

**Published in**  
*On Pragmatics*, ed. Gunnar Skirbekk,  
Skriftserien nr. 20, Department of Philosophy, University of Bergen  
ISSN 0802-4065  
ISBN 82-90809-39-5

**Gunnar Skirbekk**

## **Rationality – universal and plural? A Narrative<sup>i</sup>**

There are various ways of doing philosophy. There are various ways of making points and of trying to be correctly understood by a given audience, or of trying to convince them to change their minds. We redescribe, we point out, we present reasons – and in trying to present convincing reasons we have to take counterarguments into account, and then we are, at least virtually, already in a discursive situation with co-discussants and their points of view.

In the attempt to make sure that the points one is making are well understood one may try to describe one's position and the philosophical landscape as it is seen from this point of view. However, one way of describing where one is standing consists in telling how one got there – from where one is coming, and why. That kind of narrative has the advantage of illuminating not merely one's actual position, but the direction of one's thinking.

Certainly, doing philosophy entails various activities, such as reading, writing, listening and talking,<sup>ii</sup> and there are genuinely philosophical learning processes and experiences. However, acquiring such experiences, passing through such learning processes, does take time. It takes time to become well acquainted with some philosophical distinctions, for instance in biomedical ethics, and also to acquire the mastery of a critical discussion around these distinctions. These are formative processes which increase our sensitivity for these concepts and cases - but such learning processes are time consuming.

In this paper I shall try to illuminate my point of view on some aspects of modern rationality by presenting a kind of narrative of the philosophical experiences that led me there. It is a brief and simplified version, and a version reconstructed in retrospect. At best I can hope to make myself somewhat better understood. A deeper understanding would demand time-consuming and mutual learning processes concerning the crucial concepts and cases. My narrative represents the first steps in such a discursive process, nothing more.

### **First stage**

This reconstructive narrative starts with classical analytic philosophy – since, for me, the analytical way of doing philosophy turned out to be useful for the following reasons:<sup>iii</sup>

a) Discussions on category mistakes (such as "seven is green") and contextual inconsistencies (such as "the King of France is bold") made it clear that there is a *third epistemological category*, different from that of empirical truth or falsity and that of formal (positive or negative) analyticity.

b) This third category points to necessary *conditions for meaningfulness*, more precisely, to conceptual and pragmatic preconditions for cognitive meaningfulness, in terms of true or false

statements. In neglecting or violating such preconditions, as in cases of category mistakes and of contextual or pragmatic inconsistencies, we end up with some meaninglessness or absurdity.<sup>iv</sup> This opens for "transcendental arguments" in terms of informal *reductio ad absurdum*-arguments,<sup>v</sup> or "arguments from absurdity": By neglecting or violating some such precondition we get an absurdity, and by reflecting on this absurdity we may become aware of the role of the neglected or violated precondition, that is, its status as a necessity for meaningfulness. This is not a transcendental argument in a traditional Kantian sense. These are conceptual arguments within a linguistic and pragmatic philosophy, not within a philosophy of consciousness. Starting with something given (or rather, a description of something given), the constitutive necessities that are shown by these arguments remain *relative to* this point of departure. In a semantic perspective this point opens for a discourse of "frame and content", the constitutive nature of these preconditions then being seen as dependent on a conception of the given frame-content relationship and thus as contingent in a philosophical sense.

c) Whatever the interpretation of the overall epistemic status of these preconditions, the analytic way of spelling them out makes us aware of *pluralities* of "breakdowns". For instance, the utterance "my dog counts to ten" might be either true or false, whereas the utterance "my dog counts to one thousand and eleven" is certainly empirically false, in the world known to us. Equally, the utterance "my dog is green (by nature)" is empirically false, in the world known to us, whereas the utterance "my dog reads newspapers" would probably rather be seen as nonsensical, not merely as empirically false – and even more so for the utterance "my dog has a PhD in philosophy": There is no point in investigating this claim empirically in order to find out. This utterance is so empirically implausible that it is most likely to be seen as absurd. But it is not absurd in the sense that we could not make a cartoon of a dog doing all sorts of things, not only reading newspapers but also rightfully obtaining its PhD - in Disney-like movies this is done all the time. If a case like this is said to be absurd, it should at least be added that such cases are thinkable in the sense just indicated. However, there are utterances which are absurd in the sense of being unthinkable, such as the utterance "my dog is the first day of May". In this case there is no way of making any cartoon, not even for a Disney movie.

The point is now that these cases do show us a *plurality* of "falsehoods", and even a *graduality* from empirical falsity to down-right absurdity: leading from empirical falsehood that is empirically tested, to empirical falsehood that is so implausible that an empirical examination does not make sense, and further to absurdities that are thinkable, ending with strictly meaningless utterances. This is the tentative conclusion from the first stage.

## Second stage

With the *pragmatic turn* the semantic dichotomy of frame and content is overcome (as it were) in favor of an analysis of act-constitutive features. Speech-act analyses are carried out. The pupils of the later Wittgenstein are here of interest, such as the praxeology of Jakob Meløe.<sup>vi</sup> His way of working philosophically is characterized by detailed and cautious analyses of constitutive features in selected examples of simple actions – constitutive in the sense that a given action would have been impossible without these features.

For instance, that which is constitutive for certain activity is not the whole of the agent's body as it actually is, but those parts and capabilities that are required for the agent in carrying out this specific act, for example the forging of a horse shoe. These parts and capabilities represent the body that is necessary for this very act; without them this kind of act would have been impossible.<sup>vii</sup> Likewise, the insights that are required for the agent to do what he is doing represent the act-constitutive insights.<sup>viii</sup> And the objects needed for this act represent the act-

constitutive objects.<sup>ix</sup> Hence, there are pragmatic (act-constitutive) necessities, not merely empirical facts and semantic decisions, not merely contingency and purely logical necessities.

Such a cautious analysis of constitutive factors inherent in chosen examples of acts could be seen as a "transcendental" reasoning: by a *via negativa*, that is, by some negation of a factor that is constitutive for meaning, we are faced with a meaninglessness, and from the recognition of this absurdity we try reflectively to see the constitutive nature of the factor denied. This is thus a genuinely philosophical use of examples, trying to obtain better insight into some precondition, not merely a pedagogical one, using examples to illustrate for other persons some point already known by the acting person.

Some preconditions are act-specific,<sup>x</sup> others (like "being-in-the-world" of "tautologous" bodies and objects) could be seen as common to all actions.<sup>xi</sup> Hence, some of these body-related act-constitutive necessities are "contingent necessities", as it were – in the sense that our bodily constitution could in principle have been different from what it is. But given that it is as it is, some specific bodily features are constitutive for specific acts; in that sense they are necessary for this or that kind of action, even though it is somehow contingent, in a developmental perspective, that we have the body we have - but not absolutely contingent, if we are to remain "we".<sup>xii</sup>

This is a pragmatic approach, not merely a semantic one. It is case-oriented and cautious, self-reflectively critical also for one's own use of language, thus avoiding "big words" that are not contextually or discursively situated. But we could object that its reflectiveness is often kept implicit and its skepticism for big words and airy theory has often led to a disregard for philosophy as an activity worth being analyzed and to a selection of examples that is too narrowly tied to simple craftsmanship and thus too remote from the modern world.

### Third stage

Scientific and scholarly activities are examples of modern activities. They are institutionally situated and normatively regulated, for instance by the methodological norms of scientific and scholarly research and argumentation. This does not mean that there is no problem in pointing out these norms, nor that they are always obeyed. But there are reasons to claim that some such norms are constitutive for these activities, and case-oriented analyses could therefore be applied also for such acts.

This is what Knut Erik Tranøy has done, in focusing on what he calls "basic cognitive acts".<sup>xiii</sup> He makes a distinction between two kinds of basic cognitive acts, two kinds that are closely connected: "acquisition" of truth claims, where a person "accepts, rejects, or suspends judgment", and "communication", where a person "asserts, denies, or keeps quiet". Simply stated, the former focuses on the person-to-argument relation, the latter on the person-to-person relation. Since these analyses of our "basic cognitive acts" are themselves scholarly activities there is here an element of self-reference, indicating the transcendental-pragmatic character of these analyses.<sup>xiv</sup>

These are a few of the cases discussed by Tranøy:<sup>xv</sup>

- 1) "It is not permitted to accept p if p is known to be false."
- 2) "It is obligatory to reject p if p is known to be false."
- 3) "It is obligatory to accept p if p is known to be true."
- 4) "It is not permitted to assert p unless one has evidence for p."<sup>xvi</sup>

These examples are formulated in a legalistic language. Tranøy suggests that a moral language would do. He also suggests that the epistemic status of these norms is that of constitutive

conditions, since we could argue by the use of arguments from absurdity: a denial of any of these norms implies an absurdity.

What exactly is their epistemic status? With such examples we can "look and see" (to find out), by careful analyses and discussions in each case. But here, in this narrative, we have to do it in a more sweeping way: when we consider the three former cases (from the "acquisition" class), it could be argued that these norms are binding for any sane person. A sane and rational person who realizes that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " (as an example of a  $p$  known to be true) has to accept it and cannot reject it. This seems to be a necessity which is constitutive for being a person. If someone breaks any of these norms, we would probably say that this person has severe mental problems; we would see it as a *mental problem* rather than a *moral* (or *legal*) one.

However, the cases in which the validity question can be decided with certainty merely represent borderline cases. Examples of such borderline cases could be: some cases of logical deduction (when no errors intervene), some cases of simple perception (in the absence of illusions), some cases of lifeworld certainties (such as the claim that life is finite), and – we could add – some philosophical arguments related to the avoidance of performative contradictions. But in most cases we have merely opinions that are more or less well established, that is, claims or opinions that are examined by communication and argumentation; the "acquisition"-group is thus connected to the "communication"-group: that which we accept as true in these cases (which are not the borderline cases) is presented to us through communication and argumentation. Thus we have the well-known principle of the "force of the better argument," a principle that plays a constitutive role in argumentation. Tranøy writes:<sup>xvii</sup> "We blame someone who is unwilling to accept  $p$  (or who rejects  $p$ ) when there are adequate arguments in favor of  $p$ ." In such cases the constitutive norm has undeniably the epistemic status of a *moral* norm. At the same time there are also, as indicated, some cases (some borderline cases) in which the "must" (or the "should") primarily appears as *constitutive*, and hardly as moral.

When we consider the latter case, from the "communication" class, the picture is different. It is possible to lie, that is, to tell others what one holds to be untrue, in a sense in which it is not possible to lie to oneself.<sup>xviii</sup> For that reason these norms, of the "communication" class, have more of a *moral* status: Breaking them is blameworthy, not insane. But are they *constitutive*? An affirmative answer requires more of an *extended argument* than in the former cases.

(1) We can here argue by referring to our dependence on one another, as to the trade of truth, as it were: We are all fallible and finite, and cannot possibly by ourselves check all truth claims; hence we need each other for second-hand knowledge. A scientific or scholarly community therefore *requires* these norms for mutual trust. Not that these norms are never broken or violated now and then, but they are needed as confidence constitutive norms for this form of inquiry.

(2) But we could also argue in terms of universal pragmatics, which requires the acquisition of communicative competence: Mutual trust is needed – which, again, does not mean that one denies the empirical fact that persons also behave untrustworthily in many cases.

Each of these two approaches ((1) and (2)) implies an extensive argumentation in favor of the constitutive nature of the basic norms of the "communication" class.

Three points are worth making:

a) The discussion of such cases points at major philosophical questions, namely those of the relationship between the constitutive and the normative (the moral).

b) The way of doing philosophy is that of careful case-analyses, in order to see and to show - careful analyses, with respect for nuances (as we say: "The Devil is hidden in the details").

c) In carrying out such analyses of the various cases, we may see that the epistemic status is not always identical from one case to the next: We have indicated that we can say that all the four cases contain "constitutive norms", but we have to argue more extensively in order to show their constitutive nature in the latter case than in the three former cases, and the norms of the latter case can more easily be called "moral" than in the former three. If this is true, it illustrates a variety of epistemic statuses for these constitutive norms, and it indicates that some norms can be called moral in a sense which the others cannot. Both points are philosophically important: an epistemic variety within transcendental reasoning, and a gradual difference in relation to the moral element involved in these constitutive norms – two points that suggest radical answers to the question of the unity of transcendental reason and to the much debated question as to how constitutive features can also be morally binding norms. These answers are made possible by our "modest" method: a skepticism for big talk in philosophy, for working abstractly with big concepts and positions, and a confidence in careful analyses of a variety of cases.

#### **Fourth stage**

Apel and Habermas are philosophers who have made the "pragmatic-linguistic turn" as a change of position and as a learning process, but hardly as a change in the way of doing philosophy; for the latter point (the new way of doing philosophy) there is more to learn from Wittgensteinian praxeologists than from Apel and Habermas. But both of them (Apel and Habermas) took part in a valuable elaboration of speech-act theory towards a universal pragmatics, although the two of them ended up conceiving it somewhat differently.

Habermas conceives his own work as one of reconstruction. He does not try to elaborate arguments from absurdity, and he thinks that Apel's transcendental arguments from performative self-contradiction has only limited validity, restricted to the argumentative activity itself, without sufficient strength in other forms of discourse and communication. Whatever this controversy might imply, both Apel and Habermas support the general view that a universal pragmatics can be established: a theory of speech-act immanent validity claims (intelligibility, truth, rightness, and trustworthiness), two of these claims (truth and rightness) being argumentatively "redeemable", namely, under ideal speech conditions, pointing towards an ideal consensus as a guarantee for truth or rightness. But Habermas has all along had greater problems with the latter claims than Apel has had, and partly for this reason Habermas has felt a need to support his weakened version of universal pragmatics with other theories, such as theories of socialization and conceptual-moral development,<sup>xix</sup> and theories of cultural modernization and communicative rationality,<sup>xx</sup> and theories of the normative impact of the legal institution in modern societies.

What remains unsatisfactory in Habermas, despite all these impressive theoretical projects, is the lack of conceptual clarity through case-oriented analyses. With all his skepticism towards traditional philosophical theories and positions he remains basically confident in his own work with vast and vague concepts. Case-oriented analyses, also for arguments from absurdity, are not part of his philosophical practice.

Apel works in a similar way, but with his transcendental-pragmatics. We will comment on Apel in the next section. But first we will make an observation about Habermas: Since Habermas doubts that transcendental-pragmatics can successfully be done the way Apel believes it can be done, and since Habermas does not see any praxeological way of improving the Apelian project, he proceeds with reduced philosophical ambitions and relies partly on the support of alternative

social and legal theories, and partly on the usage of conceptual dichotomies in order to avoid epistemic relativism, and above all to avoid relativism concerning basic moral norms. Hence he has operated with stiff dichotomies between Man and nature, justification and application, norms and values – dichotomies that turn out to be problematic when analyzed carefully. To the extent that the Apelian approach, taking arguments from absurdity seriously, can be improved and strengthened by case-oriented and pluralist analyses, to the same extent the Habermasian approach could have been improved and led away from its conceptual abstractness and stiff dichotomies.

This remark leads to our next section, on the notion of pragmatic rationality, through an improved version of the Apelian project, improved through a mutual criticism with a praxeological way of doing philosophy, inspired by the later Wittgenstein. For the support of this claim, we rely on the learning processes delineated through the various stages of this sketchy narrative: from classical analytic philosophy (1), over to Wittgensteinian praxeology (2) and basic cognitive acts in the philosophy of scientific and scholarly inquiries (3), to a revised version of transcendental pragmatics (4).

### **Fifth stage**

Apel is to a large extent a fallibilist and a defender of "the many rationalities".<sup>xxi</sup> At the same time he is an ardent defender of transcendental-pragmatic reasoning qua ultimate justification (*Letztbegründung*). In this sense he is certainly a foundationalist and a spokesman for *die eine Vernunft*, for the uniqueness and unavoidability of performative and discursive reason: We have to avoid performative self-contradictions!

It is important to see that Apel's reasoning is not deductive, but pragmatically self-referential. This is precisely what is overlooked by those who raise the counterargument that Apel runs into the Munchausen-trilemma of regression, circle or decisionism.<sup>xxii</sup> In fact, Apel argues extensively by the *via negativa* of arguments from absurdity, that is, from performative self-contradiction. He points at performative self-contradictions as strictly meaningless (*sinnlos*), and through this insight he tries to formulate the norms or principles which are violated and which thus are pragmatic preconditions for meaningfulness.

However, Apel seems to assume that there is but one kind of absurdity (*Sinnlosigkeit*) and hence, that the performatively established preconditions have one and the same epistemic status, that of strict unavoidability (*Nichthintergebarkeit*). But how do we know? I would say: only by looking carefully at the various cases, to see whether the various cases of performative absurdity are identical or whether there are differences among them.

This means that the pragmatic-linguistic turn should not merely be conceived as a change of position - away from the philosophy of consciousness towards a pragmatic-linguistic approach - but also as a change in the way of doing philosophy: more case-oriented, more self-critical as to the adequacy of one's own theoretical concepts.<sup>xxiii</sup>

I would argue that if this approach is chosen, we would see that there is a certain plurality of "absurdities" also in these cases.<sup>xxiv</sup> But in this narrative we cannot discuss this hypothesis thoroughly. We will only take a look at some of Apel's own cases in order to indicate how this work could have been done.<sup>xxv</sup>

- (1) "I hereby claim that I do not exist."
- (2) "I hereby claim to you that you do not exist."

- (3) "I defend, as a claim for which there can be consensus, the proposal that we should in principle replace consensus as a goal for discussion with dissent as a goal for discussion."

We here disregard the cases of basic validity claims inherent in speech acts.<sup>xxvi</sup> We restrict ourselves to these three utterances, in order to make some preliminary remarks on the question of the relationship between unity and plurality in arguments of performative self-contradiction.

First point: in these cases the pragmatic claims are stated explicitly and incorporated into the linguistic formulation. Thereby the performative contradictions are easier to see, which might be an advantage; but at the same time they are given a semantic form, thereby making their performative status less explicit.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Second point: There are conceptual ambiguities. For instance, in the formulation "I hereby claim to you that you do not exist", the word "you" is ambiguous. It may refer to a concrete person, capable of understanding what is said. But there are also many situations where this utterance makes sense even when the "you" is not a person who is present and capable of communicating. Think of the possibility of moving gradually towards the newly born or the newly deceased; in these cases, too, we can use a "you". Maybe the term "to you" is added in order to define "you" as a present person with whom one can communicate verbally. But also in that case the utterance is ambiguous, and this ambiguity influences the question of the unity or plurality of the absurdities created in the two first utterances.

To elucidate this ambiguity it might be useful to remind ourselves of the distinction between (i) *the borderline cases* of the "acquisition" class and (ii) the cases of this (acquisition) class that are related to "communication": The first utterance (in our list of cases from Apel) can be seen as an example of a "must" (of an obligatory shall), which is constitutive in the strong sense of the borderline cases of "acquisition" class, since the existence of the person who speaks represents a truth that this person *has to accept*. But the existence of "you", of the other person, is not unavoidable in the same sense, even if we accept that the capability to use personal pronouns is internally related to our communicative competence (as it is established in transcendental pragmatics). The affirmation of the existence of "you", of "you" as a person, depends on further arguments. Conclusion: The absurdities of these two utterances (in Apel's list) are not identical. Consequently, the constitutive preconditions for meaningfulness established by pragmatic contradictions are not epistemically identical either. If this argumentation is tenable there is a plurality inherent in the pragmatic-transcendental justification.

The last utterance on the list, on consensus as the goal of discussion, is theoretically more complicated than the two first utterances. One could here claim, opposing Apel on this point, that the role of the better argument would suffice and that the term consensus is here inconvenient, since it is ambiguous and since some reasonable interpretations of this term are philosophically problematical.<sup>xxviii</sup> Briefly stated, the question is not: "consensus or dissent as a goal for discussion?" – which is suggested in the third utterance. Consequently one should look for better ways in which the term consensus could be used in transcendental pragmatics.

General point: The lack of situatedness makes it hard to cope with the ambiguities of the terms that are used in Apel. To this objection Apel could answer that these cases are meant to be idealized cases: the points of universal pragmatics are located in the deep pragmatics competences. This answer is to be taken seriously, but then the proponents should also feel obliged to show by careful analyses how the relationship between the deep level and the everyday level could best be conceived.

The following two questions are crucial in this connection: What is a concept? Where are the concepts? For, if one chooses to start with high level concepts, tied up to theoretical positions, one gets the problem of how to apply them to concrete situations where real speech acts are performed. The varieties of language usage in actual speech acts may then appear as "merely empirical" and may therefore not be taken seriously on the philosophical level. However, this is exactly the position-oriented way of philosophizing that has been questioned ever since the pragmatic-linguistic turn, in favor of a more case-oriented and conceptually self-critical way of doing philosophy: When concepts are seen as inherent in our practices, and in our philosophical practices, then concepts are not something we merely possess through some theoretical position, but something that we time and again have to elaborate from the practices in which we are involved.<sup>xxix</sup> Certainly, these are tricky problems. Theoretical positions and perspectives are important for the concepts we use in order to cope with the world and try to see things straight. Yet nor should the varieties of our conceptual usages be overruled and overrun by some conceptual schemes taken from some theoretical position.

My argument consists in pointing to the need, in philosophy, to pay attention to the actual and plural usages of concepts in various kinds of situations. In short, I am warning against a strong confidence in the superiority of one's own explicit and theory-bound concepts. Therefore, critical questions should be raised as to the claim that there is but one kind of performative absurdity and hence that the epistemic status of the established preconditions is one and the same in all these cases, that is, as to the view that all performative contradictions are strictly impossible and all transcendental-pragmatic preconditions strictly necessary.

To the extent that this argumentation is tenable, it does not mean that transcendental-pragmatic reasoning is weakened. It means that this kind of reasoning is less "unitarian" and more plural. It could even be said that this argumentation strengthens the transcendental-pragmatic project since some of the counterarguments are taken better care of by this pluralistic and case-oriented way of doing the job. If so, we have pointed towards a more promising way of dealing with the question of justification of basic norms and of communicative competence, including communicative rationality.

### **Sixth stage**

It is time to conclude: (1) In this reconstructed narrative of the learning processes leading up to a notion of a modern pragmatically conceived rationality we started within classical analytic philosophy, paying attention to its argumentative virtues, with special focus on arguments from absurdity as a genuinely philosophical way of doing conceptual analyses, at the same time as a plurality and even a certain graduality could be pointed out in the interplay between empirical falsity and philosophically established absurdities. (2) In the case-oriented analyses of basic human acts, undertaken by followers of the later Wittgenstein (the praxeologists), one pays attention to the pragmatic dimension, not primarily the semantics – as one way of making the pragmatic-linguistic turn – thereby trying to show the factors that are constitutive for meaning, inherent in the different acts. (3) In order to focus on modern cases, not primarily on simple acts from craftsmanship, we moved on to the pragmatic analysis of the constitutive norms of scientific and scholarly inquiry, including argumentation, referring to the gradual interplay between the primarily constitutive nature of some such norms and others that are also moral by nature. (4) Continuing the reflection of the nature of pragmatic preconditions we approached the attempts made by Apel and Habermas to establish a pragmatic conception of speech-acts and communication. Speech-act inherent validity claims are crucial for both. To avoid some of the counterarguments raised against the strict version of transcendental-pragmatics as in Apel,



Habermas has elaborated various theoretical approaches. However, leaving the transcendental argumentation aside, he has tried to avoid relativism by insisting on dichotomies of various kinds. Nevertheless his dichotomies, his high level theorizing in relation to social sciences and his relative neglect of philosophical arguments in favor of his normative notion of rationality and communication are all under attack - this criticism implies that Apel's approach remains a challenge to Habermas. (5) But to strengthen his philosophy, Apel would have to pay more attention to a conceptually self-critical and case-oriented way of doing philosophy; thereby his somewhat essentialist and monolithic philosophy would have to be changed in favor of a more plural and flexible way of doing philosophy and of conceiving philosophical insights.

These are the main steps of a retrospectively reconstructed learning process, which maybe also delineates some decisive stages in the development of modern philosophy – and if so, all the more it might also be of a more general interest.

## References

- Apel, Karl-Otto (1996) (co-ed. and co-author) *Die eine Vernunft und die vielen Rationalitäten*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Böhler, Dietrich (1986) (co-ed. and co-author) *Die pragmatische Wende*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Dorschel, Andreas (1993) (co-ed. and co-author) *Transzendentalpragmatik*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Fjelland, Ragnar (1997) (co-ed. and co-author) *Philosophy Beyond Borders*. Bergen: SVT Press.
- Grimen, Harald (1997) "Consensus and Normative Validity". *Inquiry* 40.
- Hollis, Martin (1982) (co-ed. and co-author) *Rationality and Relativism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Iltting, Karl-Heinz (1994) "Der naturalistische Fehlschluss bei Kant", in *Grundfragen der praktischen Philosophie*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Keuth, Herbert (1993) *Erkenntnis oder Entscheidung. Zur Kritik der kritischen Theorie*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr.
- Kuhlmann, Wolfgang (1987) (ed. and co-author) *Philosophie und Begründung*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Lee, Silver M. (1999) *Remaking Eden: Cloning and Beyond in a Brave New World*. London: Phoenix Press.
- Rorty, Richard (1989) *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ryle, Gilbert (1945) *Philosophical Arguments*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Skirbekk, Gunnar (1958) *Nihilisme?* Oslo: Tanum.
- Skirbekk, Gunnar (1983) (ed. and coauthor) *Praxeology*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Skirbekk, Gunnar (1993) *Rationality and Modernity*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press. Revised version, *Une praxéologie de la modernité*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999.

## Notes

- <sup>i</sup> This is a short version of a more extended article with (nearly) the same title.
- <sup>ii</sup> It also implies traveling, which in a philosophically relevant sense may open for creative meetings with thinkers from other philosophical traditions and with another training.
- <sup>iii</sup> In reality my way into philosophy started with existentialism, cf Skirbekk 1958: What follows is thus a reconstructed narrative. However, this narrative could be read as a key for my book Skirbekk 1993, revised and updated in Skirbekk 1999, German version forthcoming.
- <sup>iv</sup> As in the cases above.
- <sup>v</sup> For this philosophical use of the term "reductio ad absurdum", cf Ryle 1945.
- <sup>vi</sup> Cf Jakob Meløe "The Agent and His World", in Skirbekk 1983, pp. 13-29.
- <sup>vii</sup> In the terminology of Jakob Meløe: They represent the "tautologous" body, for this kind of activity.
- <sup>viii</sup> The agent knows what s/he has to know in order to do what s/he does.
- <sup>ix</sup> This kind of act-oriented analytic philosophy could thus be seen as a phenomenology, not a phenomenology of the kind that reflectively talks about all the preconditions for undertaking a phenomenological analysis, often without really doing it *in concreto*, but a phenomenology in the sense that constitutive features of acts, with agents and objects, are carefully described. In Jakob Meløe's praxeology, a critical point is made against Arne Næss's "possibilism" of the 1950s (cf Næss in Fjelland 1998, pp. 32-51): Whereas Næss at that time argued that there are different possible "total views" without any neutral ground for a rational choice among them (cf the later debate around Kuhn's paradigms), and that the lifeworld is too imprecise for philosophical analyses, Meløe tried to show that there are constitutive features in lifeworld activities; not everything is merely possibilism, decisionism and contingency. (Cf Richard Rorty's view on contingency, published at a later date, Rorty 1989.)
- <sup>x</sup> Being constitutive conditions for some specific kind of action.
- <sup>xi</sup> Cf Meløe's description of the berry-picker in his landscape, in his essay "The Agent and His World", reprinted in Fjelland 1997, pp. 77-92. This description represents *reductio ad absurdum*-argument directed against a physicalistic conception of human actions, and also against an attempt to supplement physicalistic descriptions with intentionality. In this sense we have a case of *Sinnkritik* (Apel): Preconditions (for meaning) are demonstrated by the *via negativa* of a *reductio ad absurdum*. In Meløe's praxeology we encounter cautious analyses of constitutive ("tautologous") factors for particular acts (such as the making of a pair of ski boots size 43 with the help of a given technology), but also analyses of constitutive factors for such acts (such as the general point concerning our basic act-inherent knowing in-the-world). The latter point indicates a "fundamental praxeology" (reminding of Heidegger's "fundamental ontology"), which means that these Wittgensteinian traditions should not be interpreted as being always contextualist.
- <sup>xii</sup> Concerning the possibility of a biotechnological reconstruction of Man, leading towards a "superman", see: Lee 1999.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Cf Knut Erik Tranøy, "Norms of Inquiry: Methodologies as Normative Systems", reprinted in Fjelland 1997, pp. 93-103.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Such careful and case-oriented analyses may help us to spell out the interplay between the constitutive and the moral nature of the various norms, which is a point of special philosophical interest. See later on the interplay between methodological rules, some primarily constitutive, without a moral status, others also with a moral status. As a counterview, cf Ilting 1994.
- <sup>xv</sup> One possible candidate for p is "2 + 2 = 4" (another, a false one, is "2 + 2 = 3"). These are certainly special cases (in the first case p is clearly true, in the latter it is clearly false). These cases illustrate well that we are bound to accept what we see as true, but they are hardly good examples to illustrate that we should not lie. (What could possibly be a reasonable situation to make sense of the false claim that "2 + 2 = 3"?) In most cases we are not so sure; cf Knut Erik Tranøy's own comments on this point, "Pragmatik der Forschung. Methodologien als normative Systeme", in Böhler 1986, pp. 36-54. Further analyses should be carried out concerning more realistic cases. Nevertheless, at this stage I think that the points I am making are tenable – but this claim is certainly open for counterarguments, related to such case-analyses.
- <sup>xvi</sup> NB This is an attempt to articulate norms of scientific and scholarly argumentation, not of everyday behavior.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Knut Erik Tranøy, "Pragmatik der Forschung. Methodologie als normative Systeme", in Böhler 1986, pp. 36-54; quotation p. 43. (Transl. G.S.)
- <sup>xviii</sup> But there are borderline cases of "lying to oneself", cf for instance the cases discussed by Jon Elster in "Belief, Bias and Ideology", in Hollis 1982, pp. 123-148.
- <sup>xix</sup> Using for instance Lawrence Kohlberg.
- <sup>xx</sup> Elaborating for instance the works of Max Weber.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Cf Apel 1996.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Cf the criticism made by Popperians such as Hans Albert. Recently also in Keuth 1993.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> In that sense, more hermeneutical.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Cf the arguments for similar pluralities in classical analytical philosophy (working with category mistakes and contextual inconsistencies).
- <sup>xxv</sup> The cases are taken from Karl-Otto Apel, "Fallibilismus, Konsensstheorie der Wahrheit und Letztbegründung", in Kuhlmann 1987, pp. 116-211. See also Matthias Kettner, "Ansatz zu einer Taxonomie performativer Selbstwidersprüche", in Dorschel 1993, pp. 187-211, especially note 10 pp. 196-197. Kettner rightly comments on the strange formulations and

the lack of careful analysis in Apel.

I here present, in my translation, Matthias Kettner's taxonomy and selection.

*Dialogue-inherent, necessary existence-presuppositions:*

(existence of speaker)

"I hereby claim that I do not exist".

(existence of addressee)

"I hereby claim to you that you do not exist".

*Discourse-inherent validity claims:*

(Intelligibility claim)

"I claim with an intelligibility claim that I do not make an intelligibility claim".

(Truth claim)

"I claim as true that I do not make a truth claim".

*Discourse-inherent interpersonal relations:*

(Equal rights)

"I claim that I do not have to recognize the equal rights of all possible [*denkbaren*] partners of argumentation".

(Free acceptability)

"I hereby claim as intersubjectively valid (= as freely acceptable to any discourse partner) that I do not have to recognize the norm of free acceptability of claims".

(Freedom from violence)

"I claim that all usage of language – also argumentation – is nothing but a practice of violence".

*Discourse-inherent goals:*

(Consensus formation)

"I defend, as a claim for which there can be consensus [*als konsensfähig*], the proposal that we should in principle replace consensus as a goal for discussion with dissent as a goal for discussion".

<sup>xxvi</sup> Cf Gunnar Skirbekk note 3, ch. III, where arguments from absurdity ("*reductio ad pathologicum*"-arguments) are presented, defending a distinction between (empirical) performance and (deep) competence.

<sup>xxvii</sup> This is no criticism of semantics as such. But in this connection it is important to emphasize the difference between a pragmatic and a semantic approach.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Cf for instance Harald Grimen, "Consensus and Normative Validity"; Grimen 1997, pp. 47-62.

<sup>xxix</sup> Cf Kjell S. Johannessen, "Rule Following, Intransitive Understanding, and Tacit Knowledge", in Fjelland 1997, pp. 205-227.