) that it is grossly unethical to project one's own private reference as the touchstone for all; and that (iv) men and women, '*anthro-*', achieve their human nature in talk through '*-poetics*', not through literal belief. By the way, it is not without significance that we often use the word 'telling' as an adjective to mean *of newly persuasive and lasting importance*.

Finally—an apparently disturbing philosophical conclusion — since the notion of singularity is no more than a catalyst, we do not need to believe in 'the singular entity' for it is quite otiose in our ontology, however valuable it is in communication. We need to acknowledge this at the very same time as we, with the utmost seriousness,—as in a game or play —treat the singularity as real. Strictly speaking, there is no perceptible difference on behaviour at that moment between those who actually believe in the singularity and those that are co-operatively imagining it; it is just that the believers are using an hypothesis *as if* it were purely real, while the others are using the hypothesis knowingly (for this linguistic use of 'as if' see Hans Vaihinger 1924, 91-95). Compare the extra success of jokers who manage keep a straight face.

The claim here is that the Word, the Trope, and the Statement themselves, the building-blocks of all communication, are of this form, a view that bears out the opinion of Calvin Schrag, the American philosopher of rhetoric, that 'Narrative is the linchpin of discourse' (Schrag 1997: 41). In narratives an expectation is presented as established in order that, by the provision of a clue to a new context, the hearer's interpretation can be shifted about upon the real, thus changing the 'world' (which we can take as the collaborative interpretation of the real). We thus change the 'objective' nature of some part of it, that is,

its definition within the current interpersonal acceptance.

What now emerges is that, in order for the speaker, who is armed with the new interpretation, to effect in the hearer a change in percept at this first stage of communication, they must, to begin with, both behave *as if they are picking out exactly the same thing from their separate fields of experience*. Just as in the Joke and the Story, a speaker, once this needful situation has been set up, produces a clue to a new intentional context, and this affects the context of what was initially agreed, shifting it upon their sensory fields and their memory of them. This, of course, is the aim of the utterance, but, as we know well, it may not succeed. The partners in the dialogue must, as Wilhelm von Humboldt insisted (1971, 36), make their own checks upon their own sensory experience in order to test out that shift, checks which have to be made for the transformation to be appreciated.

This situation is thus an unusual one: though both *think* that they have focused on ‘the same entity’, all they are actually doing is bringing two differing selections from the brute real into a rough co-ordination, one sufficient to guide their co-operative actions in the current circumstance, but the key additional point is that *this mistaken thought is what enables them to produce that rough co-ordination in the first place*. It matches exactly the first move in the joke where it appears for the moment that both the joker and his hearer share the same understanding of a part of the world. It is also, unsurprisingly, what keeps them both from realizing what they are actually doing!—and what has kept most linguists from realizing what was being done!

It seems likely that what the blind and deaf Helen Keller unconsciously realized, as she ran her hands under the water from a tap and was treated to tactile signing of /water/ from her teacher, was not so much that she had come to understand what a name was (Aitchison, 1996, 96) but that language began with the understanding that the other’s attention, through the hand sign /water/, was on the ‘same’ portion of the Real, even *though she and her teacher had markedly different perceptions of it, her teacher having normal sensory access to the world*.

Note, therefore, the paradox that arises from this *dramatic performance* of the coincidence of each person’s object with that of another’s. Every informative statement is of this form: the two in dialogue begin by getting a *rough and partial* superimposition of their percepts by acting as if they *already had a perfect one*, as if there were a single entity that provided an unquestionable referent for both of them. They have to act out Samuel Butler’s notion that ‘everything is what it is and not another thing’ (Butler, 1970 [1726]), as implied by the so-called ‘Laws of Thought’ (which are obviously dependent on the Idealization of Reciprocity). No surprise that that they are called ‘laws’ as they are presumed to apply to any speaker. The next step is to deny that very presupposition, because the speaker provides a clue to another intentional perspective that alters the ‘entity’, which amounts to

a common admission that they *did not in fact have a perfect superimposition of their selections*. They performed what is thus an imagined act, one which cannot be but an act of faith. It is clearly necessary as a part of our method of achieving an overlap of our separate selections from the real that we behave as if it were not *a mere overlap* but a *pure coinciding*.

In actual dialogue the mismatching between the speaker's and the hearer's 'referent' can vary considerably: (i) they can overlap by a large margin such that the mismatch can be very minor and cause no notable mix-ups for a considerable time; (ii) the overlap can be very small in that a misunderstanding rapidly emerges; (iii) there may be no overlap at all in which misunderstanding leads to gross dissimilarity in action. There is a fourth type of mismatch: it may be that the intended hearer has not sorted any entity at all from the real in that region of it, it being outside the present scope of his or her attention. The fact that the real sensory field may exist unperceived has been contested by some objectors to this theory: the psychologist James J. Gibson for one believes that the real consists of a mass of already distinct 'invariants', so in his view one cannot not perceive, that is, that every portion of your sensory fields is already mapped out into separable units (Gibson, 1977, 67). The response is to say that this is our hope, and, too, the basis of our method of guiding us through the real, but not by any means a given (for empirical evidence that disproves Gibson's claim see Wright 2005, 91-3). One can add that Gibson's use of the word 'invariant' is no more than an expression of the Idealization of Reciprocity without the acknowledgement of the inescapable risk that attends it; for two persons in communication, each has arrived at his or her hopeful 'invariant' but they are not the same, so for each there are regions they are sensing but not perceiving. It needs to be pointed out that a mismatch in understanding can lead to positive as well as negative outcomes, for the hearer may already have assumed something in the 'taking-for-granted' which is of immense mutual value and which, initially, had not been at all recognized by the speaker. Teachers are always open to being taught by pupils.

#### **(Step 4) The Difficulty of Performing the Idealization**

We come now to what Schutz omitted. It probably will already have been realized that, in any case, such ideal coinciding was impossible from the start: the sensory and perceptual differences prevent it taking place. An idealization of reciprocity is impossible to effect, for what does such reciprocity imply but a perfect fusing at some eternal point of all the wishes and desires of both parties? One cannot artificially limit the desires of the partners in dialogue to something immediately relevant as each identically perceives it. It is plain that one's trust has to move out of the range of current expectations into a consciously imagined fusing, and this is one which is prepared to take *unexpected* motivational differences into consideration.

A philosopher, Joel Feinberg, has dubbed this extending of intention into the future the

### 'Accordion Effect':

This well-known feature of our language, whereby a man's actions can be described as narrowly or as broadly as we please, I propose to call the 'Accordion Effect', because an act, like the folding musical instrument, can be squeezed down to a minimum or else stretched out. (Feinberg 1965: 146)(He gives part of the answer to the questions surrounding this odd feature of language in that almost unnoticed little interjection 'as we please'; in the phrase 'as we please' the word 'we' has only an individual sense.). The accordion is stretched out by our providing wider and wider explanations of the intentional context. But there is a question that Feinberg did not ask: Is there the assumption that there is some *one* fixed fully open position, which, although a few of the bellow pleats are tattered, still represents a 'totality' of understanding which touches the world securely at its fully extended edges? This is extraordinary in that it appears to envisage an ideal goal of all our actions, some *summum bonum* for both speaker and hearer beyond the horizon which, of course, can never be achieved.

One is tempted to say that talkers have to content themselves with taking Feinberg's accordion as open enough to justify current suppositions about the relevance of what is said, the context thus having distinctly fuzzy edges. But that temptation is to be resisted if we are to analyse the circumstance satisfactorily—for whose are 'the current suppositions'?

Another linguist, Sir Alan Gardiner, criticized Saussure thus for neglecting the fact that each person has a different understanding of a word (Gardiner 1951, 52-61). We can quote Immanuel Kant here:

To one man, for instance, a certain word suggests one thing, to another some other thing; the unity of consciousness in that which is empirical is not, as regards what is given, necessarily and universally valid. (*Critique of Pure Reason*: B140)Kant's uncontentious statement, that it is not possible for two persons' understandings to match exactly, has not been given by philosophers the attention it deserves. And why? Why do we take the equivalence as confirming a rational view of the world, that rationality depends on the common singularity of the entities we refer to? Fortunately, Ragnar Rommetveit has concerned himself with this very matter; he has empirically established the fact that it is possible for two persons to arrive at practical co-ordination in speech and action without either being aware that they each have marked differences of sensation and perception (Rommetveit, 1974). These differences would, indeed, only become salient to one or both in some entirely new context unforeseen by either, in which some hidden criterion on which one had been unconsciously relying became relevant to his or her current purposes.

A logician, Harry S. Leonard, has commented on this universal feature of communication, an ever-present but concealed 'misapprehension': notice the radical implication here which goes beyond this remark and that of Kant: the two might not even be using criteria that pick



out strictly the same extension, the same 'thing'.

Two people engaged in this same process of trying to reach a common understanding may well find two sets of criteria which remarkably well isolate the same extension. But do they understand the word in the same way? (Leonard, 1967: p. 266) For one of them, his 'entity' might not be considered to last as long as the other's 'entity', or cease to be 'the same thing' when it changes in some quality (say, in colour, weight or taste). As Aristotle commented, what are six apples for the seller do not necessarily count as six apples for the buyer. So the actual imputation of entityhood is just that, an imputation, performed mutually. To use phrases from Habermas, one has 'to play along' (2008, p. 32), acknowledge that there is only an 'overlap' of reference (ibid., p. 40), thus achieving only an 'interlacing' of differing 'perspectives' (1970, p. 141). This is what objectivists like James J. Gibson are unable to recognize.

There is thus a detectable taint of inconsistency here in the first quotation from Habermas, for, if there is something 'unshareable and individual' in an agent's perceptions, how can the 'symbols' be 'intersubjectively valid'? This is Saussure's problem the other way round, for we can ask how can word and meaning perfectly match when meanings change across time?

Leonard's remark can take us further: it does not matter (in the sense of how the participants in language judge their intentions and how they direct their separate attentions) whether their attempts at co-ordination do coincide fully, that is, each might have their own 'entity', their own selection from the individual experiences they are having, as long as the 'failure' of overlap between these selections does not immediately interfere with their immediate pragmatic judgements of success in the action concerned. Another way of putting it is to say that where each puts his or her boundaries upon the real can differ even when both would say that they were satisfied with their mutual agreement at that moment in time.

The implication is a startling one: there is actually no *single* entity in front of them at all—*its 'singularity' is something supposed for the convenience of communication*. That convenience is established by each behaving as if their two selections from experience actually *did* coincide. Obviously, if they did not make this necessary but strictly false assumption that there was only 'one' entity in front of them, they could never bring their separate judgements into any sort of harness.

This vital demand is what requires that the collaboration be ethically based on faith and not blind trust. To accept that *all* percepts are viable (Ernst von Glasersfeld's favoured word here; Glasersfeld, 1984, 25) and that the language group is maintaining the co-reference of them by this species of faith is not easy to recognize or accept. Glasersfeld himself, like Schutz, does not carry his analysis further and pick up the ethical necessity of faith in this

mutual situation.

Fearing for the security of our concepts, in particular our self-concept and the group concept bound up with it, leads, as we have seen, to rigidifying the blind faith into an unshakeable conviction of a final truth of our own identifications, which prevents, as we shall see, the challenge of faith from being recognized.

There is an unusual question here. If language has evolved in this way, few can have been consciously aware of this mutual assumption. Strictly speaking, it is not an assumption, but a natural performance. Analysis of the situation shows the two agents in dialogue behaving 'as if it they had exchanged bodies' with the result that a 'referent' appears 'exactly the same for both of them'. The subjects themselves are not in possession of the theory we are now entertaining. Since they are behaving as if 'a single object' were in front of them *without knowing that they are so behaving*, they immediately and certainly believe that 'it' is the 'same object' for their interlocutor. For them there is no 'as if'. Hence, they are continually faced with shocks, pleasant and unpleasant, either when a correction works upon them or when brute contingency breaks in upon their assurance. It is not a great deal of consolation to realize that the intrusion of contingency thus is a proof of there being an external real independent of our language; and, furthermore, because of this real residue, *solipsism is impossible since one's notion of oneself is thus inextricably dependent on the judgement of others*. The brute contingency of the real as such is as present in the so-called 'self' as anywhere else in the real, and much therefore *always* lies outside our knowing. Habitually, however, the overall false conviction of a objective world is not disturbed, the reason being precisely that the mutual performance of perfect objectivity *has to be resumed with every utterance*; otherwise we could not talk at all, for we would fail to get our separate perspectives in any kind of rough co-ordination. What cannot be disturbed is our inescapable immersion in the real, which continues in our sensings while our perceptions range dubiously and dangerously over it.

At this point it is needful to note that a naïve objection to this can be disposed of. The objection goes thus:

The sensory and perceptual relativity premiss has no force here because it is plain that the objectivity of the entity at the core of the attempts to refer is already an existent fact. There is no harm in pointing out that they may be varying perspectives upon the person or thing or property in question, but it cannot be denied that the focus of these 'overlappings' exists apart from them, and that it remains as what the attempts are trying to close in on. However 'vague' may be the criteria of recognition, *the vagueness is the same for everyone* (Wiggins, 1986, 95): it is plain that there is a core common across all perspectives. To use a favourite phrase of John McDowell, it is 'thus and so' (McDowell 1994, 9; see also Tye 2000, 46-7). Bertrand Russell dismissed vagueness altogether: 'There can be no such thing as vagueness or imprecision; things are what they are and there's an end of it' (Russell 1923,

85). But the 'singular entity' is not an 'existent fact': the *taking* of the focus *as* a singular, pre-existing 'entity' is only the means by which differing selections are held in hopeful focus. What undeniably exists is the ground of the real, the ever-changing flux, which has been carved out by each observer applying different criteria of recognition. Indeed, when a correction goes through and is apparently confirmed by one's sensory inspection, one has been presented with a proof of *the existence of the real*, but one has not been presented with a proof of *a perfect 'objectivity'* characterizing one's own selection, which remains irremediably different from that of others (Kuhn 1970, 198-204). Naturally we are disinclined to suspect our own and others' success in the game of projecting identities: it has taken such trouble to hone them.

One has to say that *each person's selection outlines and embraces a portion of the real*, but, because that portion cannot match that of anyone else, there is no final *objectivity* in that selection. You may be taking for granted as definitive of that 'objectivity' something you perceive that no one else does, and no one, including you, as yet knows of that difference between you! The word 'objectivity' becomes a useful piece in the language-game but it has no ontological reality except as such a piece; it can only slide about on the real as we adjust it in mutual hope. One curious consequence is that the updating the Speaker hopefully supplies may be unsatisfactory in the long run, but *the transformation still proves the existence of the real*, for it shows that the two observers have sensory access to it as the ground over which their selections play. There is therefore no pretence in the joys and sufferings that result from our engagements with the real for the whole play has a purpose, namely, to guide its collaborative drama through time for the impossible realization of all our hopes. It does not proceed for the satisfaction of any *one* of us because that very 'oneness' we owe to the great game itself. Pretence at the mundane level is thought of immediately as a form of deception, but the great play is not a deception but the grandest of hypotheses, one we are within and cannot exist without ('without' here can be taken as an Elizabethan pun).

The continuing agreement in co-operative action with that part of the real leads us to equate its historical, temporary, only *viable* objectivity with the real, but this is to try vainly to turn hope that what we have picked out as the same for all of us, into logical certitude (Glaserfeld 1934, 33). Worthwhile dwelling on this fact: we can point at 'the' object and say to ourselves "That's real!" or, with Ted Honderich, "That's actual!" (Honderich, 2014), but one is still in the position of one ignoring the access of others: Birdwatcher B could have confidently pointed to the two-and-a-bit leaves he *took for* a bird and said "That's real!", and these is a sense in which he would be right, for that portion of the real which he was perceiving as a bird was still a portion of the real, however he was objectifying it.

Objectivity is thus not a feature of the real: it is only a rough compromise of differing perspectives upon existence that should guide human beings in their would-be collaborative actions within it. We find it profoundly unsettling to think of objective 'reality' as shot

through with doubt: better, it seems, to hold to a 'security' that our partner in dialogue also appears to want to uphold, especially when our own identity would be rendered precarious. What is comfortingly forgotten in such attitude is that the real is full of surprises, and some of those surprises can arise unbidden from within *us*. How valuable it is, then, that we are unconsciously drawn to stories, which are all about those surprises. Inevitably, one element of the resistance to this theory lies in the fact that it is profoundly disturbing, as well as counter-intuitive, to accept the idea that all our identifications are irremediably uncertain, only maintained by human faith, faith which accepts the attendant risk.

Borrowing from the theory of the theatre, one can say that we should view all our mundane identifications as betraying a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, that is, with the fictive illusion showing through. Brecht counsels his actors to disturb the audience's cosy acceptance of the theatrical illusion so that they were unable to escape the play's relevance to their lives:

The audience were to be nudged into a critical and inquiring attitude by a continual emphasis on the fictional status of the theatrical enterprise. (Elizabeth Wright 1989, 27). For Brecht the aim was political, namely, to disturb the numbing effects of bourgeois ideology; but in the present context we can apply it to our habitual absorption in the mundane world, in which we turn a merely viable perception—of our 'theatrical enterprise'—into a complacent self-deception. Although Brecht himself would characterize this theatrical method as arising from *political* insight, we can rather say that fundamentally it is a *philosophical* one.

An unforeseen consequence of blind faith is that it transforms the play-assumption of the Idealization of Reciprocity into a real belief in a final coincidence of Speaker's and Hearer's desires. Therefore one has right to say that blind trust implicitly projects a *summum bonum*, a heaven, a utopia, a promised land, a 'Jerusalem', where all desires are magically harmonized, when in fact they are no more than poetic expressions of our unrealizable mutual hope (Wright 2012). As Feinberg's analysis shows, the 'intentional perspective' one adopts has no horizon. All our motivation has no idea of where it wants to end up—except as part of the needfully imagined common *summum bonum*.

Objectors may protest that such an extension of their position is a fanciful exaggeration, but to believe in the perfection of the singularity of objective reference implies precisely that. A timelessly divine uniqueness invades the claim of mundane objectivity, but the 'commonsense' defenders of it cannot see it. When they typically protest "You are not telling me that that is not a book here in front of us both!", you can counter with drawing attention to their use of the word 'telling': what this implies is that (i) language is all to do with narrative *telling*; (ii) their prohibition of one's telling is a sign of their believing in the imaginary perfection of the 'commonsense' reference they are making—while ignoring how the commonality of mutual sense is achieved by the Idealization of Reciprocity, and thus, implicitly, as a German friend, Ulrike Hanraths, has pointed out to me, *forbidding me to*

*speak*; (iii) that it is grossly unethical to project one's own private reference as the touchstone for all; and that (iv) men and women —'anthro-'— achieve their human nature in talk through '*poetics*', not through literal belief. By the way, it is not without significance that we often use the word 'telling' as an adjective to mean *of newly persuasive and lasting importance*.

Honderich, Wiggins, McDowell, and their like—all the way back to Russell—are typical of philosophers who dismiss anti-objectivist arguments thus. What motivates their false sense of certainty is their inability to see that any mutual identification has to take account of the stubbornly residual differences in our access to the real, and, in particular, to understand that a feature of such taking account must involve co-operating observers engaging in a form of *play*. If they advance to detecting a trace of the ambiguity of play, they can only construe the dual nature of the method as deception or disguise or an attempt at subversion. After all, as they would put it, what could be more destructive of truth than ambiguity?—Could not that ambiguity be deception? This is why they characterize anti-objectivism as relativist, as a view that refuses to accept that the basis of truth can ever be arrived at. So in opposing the relativist they adopt the authoritarian stance of someone engaged in morally correcting another, and thus feel justified in their certainty. To quote Russell again, 'Things are what they are and there's an end of it.' There's an end of it, because 'it' is the taken-for-granted agreement across speakers of language that observers are focussed upon *one* entity, but to accept that it is only *taken for* such is regarded as blasphemy.

However, play proper, whether of a game, a joke, or an aesthetic creation (poem, novel, drama, painting, statue, mime, ballet, etc., etc.), demands the mutual taking of one perception for another together with the serious recognition that all concerned are not 'concerned'. We have to play 'with straight faces', *knowing full well that all of us are all doing so*. This implies that all speakers should be apprised beforehand that only faith can bridge the disturbing gap between the truth we are projecting together and the response of the real to our hope.

The objectivist winces away from the fictive character of this unnoticed collaboration: he sees it as delusory, pretended, even mythical, and derides what he regards as relativism with these accusations. But its irremovably dual nature arises from the two hypotheses that the persons in dialogue are trying to match. The objectivist cannot see the duality *with a straight face*, that is, inwardly acknowledging its presence but outwardly behaving as if it did not exist, all the while knowing that his partner in dialogue is doing exactly the same thing! Ironically, he is the one who is superstitious in taking the timeless singularity of 'the' entity for real.

When a philosophy professor of the analytic persuasion, Robert Kirk, said to me, "You're not going to tell me that that is not the sun up there!", I replied "All you are doing is *exhorting*

*me to share the basic, poetic trust of language with you, and I will, for unless we treated our co-reference as a perfectly singular reference, I could never update you about the Real, such as now by saying that, strictly speaking, that bright disc of light is not the sun, for the actual sun is invisible some degrees further down the sky!"*

The actual state of the case is that all 'entities', including that of the self, are maintained as co-operative choices from the real by this hidden faith — to quote the poet Edwin Muir, 'Faith made the whole' (Muir, 1960, 238-9). *Incidentally, this is what had led the religions of the past to attribute the creation of the world to God, which can now be seen as only a poetic acknowledgement of the countless acts of mutual faith between human beings who, in talking to each other, have projected their hopeful sortings upon the real.* The popular origin of this faith process as a god or gods is a sidelong admission that faith is at the core. The claim in the catechism that 'God made everything' can now be seen as an unknowing disclosure of the actual human construction-in-faith sustaining the whole language system.

### **(Step 5) Faith—The type of trust that is ethically requisite**

This hidden mutual faith, then, needs a closer look. If this theory is correct, what Rommetveit has called the 'naïve and unreflecting faith' that we have mutually focussed on a perfectly singular entity (Rommetveit, 1978: 31) is essential to all language, and therefore all that is human. Communication apparently displays a need to trust other members of the group, but it is questionable whether at this level it is describable as 'altruistic', for how could something *evolved* be *normative*? The performance requires this initial trust that enables perceptual correction to go through, but it is trust so second-nature it is entered into without thought. At the animal level, two predators may successfully capture their prey, and we onlookers may be satisfied with identifying the 'singularity' of their prey, but differences in their sensings and perceptions may still be evolutionarily significant in the future; the animals themselves, of course, have no such awareness of their differences from the perceptions of others even though those differences may lead to evolutionary survival.

It is thus profoundly disturbing to this tempting narcissistic view of the world as securely objective by our own standards to suspect that what 'counts' for us may not count in the same way after a new interpretation is proffered to us by our interlocutor. This is why the word 'count' has the two meanings that it does: 'count' as *to enumerate singularities*, and 'count' as *to matter*, the link being that the 'singularities' we have selected were selected at the behest of motivation. This ambiguity is itself low-level evidence in support of the present theory. An 'it' certainly exists as my choice from the Real, but the choice that produces the 'it' for the Other is not the same as mine. In other words, we each separately *see* the Real *as* some-*thing* in our own way, but we have to behave as if that we just *see that* there is one identical thing before everyone. The 'seeing-as's' are *actual* in each observer: the 'seeing-that's' as one and the same for each is a mutual *fictive* construction. Michael Dummett was indirectly alluding to this when he wrote 'Knowledge of truth-conditions cannot be reduced

merely to verbalizable knowledge' (Dummett, 1973, 461),' an echo of Locke, who, in referring to men's 'different ideas', said that they 'make the signification of [a] common name very various and uncertain' (*Essay*, III ix 13).

It can now be seen why we should withhold the honorific term 'faith' for the basic Idealization of Reciprocity, for there is a subtle temptation to move from the tacit *performance* of an agreement with the Other to the *conviction* of there being a perfectly shared, timeless singularity as a 'common' referent. How easy to build on that needfully imagined projection of that singularity without which a statement cannot be made, to a superstitious belief in it, especially when one is not consciously aware of the Idealization in the first place. The Idealization *per se* may have the form of trust, but, unless it is informed with a notion of *risk* covertly arising from our differences from the Other, it is only a pseudo-trust. The ever-present possibility of *sacrifice* is ignored, especially when the entity in question is one's self. This may be an underlying fear for the naive objectivist in many cases where an objective truth is being claimed

A curious surfacing of this conviction, one that hides its origin, is to be found in the work of an American philosopher, Lynne Rudder Baker. In one of her books (2000) she explores the intricacies of the constructed interrelationships of our mundane worlds of ordinary objects and scientific ones. Persons, selves and things are all characterized in their entityhood as ontologically singular atoms. For example, she regards a person and her body together as an ontologically singular unit: 'it is not as if there were two *separate* things — my body and myself. There is a *single* constituted thing—me' (p. 114). Just as Democritus used the word 'atom' (literally *not split*) in search of the certainty of a basic identity in the constituents of matter (and we can extend this to the modern quarks and bosons), she discerns the same fundamental singularity in an ordinary table. The present argument can explain why. The reason is that the collaboration in trust, or, preferably, *faith* of Speaker and Hearer in an uttered statement with 'table' as its singular referent relies on their mutual imaginative performance of convergence on a singular 'atom' of 'knowledge', faith, of course, because there is no singular referent in the real. What does exist there is the convergence (or not, as the case may be) of two complex perspectives compounded of two sensory, perceptual, and conceptual selections from the real. So Baker has made the common error of turning a feature of the dialogic compact into an ontological given; she is virtually recommending the Idealization of Reciprocity without knowing that she is.

This is why I have frequently said that every 'identification' that we make should ultimately be seen to depend upon that faith. The very word 'identification' betrays the actual nature of the mutual construction that is taking place, for its etymological source is 'a making of the same'. What we forget is that we are doing the making together, a making of a guide for mutual perception, not, obviously, a making *of the material from which we select* - the real.

A proper faith is certainly not blind. It does not superstitiously depend on certainties

believed to be absolute. Have not theologians over the centuries protested that faith is precisely *not* certainty — ‘Oh, Lord, I believe: help Thou mine unbelief’ (Mark 9:24). If the Real can subvert the Thing and the Self, escape the word, rule and custom that attempts to keep it roughly within bounds, then there is risk in every act of trust. *To trust someone is not to be sure that they will do exactly as you personally expect.* To believe that they will is to put yourself in a narrative over which you have little control, as well as committing the narcissistic sin of believing that your desire is their desire, your objective world is theirs, absolutely without any awkward residue. There is always a residue, as Humboldt insisted, sometimes favourable to both, sometimes harmful to one or both, sometimes for the moment neutral in its implications. A proper faith acknowledges that the Other, a part of the Real, can never be encompassed within the play of language, no more than one’s own self can. It is now plain that one’s self-concept depends upon dialogue with others; one would not even be ‘a self’ without them. We both need our partner in language to talk at all, but, if we are to talk in a genuine fashion, then our faith must be of this second kind, not the pseudo-trust, *every time we speak.*

*This is what all jokes and stories are about.* Are jokes and stories not repeated demonstrations of what happens when someone superstitiously favours their own choice from the Real while disregarding all clues to the contrary, indicative of what others may be seeing? And this is so consoling for readers of stories, safely insulated by foreknowledge of those clues which save them from the misunderstandings of the characters in the text. This is where the pleasure of the text lies. Look at Oedipus, or the rioters in *The Pardoner’s Tale*, or Marlowe in *She Stoops to Conquer*, or Emma in *Emma*, or Pip in the appropriately named *Great Expectations*. A story follows exactly the same pattern of the informative Statement: having established one projection of the ‘truth’, the author-speaker introduces a second clue to a new intentional perspective which disturbs the Idealization of Reciprocity. The Statement is thus a story, and the Story is a statement. A story proceeds by first establishing *a strong wrong first clue* for the protagonist, and then proceeds to subvert the first interpretation by providing a *faint right second clue* to a new interpretation (sometimes often and faintly throughout, sometimes in a final surprising *peripeteia*, sometimes both, and sometimes protagonists are left in their sad misapprehension (Wright 2005, 59-64; Jane Austen is expert at this teasing).

Speaker and Hearer are engaged in a hopeful adjustment of the play of language, and their trust in it therefore involves the expectation that the new meaning will contribute to the advance ultimately towards some future felicity for both. Nevertheless, however sincere both parties may be, each may understand the words differently and not know of that difference until later. So in opposition to Robert Brandom’s claim that all should be made publicly ‘explicit’ which is a literalizing of the impossible hope (Brandom 1994), the claim here is that *what is implicit for each cannot all be explicit for both* (although we all, keeping straight faces, have to behave in the performance of a Statement as if it is!).



A more self-concealing version of the same error can be found in a definition of ambiguity by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson:

Everything is ambiguous, as long as it is taken by itself, while nothing is strictly ambiguous if we look at it top-down, placing it in its proper, cognitive environment. (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, 205) Notice the belief—not provisional assumption—that a ‘proper’ placing of a word in ‘its cognitive environment’ when one ‘looks at it top-down’ ensures a fixed, utterly single meaning for each word. This plainly reveals the status of the word as an Idealization of Reciprocity. Neither Sperber nor Wilson, as with Baker, are aware that what is really being recommended nor of the possibility of the updating that is at the core of an informative statement.

The first thing one can say here is that the use of the words ‘proper’ and ‘top-down’ betrays the frankly authoritarian conviction that a single agent cannot change the public meaning of a word. This is often backed up with an amused allusion to Lewis Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty who claimed that he could make a word mean just what he chose it to mean, which suggests that any adjustment to the meaning of word can only be nonsense, or, at the most, a trope. Anyone who uses this dismissal has no right to be amused *as the definition rules out jokes*, especially ones with a serious purpose. Sperber and Wilson forget that ‘cognition’ is negotiable. The second thing to say is that their definition is unable to see itself as the necessary dramatic performance of a perfect mutual co-reference that allows a shift of reference to take place—one might say, as the mutual imagining of Saussure’s ‘synchronic’ fixedness that enables the mutual ‘diachronic’ adjustment to go through. *Unless some rough overlap of referential perspective between participants in a dialogue can be mutually established, no updating can be achieved.*

This acknowledgement of our irremediable difference in sensory and perceptual perspectives must carry with it the admission that *both comic and tragic outcomes cannot be scientifically ruled out*. The supposedly agreed ‘truth’ thus is secondary to the original ‘troth’. To repeat an earlier dictum of mine: ‘Troth comes before truth, and love before troth’ (worth noting that the word ‘truth’ derives etymologically from the word ‘troth’; Wright 2005, 228-9). In the comic or tragic situations, the troth is ethically secondary to the quality of the love that the two parties have for each other, for the resulting emergence of the mismatch may only be resolvable by sacrifice on the part of one or other or both. So love is extremely difficult on those occasions in which the conflict is not resolvable—Read *Great Expectations* if you are in doubt.

That this is an alarming possibility leads many into being blind to the very act of trust involved in speaking, to the point where they project their own understanding as a fact and not a mutual, *provisional* assumption. A philosophical implication is that anyone who is tempted to take the singularity of entities, either of their own selfhood, other selves, or any external entity as a given, objective, impersonal fact—and not, as it is, a tentative

experiment in the co-ordination of two differing selections out of the undoubted real — is being *superstitious*, and superstition rests on a blind ignoring of the existential risk. What is faith if it is not prepared for the risk of finding that the person one loves is an ‘enemy’?

That this accusation includes both idealists and hard-headed positivists may come as something of a salutary surprise to both of them. The actual state of the case is that, all ‘entities’, including that of the self, are maintained as would-be co-operative choices from the real by this hidden faith. This mundane ‘world’ of ours that we call ‘reality’ is hopefully kept in place on the recalcitrant real by our co-operating in faith. The word ‘entity’ itself is a trap bestowing as it does a fixed singular *existence* in the real upon what is no more than the concatenation of all our separate hypotheses fuzzily overlapping on the real. This is not to deny that this language trick has helped us in varying degrees to track the changes in the real; hence the Glaserfeldian ‘viability’. In case one were tempted to extend this viability to the whole of the cosmos, one must recall how parochial our view of it is.

We can thus correctly accuse Plato of carrying the Idealization of Reciprocity to the point of reifying the imagined coincidence of our selections as his ‘Forms’, and, inevitably, mistakenly bestowing upon them the sacredness of divine ‘truth’, when their ‘sacredness’ arises from our having to have faith, a human faith that is prepared to accept that conflict can emerge in the most loving relationships and the love must learn some way of enduring it. In his elaborate Cave Analogy he forgot the others who were examining the Wall of *the challenging real* with him; he never considered what the Wall represented in his scheme (Wright 1979).

Since every ‘entity’ (and ‘property’ – for the argument applies just as much to ‘singular’ properties) they pick out is sustained at the best by this ‘holy’ human faith, it is no wonder that it is easy to believe that ‘God’ has ‘created’ ‘them’ all. The real motivation behind the creationists’ wanting to have a god creating them all is, as I noted above, *no more than a skewed acknowledgement that human faith is the ground of all our recognitions, but it undoes its own desire in not accepting the difficulty of real faith.*

One can use a justifiable *argumentum ad hominem* here specifically addressed to those objectivist philosophers. To believe that objectivity is as one sees it, plus the conviction that everyone accepts it as one does oneself, is an act of narcissism. One’s own interpretation of that portion of the real, one’s own guide to action in that circumstance—for to accept that portion as ‘objective’ is to be convinced that one’s desires and fears are wholly taken account of in that act of perceiving—is to proclaim an absolute certainty and the right to guarantee it. There is both vanity and complacency in such a stance, as well as lack of courage in not facing the challenge of the real that is acknowledged by faith.

## (Step 6) The Ethical Implications

Faith is thus very difficult. We would not be able to utter an informative statement unless we entered into the play that takes the real as consisting of re-cognizable 'entities' (and 'properties') visible to us all in the same way; because of this, it is dangerously easy to move from this to believing what we are unconsciously entering into—that is, to taking the play for real. Let us go over the traps here.

1. To remember that the word of one's language partner cannot in the final analysis be his or her bond. The motto of the British Stock Exchange is 'My word, my bond'. Don't we say 'I give you my word.' But it can't be just *your* word—it is your Hearer's, and your hearers'-plural. One salutary way of remembering this is to realize that one's every use of 'I', 'we', and 'you' is attended by an aura of risk and doubt, and should therefore be imbued with the responsibilities of faith.
2. To forget that any 'taking for granted' is what it says, an acceptance of a partial agreement as a perfect one. To quote Rommetveit, 'We TAKE a *perfect* intersubjectivity FOR granted in order to achieve a *partial* one' (Rommetveit 1978, 31). After all, that is what 'to take for' means.
3. A hearer's unexpected interpretation of one's word may be comic, in that you can ease some of the motivational pain in laughter, laughter in which the body's pain is assuaged by a concession to the Other, or their concession to you, or a concession by each of you.
4. On the other hand, the unexpected interpretation may involve a tragic transformation, as it did for Pip. Then a sacrifice may be called for by Speaker, by Hearer, or by both, which was not foreseen at the moment of the original agreement, and this involves challenging negotiation, if that is at all possible. Sometimes in the most tragic cases, as we have seen, it is not possible: the bases of our motivations sometimes go down so deep it would be to brainwash us to proceed further. This dark conclusion is one which those who are suspicious of this approach to the human indistinctly discern, thus adding to the dangerous aversion to engaging with the argument. Nor will this pain necessarily be assuaged - certainly not by some compensation in a non-existent afterlife, as many would-be martyrs expect. The only compensation is perhaps that one's story becomes exemplary for those who follow after, though they may not know that you were the agent. Tennyson has the line 'Our echoes roll from soul to soul', and your echo may have an effect on posterity without posterity knowing that it originated with you. It may not glorify you, for you may be nameless, like those who freely took the place of others in the ovens of Auschwitz. Their example still inspires, anonymity or no. *One doesn't do good in order*

*to be personally rewarded, even in posthumous reputation. One equally certainly doesn't do good in order to avoid eternal punishment!* Surely moral worth evaporates if either of these is the reason for action. These 'echoes' are what immortality really is. We have contributed—well or badly—to the great drama that passes on through time like a 'Mexican wave' round a stadium through sports spectators, those sitting ahead of it being the unborn, those after, the dead.

5. Look now at a more insidious temptation. The shift now revealed implicit in the other's interpretation can look at once like treachery or heresy, this when the mismatch with your own was not at all salient to either of you when the original agreement was made. You may have sacralized your private version in the anarchist manner, or it has been a tradition handed on to you by the 'authorities' as sacralized: that the prohibition of action or the instigation to it was presented as divinely sanctified and therefore unchangeable by definition. The residual blind trust is thus defensively rigidified, (a) because the demand of unquestioning acceptance is also a demand for a promise of your utterly unwavering loyalty to the family, the group, or the nation— of course, according to the would-be authority's interpretation of it, a realization which undermines the would-be moral argument of those who defend 'Big Brother' invasions of privacy; (b) all the myths supportive of that solidarity become literal, instead of being aesthetic, indeed playful, encouragements of the Idealization of Reciprocity—which are valuable if supportive of faith and unreliable if supportive of blind trust. What should be consciously dramatic becomes unconsciously self-deceptive: one ends up believing the myths instead of performing them—and this from persons who make a great pother about the treachery hidden in all things ambiguous, equivocal, fictive, illogical.
6. When the communication does go through and both partners are satisfied, note the additional temptation: the original ideal agreement spreads this feeling of success to the whole of one's language. One may become an objectivist, with no motive to think that one's own idiolect does not match the language as a whole. The mundane world seems all the more secure, fears of risk having been tranquillized away. The mundane becomes the real, and one's sense of its unpredictability fades. One becomes more reassured with talk of objectivity, loyalty, sincerity, reality, and anyone who suggests a flaw in these eternal verities is automatically suspect. Don't we all know that fiction is akin to lying, that jokers are not serious? That is why Humboldt's, James's, Schutz's, Wood Sellars', etc. insight was neglected and still is. The unspoken fear is that it leads to relativism—Did not the last pope in his first week as pontiff make it the key enemy to be watched for at all costs? For me there is a keen irony in a leader of what is called 'a faith' taking up such a position. A pure authority is as impossible as a pure

freedom.

Playing is something sensible children do without difficulty. Some children, however, find the challenge to their sense of identity too frightening— like the child in an Orcs-and-Hobbits game who bursts into tears when he is ‘taken prisoner’. Read the last two lines of Thomas Hardy’s poem ‘The Darkling Thrush’ where the myth of a final heaven, a *summum bonum*, as inspiring the song of the winter thrush, is accepted for what it is, a valuable myth:

Some blessed Hope whereof he knew

And I was unaware. (Hardy 1952, 137) A look at the myths that have produced a recognition of the dark conclusion is worthy of note here. If one examines the ‘Trickster’ figures that characterize a number of unrelated cultures (for example, Eshu Elegba in Yoruba culture, Kokopelli in North American tribes, Hermes in Ancient Greece), one finds

1. that they are associated with practical jokes of many kinds, most often blatantly challenging the sexual mores of the tribe in question, thus metaphorically putting desire at odds with traditional codes;
2. their jokes of themselves take advantage of ambiguity at the frontiers of existing law and morality, exactly where linguistic adjustments to accepted patterns of behaviour take place, where talk is going on, so they are gatekeepers and messengers;
3. (of special relevance here) they are paradoxically both bringers of things of value to the community (such as medicines and fire; Anansi of Ashanti myth made the matter out of which the world is made, as well as providing grain and the tools for farming) and the creators of violence and pain (Carr and Greeves, 2007, Ch. 3). The ambivalence shows itself currently (2014) in the film *Thor: the Dark World*, in which Loki, the Norse Trickster, is induced to aid Thor in saving the world. One can view this as a poetic acknowledgement both of the creative imagination that has contributed to our material progress, and of the inevitable suffering that attends the use of that ambivalent instrument, language, *that the tragic always remains a possibility*. Language has thus always been ‘divine’; ‘In the beginning was the Word’. The Idealization of Reciprocity at the heart of language foresees in imagination a final heaven and an omniscient god that it must, *in play*, accept as real, knowing full well that it is unreal. This core of ancient wisdom is sadly missing from those optimistic religions that turn the myth of a final heaven into a literal end of life’s journey.

## (Step 7) Why Humboldt's insight has been ignored

Let us summarize these temptations to ignore Humboldt's insight that language partners must behave as if the speech-habits of the other 'were similar to his own', the thought expanded by Schutz into the Idealization of Reciprocity:

1. The disinclination to distrust one's partner in language, for this seems implicated in the idea that the reciprocity is to be idealized, that it actually does not exist in the ideal form assumed.
  2. The narcissistic tendency, as part of the superstitious 'blind trust', to equate one's idiolect with the language as commonly spoken (Saussure's synchronic aspect of language). It amounts to a prejudice in favour of one's own interpretation, *the anarchist error*.
  3. The disinclination to disturb existing structures of trust, loyalty, obedience in whatever group one is, whether political, religious, or of the dominant scientific 'tradition' of one's day.
  4. From 'authority's' point of view the tendency to see mismatches to the public interpretation always as disloyalty, treason, etc., *the authoritarian error*.
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1. The tendency to consider all adjustments only permissible from established figures, whether those of the authority recognizes or those the anarchic periphery does.
  2. To be in favour of strict logic, agreed objectivity, familiar categorizations, tested criteria, etc.— to the exclusion of all unexpected adjustments.
  3. The failure of love in not being prepared for possible deep-seated disagreement, in not realizing that conflict is an inescapable risk in the language-game— furthermore, especially when a disagreement has not been *consciously planned by one's interlocutor*.

Now these are suggested reasons why the insight has been ignored, but there may be more.

The prejudice against it revealed itself in unconscious resistance in the academic world. Take Fritz Mauthner's case; he found that he was unable to progress in promotion because of his views. Or that of Roy Wood Sellars, who, late in life, spoke of his disappointment that his 'Critical Realism' awoke no response in the philosophical community at large; he confessed that he 'did not know why' (Wood Sellars 1970, 141). F. C. S. Schiller, finding himself sidelined by the fashionable philosophers of his time (the 1920's and 30's), retired from Oxford to the United States where he hoped his championship of William James and his consequent critique of linguistic philosophy would be more warmly received. The linguist Sir Alan Gardiner, having stated what was in effect a Schutzian analysis of the speech

situation, confessed himself wary of current philosophical criticism and held back from pursuing his insight further (Gardiner 1932, 81). George Steiner's remarkable book *After Babel* (1998), in which he examined the notion of the Idiolect, has not received from mainline philosophers the attention it deserves.

The false hint of relativism and solipsism keeps possible opponents away —though one can hardly call them 'opponents' as they never seriously do any opposing. The slightest of inquiries, though, would have unearthed the plain fact that, since, within the theory, 'selves' are just as much continually corrigible as any other 'entity', they fall within the risk that human faith brings with it. Accusations of relativism and solipsism, therefore, pass this theory by, as does that of 'postmodernism', which is believed to wrap up these vices in impenetrable jargon— this charge can hardly be levelled at Wilhelm von Humboldt or William James.

What is extraordinary is the fact that no arguments have been produced to subject the Idealization of Reciprocity claim to careful refutation. The ignoring is so powerful it ignores its own operation. A critic would also have had to cross disciplinary boundaries to create a satisfactory opposing case, and, in academia, there are career obstacles to doing that, especially between philosophy and anthropology.

## **(Step 8) The Scope and Simplicity of the Theory**

The fact that the discussion must cross-disciplinary boundaries is a positive feature of the theory, for it testifies to its *scope*, and scope is one of the common characteristics of a good theory, as *issimplicity*.

### **(8a) Scope**

Let us first indicate the scope and fertility of the theory. This is no place to display all of the riddles would solve outright; a quick list must suffice. The light it sheds on language is one of these: it is a proposal which leads to a defensible account of *the origin of language* (with help from the anthropologist Gregory Bateson [Bateson, 1980, Wright 2008]. The fact that a wish to inquire into the origin of language used to be regarded in linguistics as naïve, even cranky, is further evidence of the prejudicial fear). At the same time it offers a novel view of logic, rhetoric and grammar, offering an explanation of the Synchronic/Diachronic distinction, of predication, of the nature of the Joke, the Story and the Trope, and such conundrums as the Ship of Theseus and the Cretan Liar (Bateson, 1978: 79-81; Wright 1976, 2005, 2011).

Outside language there is the placing of *human* faith as the basis of religion and patriotism, and, highly politically relevant at this juncture in history, *as it accounts for the source of fundamentalisms of all kinds* (which are not 'faiths' at all but superstitions); it also demonstrates that the so-called 'secular' can have faith at its heart. All tyrants, all

totalitarian oppressors, all dictators. religious or political, are thus superstitious: a proper faith is open to adjustment. It should be deserving of some astonishment that the source of so much oppression, from bullying at school to genocide between social groups, can be traced to a misconstrual of a linguistic requirement in communication.

As a single indication of the scope, take its account of the continuance of human society over time as new members are born and the old die (see the Mexican Wave Analogy above, and the remark about immortality in Section 5). The account is a *scientific* one. Its subject of investigation is the *interplay* between members, for that is what it is, the equivalent of a play. Ask what a scientific account of a stage play could be—and, further, why no scientist has yet inquired into its nature.

A scientific account of a stage play would have to explain the operation of mutual imagination among actors and audience and how that proceeded. It would have to explain the differences in understanding and yet the measure of co-ordination that was achieved—as has been done in the Schutzian explanation of the operation of language. All the brains, all the bodies of those present contribute to that continuing social act, yet all are projecting in imagination a dramatic ‘reality’ supposedly common to them all. That fictive projection is actually going on in those minds, so it behoves science to explain the material basis of that collaborative fictive projection —indeed, of what such *mutual imagination* consists. Similarly with *the progress of our social history*: we are all projecting it, including our notion of the ‘selves’ who are doing the projecting, and the social groupings supporting selves and which selves maintain. However, we do not ourselves have scientific access to the neurophysiological systems that uphold that projection. As a result, for us the ‘selves’ float in the social play seemingly without a material base, and their notions of themselves are always in flux, defined by the state of the game of ‘self-definitions’. Hence, the fear of acknowledging the risk to ‘identity’.

We can also here perceive the reason why science has been loth to ask scientific questions of drama: it would bring to the surface the fact that the whole would-be logical edifice that we have taken it to be would be revealed for what it is, a mutually maintained, dramatic act of hope— and, ironically, one acknowledging that no total explanation, no ‘theory of *everything*’, can be forthcoming.

The outstanding difference from a stage play lies in the obvious fact that the words and actions performed have no immediate motivational consequences: in a stage play no one suffers or dies or enjoys sensory delight (this is why one could hardly be attending to the film if one is wondering whether Andie McDowell and Hugh Grant in the *Four Weddings and a Funeral* film were enjoying their kisses, or whether the guests at the banquet in *Macbeth* like their food and drink; the theory also suggests why the superstition of physical danger in acting *Macbeth* exerts a strange fascination).



This theory renders harmless Gilbert Ryle's jibe about there being a 'ghost in the machine' (Ryle 1949, 17ff), as we are metaphorically 'machines' that are making real 'ghosts', that is, *the dramatic projections of everyone including our 'selves'*. This is why there has been talk of the 'spiritual' nature of the 'soul'. Many a theorist has regarded 'the soul' as invisible, outside measurement, impervious to experiment, and non-scientific, and thus 'unreal'. You could say the same of the characters in a play being performed, but 'they' as part of our ongoing imaginings are undeniably a part of the real, and, as certainly therefore, a justifiable subject of scientific study.

When we die, our influence, 'good' or 'bad' as judged in the ongoing game, continues: this is what 'immortality' really consists of. It is not centrally in the active memories of those who knew you personally. Thomas Hardy has a pathetic poem—'Her Immortality'—in which a fading ghost visits a living person with the complaint that, when the latter ceases to remember her, her 'immortality' will be over (Hardy 1952, 48). This is a mistaken way of satisfactorily accounting for intimations of immortality. Immortality is not an occult illusion as the aggressive atheists have it, but the Tennysonian 'echoes' that really occur in the minds of the surviving members, that is, the multifarious *influences* that we have had upon each other's actions. Clearly there is no personal immortality, nor is there *a fortiori* any bodily immortality, although bodily immortality has been often used as a metaphor for what actually happens. The fact that evil 'souls' as well as good ones go on existing in the superstitious account is an attempt to make sense of the persistence in the living drama of their influence on others; in the Christian version, evil people and the devils who tempted them are as 'immortal' as the good. Within the great dramatic social game lies all the 'spiritual' continuation that old religion was trying to conceptualize. After our death, our human value lies in this legacy and constitutes all the immortality there is. One can add that this perspective upon human life should make this non-occult 'immortality' one of our personal aims. Take Shakespeare's sonnet 'Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea' which concludes with the question how beauty can be saved from the time's destruction, and answers,

O! none, unless this miracle have might  
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

Here is a case where the word 'miracle' has something in addition to its a metaphorical and hyperbolic meaning, namely because something of Shakespeare's *influence* still survives today in the great drama of our human life on this planet and not in any occult sense. It is a 'miracle' that in principle science could explain, thus supporting this view of what faith requires. This particular utterance can obviously taken as exemplary of all utterances.

Aggressive atheists are thus mistaken in dismissing the notion as a mythical invention when it can be given a scientific place in our assessment of the human as a mutual act of open-

eyed imagination which continues in the living, and, because it should be *played*, it has no objectivity at the *mundane* level. Faith for Dawkins is no virtue at all—it is even ‘pernicious’ to teach it as one (Dawkins, 2006, 247); Hitchens equates it with blind belief (Hitchens 2007, 254-9); similarly for Dennett, faith is a ‘meme’ that encourages you with Mark Twain ‘to believe what you know ain’t so’; for Onfray, all entertaining of myth, such as a vision of an after-life, is ‘a really deadly sin’ (Onfray 2007, 217). These Enlightenment-inspired thinkers are so set against the ‘irrationalism’ of religion that they have ignored the notion of human faith altogether.

Russell’s stress on the key notion of unique reference enshrined in the word ‘this’ can now be seen as an unconscious acknowledgement of the mutually imagined singularity that has to be upheld by *faith*. Read Chapter II of his *The Problems of Philosophy* and you will witness the strange spectacle of a discerning mind unable to subject itself to its own analysis. We can also now understand that this too is the source of the aggression of those misguided atheists: the fact that they have been compared to the fundamentalists they berate is thus not without significance. Like them, they cannot play seriously. A serious atheism has to make space for play in its theories.

The criminal’s response that such a slack morality, one that asserts that there is no divine denunciation or ‘punishment’ of ‘evil acts’ to back up the legal and social order, contains its own refutation. Such a response ignores what the theory has to say about the ‘individual’, namely, that there is no single self to be found that is aware of its own paths to happiness. The criminal certainly cannot define ‘his or her own’ path. Criminals always place a huge value upon gang loyalty for they have foregone loyalty at the public level. There can, for example, be no financial aggrandisement that can ensure human satisfaction outside the great game, no way criminals can ensure that a satisfying end to his endless scheming can be achieved. But believing that life can be securely defined outside the great language-game-*with-others* is a recipe for personal disaster. Of course, there are instances where the ‘criminals’ have a right to contest a law which constrains them, as in Bangkok today (May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014) where a minister in a former government is being imprisoned by the leaders of the military coup for ‘a crime against the state’.

The way to sustain human faith is to be well aware with Mark Twain that the myths are *what ‘ain’t so’* and yet perform them dramatically *as if it were so* until a mismatch of understandings brings about a negotiation that reaches a satisfactory outcome—if such a one is possible, because what constitutes undue sacrifice is not a given, not metaphysically engraved in the blankness of the real. There is only one reassurance to be had: that for two hostile people, this theory would help them to know beforehand that enmity was always possible and, paradoxically, love is the only possible solution. In performing it dramatically you know perfectly well that it ‘ain’t so’ (and we have seen that many a child at play or an actor could tell you as much), but you do it just the same, if you judge that the myth has a worthwhile symbolic meaning. We do it happily with Santa Claus, and consequently enjoy

the myth of worldwide, generous, familial love. Those parents who initially try to make their children believe in a 'real' Santa Claus cannot play, and, worse, do not understand that their children can! The so-called 'children's fantasy film' *Tooth Fairy* is based on the false assumption that children prefer being thus led by the nose; the whole film sentimentalizes children as sweet little innocents who must be quarantined from the adult world as long as possible, a world that is dourly objective, devoid of imagination.

*Pace* Onfray, what is 'a deadly sin' is to believe superstitiously that personal survival is what real immortality consists in, when there is a justifiable alternative way to give a scientific place to the notion. That the universe may destroy the great drama on our planet at any time is irrelevant to the value it should have for us, at the same moment we accept that there is no future 'reward'. This is what a good 'faithist', as I have called him —i.e. an atheist who sees the centrality of *human* faith—should do (Wright 2012, 53ff).

Even if you take the non-philosophical aspects of the theory alone, its claim to be a fruitful one is worth considering. It is unique as well as radical in its bringing the ethical power of faith to bear upon knowledge. Even though it prove mistaken, the *scope* of the theory is undeniable.

### **(8b) Simplicity**

As regards that other criterion of good theories, its *simplicity*, consider this anecdote from my past.

A distinguished philosopher from the University of Buffalo, the late Peter Hare, heard me explain this view of the human, and his response was immediate: he said, "It can't be that simple!" I here submit that this is one reason, perhaps the most important one, why the philosophical *riddle* of the Idealization of Reciprocity has been neglected for it is strange as well as difficult to see that solidarity, friendship, affection, and love are involved in all our 'identifications', scientific as well as mundane.

Finally, one may quote, appropriately, from a story, Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings*. As the laughing Gandalf said of the *riddle* 'Speak Friend and enter' (*sic*, i.e. without commas round 'Friend') that was on the door into the mines of Moria, a statement that the humble hobbit Merry had queried—and which we can now take as the password to the entrance to language:

I have it! Of course, of course! Absurdly simple, like most riddles when you see the answer . . . I was wrong after all, and Gimli too. Merry, of all people, was on the right track. The opening word was inscribed on the archway all the time! The translation should have been *Say 'Friend' and enter*. I had only to speak the Elvish word for *friend* and the doors opened. Too simple for a learned loremaster in these suspicious days!" (Tolkien 1993, 325). 'Friend', the password to the entrance to language—and to the human.

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