

Truth and justification

Reflections on epistemic notions and practices

Introductory remarks: how to get from justification to truth?

According to a classical view, truth should be conceived as the correspondence between a proposition and a state of affairs. A proposition is true when what it claims, corresponds with the state of affairs about which the claim is made. (Consequently we can only talk about a state of affairs to which true propositions correspond, by the use of true propositions.)

In *pragmatic discourse-theory*, as in Apel and early Habermas, the question of truth is approached by a discussion of the way we try to justify our truth-claims under ideal argumentative conditions: Truth is conceived as “absolute”, it is not gradual, nor time-dependent. Justification is gradual, more or less well founded, and context-dependent; it may turn out to be insufficient and incorrect (justification can “be lost”). At the same time, justification is supposed to be the procedure that leads to truth. But if justification is fallible and truth is not, how can we reach truth through justification? In short, how should we conceive the interrelationship between justification and truth so that we can both take care of their difference and their interconnection?

In pragmatic discourse-theory, a solution is supposed to be found in speech-act inherent presuppositions, interpreted as “idealizations”. Briefly stated: in communication we necessarily make speech-act inherent truth-claims and these claims presuppose a regulative idea of truth as an ideal consensus reached through argumentative procedures under ideal conditions. Hence, truth and discursive justification remain different, but due to these idealized preconditions they are also interconnected.¹

In this paper a basic familiarity with pragmatic discourse-theory is taken for granted, and I shall proceed by commenting on some questions in the current debate about the relationship between truth-claims and ideal justification through free and open argumentation.

In so doing I pay attention to the epistemic status of concepts involved.² In short, I shall look for underlying conceptual ambiguities and inadequacies in the double step from “truth-question” to “truth-

claim”, and from ”truth-claim” to ”discursive justification” under ideal conditions and with consensus as a regulative idea of truth.

These are intricate questions. And the way we go about these questions is related to how we conceive our concepts – for instance: should we primarily look for concepts in various kinds of *practices* or in theories or theoretical *positions*? In this paper I shall pay attention to the former, practice-oriented approach, though without neglecting the latter, theory-oriented one.

My main points

Before entering the various specific discussions I shall briefly delineate my main points. Such preliminary remarks, I assume, may help the reader to get a picture of where I stand within a broader philosophical landscape:

The *concept of truth* should not be restricted to propositional truth. There are also truth-questions related to (i) various kinds of *life-world certainties*, and there are special truth-questions related to (ii) *comprehensive texts*.³ – I defend these claims by the use of case-oriented discussions:

(i) Case-oriented discussions of *generalized fallibilism* may be helpful to spell out the epistemic status of such *life-world certainties*, that is, on the one hand, various kinds of *act-inherent “tacit knowing”*,⁴ on the other hand, some *statements that are taken for granted*, not because they belong to a special class of propositions, but because they are embedded in circumstances that do not allow for any reasonable doubt.⁵

(ii) Similar discussions may be helpful in spelling out the special truth-questions of *comprehensive texts*, compared to the status of truth-questions of singular propositions. Catchwords here are conceptual adequacy-claims and hermeneutics.

Such case-oriented discussions are useful in overcoming what appears to be a *too schematic use of concepts*, in this case of the concept of truth.

In the same way the *concept of justification* should also be differentiated (again, without sharp distinctions): There are strictly self-reflective justifications and there are discursive justifications. There are justifications in terms of various kinds of “absurdity-arguments”. And there are life-world certainties beyond any of these kinds of

justification. Again, case-oriented discussions may help to overcome a too schematic use of the concept of justification.

Philosophy, too, is obliged by its truth- and validity-claims, typically in terms of conceptual analyses and self-reflection, oscillating between discussions of case-oriented thought-experiments and of general positions; but philosophy is not merely focusing on questions of justification and their presuppositions: *Conceptual creativity* is also important, both in “re-describing” new “vocabularies”⁶ and in “re-constructing” and articulating crucial events and experiences of the past.⁷ Hence, philosophy is open for various literary genres, not only scholarly articles and theses.

However, this creativity is not without *limitation*. Strictly self-reflective arguments as well as the various absurdity-arguments of our acts and speech-acts do indicate that there are unavoidable truths, and hence limits for possible renewals. Not everything is open for “re-description”. In so far transcendental-pragmatics (e.g. Apel) has a valid point.

But transcendental-pragmatics (as in Apel) tends to be too schematic:

Case-oriented discussions do show that there are differences and nuances within the term “absurdity”, both in strict reflection and in a broader use of arguments from absurdity.

Furthermore, the term “consensus” has to be treated with great caution, both because (α) linguistic perspectivism can not be overcome by semantic syntheses, and because (β) the notion of possible participants is in principle not definable.

(α) However, linguistic perspectivism for claims *within* discursive justification-processes does not imply an identical perspectivism for our strict reflections *on* the pragmatic *preconditions* of discursive justification-processes, nor for our *act-inherent certainties*.

(β) Finally, the unavoidable openness of the notion of possible participants (due to future generations and to the “hard cases” of bio-medical and environmental ethics) becomes particularly urgent in *practical* discussions, especially since those living today in various ways may *shape* future individuals, both by social and biological interventions, and hence the *very notion* of a consensus among independent and autonomous individual gets blurred.

With these brief remarks about my basic claims we are ready for the nitty-gritty of the various case-oriented discussions.

The truth-predicate, never used comparatively?

We use to distinguish between "p is true" and "p is held to be true" (for discursively good reasons); and we tend to think of justification as gradual, in contrast to truth. However, some philosophers develop this point by formulating very strong claims about the usage of the truth-predicate ("is true"), claiming that "absoluteness" and "non-graduality" is embedded in the deep "grammar" of the everyday use of the truth-predicate. Hence they claim that the expression "is true" has no meaningful comparative use, no gradual meaning.⁸

Is this a tenable view? Sure, any relevant counter-case must be more than an empirical fact about the actual use of the words. It must contain what might be called an "epistemic point" at the "grammatical" level, that is, a basic conceptual point. Are there such counter-examples?

Here are some suggestions:

1. Imagine the following utterance, for instance in the popular press: "This is a story of true love." And imagine this response: "Oh, it is less true than you think." Could these be possible utterances (in this context)? Probably. If so, do they have an "epistemic point", as it were? Probably. However, here the predicate "true", in the expression "true love", means something like "real" or "genuine".⁹ It is not the propositional usage of the truth-predicate. So, in this case the expression "less true" does make sense, but not for the conception of truth as correspondence.

2. A similar case. Imagine a Neo-Platonist who believes in a gradual ontology according to which Being (the One and the Good) radiates decreasingly throughout the universe until it ends in non-being. *Unio mystica* gives the highest (tacit) insight, and its indirect articulation in Neo-Platonism philosophy gives us the highest truth that can be verbally articulated. There is gradually less truth the further out we get, away from *unio mystica*. This Neo-Platonism does not represent a everyday usage of language, but it does demonstrate a gradualist usage of the truth-predicate.

3. Consider the following utterance: "This poem reveals a deeper truth of life than most reports in psychology." This is a gradual and comparative usage, and this may be a meaningful utterance (in some contexts). This utterance, of a deeper poetic truth, might occur in

various everyday contexts, and hence it indicates that a gradual and comparative use of the predicate "true" is possible.

4. Finally, imagine these utterances: "This is the true story of their relationship. – Oh no, this story is less true than it could have been!" Are these utterances empirically possible? Probably. They do make sense in a given context. But do they have an "epistemic point"? Well, these utterances refer to a narrative about human relationships. First of all, in such cases it is often doubtful that we may talk about "the" true story. A cautious person would rather talk about "a true story"; from our own life-experience and from literature we know how difficult it is to give an account of such relationships. However, the main point is here the *comparative* use of the term "true". (i) We may start "negatively": Even though it is hard to envisage "the true story", we may often recognize "untrue stories". (ii) Then we may look at the comparative use (in a negative perspective): Some stories are "less well taken" than other stories, and in this sense they are "less true". (iii) Consequently, we may also say that some stories give a better, a "more true" account of the actual interrelationships than other stories do.

I think cases like these (especially the latter ones) are supportive of a reasonable doubt as to the tenability of the strong claim about the "grammatically" grounded "absoluteness" of the truth-predicate.

Methodological considerations

Bluntly stated, philosophers like Apel and Habermas tend to discuss the relationship between truth-claims and discursive justification without case-oriented discussions of the varieties and ambiguities inherent in these terms.

I start with a reminder. In the pragmatic tradition (Apel, Habermas) we have four basic validity-claims, namely truth, normative rightness, intelligibility, and truthfulness; the former two (truth and normative rightness) are seen as discursively justifiable ("redeemable").

Since these validity-claims are not immediately given at the level of *empirical performance*, in actual speech-acts, but are located at a *deeper level of basic competences*, there are considerable problems when we try to "spell them out" and discuss their mutual distinctiveness and possible interrelationship.

One way of approaching this intricate problem is the attempt to work with "meaning-critical" arguments (*sinnkritische Argumente*) in terms of informal *reductio ad absurdum*-arguments: From (the

description of) a given state of affairs we intentionally break or neglect some basic rule or principle and thus produce an "absurdity", and as a next step we try to formulate the meaning-constitutive condition that was violated.

In this paper I cannot carry out such "arguments from absurdity" (or "absurdity-arguments") in any detail,¹⁰ and at this stage I restrict myself to a brief statement of what I see as a probable outcome: If we ask such "meaning-critical" questions concerning the basic competences that a mature and sane person must have acquired in order to be able to cope with life, we have to include the ability to master some distinction between what is and what is not, what works and what does not – not necessarily explicitly (verbally), nor faultlessly, but sufficiently well *in practice*.

This ability is a basis from which truth-claims can be articulated in terms of propositions that can be discussed and possibly justified in term of a discursive redemption.

At this stage I shall draw attention to the following points:

1. Firstly I would like to draw attention to the various "*tacit*" *presuppositions* that are included in our coping with the world,¹¹ for instance the presupposition that (i) the ground on which we walk is stable (earthquakes taken into consideration), that (ii) stiff material objects work similarly to-day as in the past (we could say, according to the same laws of nature), that (iii) we have a practice-based ability of following rules (including the rules of our own language). Those are, in short, the kind of certainties (*Gewissheiten*) pointed out by Wittgensteinians. The point is now the following: These competences could rightly be said to entail a mastery of "validity-claims", and more specifically, the mastery of some kind of "truth-claims". But they are *not* raised *explicitly* in the same way as propositionally articulated truth-claims. They are non-propositional.¹² These non-propositional "truth-claims"¹³ are not thematized, nor are they justified discursively;¹⁴ they are "truths" that we have "always already" acquired (as it were). But when we talk about "truth-problems" – of the possibility of "reaching truth" and of "having truth" – these *action-related certainties* should at least be mentioned and located within the overall scenario.

2. Secondly (and relatedly) it is worthwhile to pay attention to the way we *learn* to use the term "true". This is widely an empirical question. But here we are interested in a conceptual point: If we take it to be a reasonable scenario that the truth-predicate is learnt in game-like situations where the child is shown how to distinguish claims that something is the case from claims that it is not, and that the procedure

for finding out is a concrete "look-and-see", we have delineated a paradigm of some basic "truth-claims" and of their "redemption" by *direct experience*, different from the paradigm of "discursive redemption". Compare similar procedures when a witness is asked to "tell the truth" in court, about some concrete event. And compare basic fact-finding in scientific research: by *simple observations*, not discourse.

3. Thirdly I would draw attention to the *strictly performative argumentation* of transcendental pragmatics (especially in Apel). The verbal formulation is here open for discussion. But still we are supposed to have infallible validity-claims of pragmatically rooted preconditions for argumentation and dialogue – philosophical validity-claims that could be seen as truth-claims, even though their strictly reflective justification has its own characteristics, and even though the truths involved are "always already" (implicitly) acquired.

I would like to underline the following general points concerning these three kinds of truth-questions, or truth-like questions:

1. In the first group we have, for one thing, practice-inherent certainties that can be thematized in terms of propositions and be brought into discursive procedures.¹⁵ But in this group we also have certainties or forms of understanding that for various reasons remain implicit and unthematized; and we have certainties and forms of understanding that in a crucial sense remain personal and practice-related – in some cases they can be verbally (and orally) articulated, for instance poetically or existentially, but not propositionally.

Which epistemic term should we use in characterizing these "truth-like" questions? Even if we decide to talk about these presuppositions and certainties as "*truth-questions*", it is in a sense not quite appropriate to talk about them as "*truth-claims*": Either the possibility of a "propositional claim" is out of question, or such a "claim" is yet to be made explicitly.

Since the step from "truth-question" to "truth-claim" is problematic in these cases, it follows that it is also problematic to take the next step for granted, namely the step from "truth-claim" to "*discursive justification*" (and further, to possible discursive "redemption").¹⁶

2. In the second group we have truth-questions in terms of simple observations of particular facts, which paradigmatically are not themselves "questioned", but which deliver material to the various

discussions of propositional truth-claims at a theoretical level. But once we are within theoretical discussions the question about the most appropriate interpretation of the various singular observational statements is part of the overall discursive procedure; hence, those who focus on the discursive procedure, on the argumentative activity of giving-and-taking reasons, have a good point for doing so.¹⁷ (And this is then followed up in the further step from truth-claims to discursive justification.) But thereby the question of the simple cases of "truth-finding" will have to be taken care of separately. And then there is a danger that we overlook the "truth-questions" of such simple observations.

3. In the third group, of performatively self-referential reasoning, we have questions that may appropriately be called "truth-questions", or at least "truth-like questions". For instance, we have the presupposition of one's own existence and that of the interlocutors. But we also have "validity-questions" for basic norms (norms of mutual recognition and norms for discursive procedures¹⁸), and validity-questions of intelligibility (for instance for the language we use), and claims of truthfulness and sincerity (between the co-discussants). And we have validity-claims related to the (relative) adequacy of the concepts that we use. All in all, this means that a whole range of validity-claims are at stake. They are not only presupposed (which they always are, according to universal pragmatics), but they are in various ways brought to our awareness by transcendental-pragmatic reasoning: not only truth-claims, but also some normative validity-claims are reflectively thematized and recognized. Hence, these various cases of validity-claims reach wider than the realm of truth-claims in a more restricted sense, related to propositionally articulated truth-claims apt for possible justification in theoretical discourse. However, in the act of strict reflection we "reach truth" immediately, as it were – and not by the procedure of fallible discursive justification.

Bluntly stated, in pragmatic discourse-theory the discussion of the relationship between justification and truth takes place within a scenario characterized by two decisive steps, that *from truth-question to truth-claim* and that *from truth-claim to discursive justification*. My point is now to remind ourselves of all those "truth-questions" (or "truth-like questions") which thereby may fall out of the overall picture.

As to the current discussion of the relationship between justification and truth this reminder may be useful in drawing attention to alternative ways of "having truth" or "reaching truth". Hence it may contribute to de-dramatize the sharp distinction between justification

and truth, or fallibilism and certainty:¹⁹ There are also certainties and truths at a "pre-discursive" level, as it were.

Paradigmatic "truth-claims"

We shall now return to what in pragmatic discourse-theory is taken to be *paradigmatic truth-claims*, namely propositions making explicit truth-claims, apt for discursive justification in order to see whether the claims are justified or not – that is, for general, negative and modal statements, rather than singular observational statements.²⁰ Hence, scientific and philosophical discussions are paradigmatic discursive procedures.

However, these "candidates" for discursive justification, namely general statements conceived as fallible hypotheses, could be critically questioned: Not *all* general statements should be seen as fallible hypotheses, independently of the circumstances for their utterance. Take for instance the statement "the Earth is round", or "Man is mortal", uttered under normal circumstances. General statements, for sure, and statements that in principle could be doubted and discussed; in principle they are fallible (and thus "*umstrittbar*" and "*diskurswürdig*"), but only in principle, and for philosophical discussions, hardly for scientific ones. For, what could under normal circumstances be reasonable counter-arguments? And what would our universe look like if these propositions were rejected? How much of our "well-entrenched" convictions would then have to be revised?

If these remarks are seen as tenable it means that the scope of the actual discussion is delimited already at the level of general statements ("hypotheses"): There are circumstances of "consensus reached" or "truth found" within scientific and scholarly research. Macro anatomy of the human body could be seen as a relevant case. This is today a discipline for education, not for further research. In this case discursive justification has come to an end, as it were.

Four basic validity-claims: sub-distinctions and "spill-over"?

We have mentioned the four basic validity-claims, according to universal pragmatics (namely intelligibility, truth, normative rightness, truthfulness), and we have referred to cases of truth-like questions that do not easily fit into the two-step-scheme of "truth-question related to truth-claim" and "truth-claim related to discursive justification". Now we could ask: How should we more concretely conceive these four

basic validity-claims? Are there interesting *sub-distinctions*? Are there interesting *interrelations* between the various validity-claims?

To the latter question it is worthwhile recalling how adequate concepts can be conceived of as a *precondition* for meaningful sentences and thus for the truth or falsity of these sentences. The same point (about conceptual adequacy as a precondition for validity) could also be made for normative statements. Stated in negative terms we could say that conceptual disorders – such as category mistakes and other forms of infelicitous conceptual usage – imply an unintelligibility which undermines not only the question of truth (or falsity) but also that of normative rightness. In short, the validity claim of intelligibility has a preconditional relationship to the two "discursively redeemable" validity-claims (truth and rightness).

Hence there is a preconditional relationship between *conceptual adequacy and intelligibility* on the one hand and the *validity-claims of truth and rightness* on the other; and at the same time there is a familiarity, but also a difference, between *conceptual adequacy* and *intelligibility*: The question of conceptual adequacy, involved both in truth-claims and in rightness-claims, is not identical with the more comprehensive notion of intelligibility in general.

It is thus worthwhile looking into what could be called "conceptual-adequacy claims" – or should we say: "validity questions of concepts"? – or "claims of conceptual truth" (suggesting a similarity to truth-claims)? – or "claims of conceptual intelligibility" (suggesting that they should be classified under the validity-claim of intelligibility)? This terminological uncertainty indicates both possible subdivisions and interrelations, for the four validity-claims.

Here I shall restrict my comments to the role of *conceptual adequacy* in relation to *truth-claims*: Does this relationship imply that meaningful concepts are preconditions for meaningful statements, at the same time as truth-claims and conceptual adequacy-claims can be analyzed independently? Or is there a "spill-over" in the sense that the question of conceptual adequacy somehow *influences* the truth-question?

Some thought-experiments

To handle this question we shall look at some cases, in terms of thought-experiments. In so doing, I will *not* consider *single statements*, but instead consider *discipline-based theoretical perspectives* and what they by serious research may bring up in terms of scientific results – for instance the following case:

In order to find out what is happening at our universities and in their interplay with society at large, we may ask for economic research. In this case we ask for the *discipline of economics*, with its particular conceptual perspectives and methodological presuppositions. When such a discipline-based enquiry is carried out professionally, with the concepts that are constitutive for this discipline, we get well-grounded answers. Clear concepts, strict methods and extensive empirical work lead to a reliable result. The answer is *well justified*.²¹

Now the decisive point: We could have given the same task to professional *sociologists*. Let us assume that we do, and for the sake of the argument, let us assume that they come up with a decent piece of work, but that their work is less well grounded, *less well justified*: The empirical work is less extensive, the concepts used are less clear, and we could even (for the sake of the argument) assume that the empirical work is less rigorous, according to standard methodological requirements.

However, in this case – although the economists’ answer was *better grounded or justified* than that of the sociologists – it is still possible that we would claim that the sociologists gave us “*a truer picture*” (or a “*more true picture*”) of the situation, in short: a picture more adequate for coping with this kind of problems.

This argument alludes to the subtle discussions of the *adequacy* of different conceptual schemes *relative to a certain reality*. These discussions are far from easy, but nor are they impossible. At the outset we are thus in need for a distinction: one between the *empirical well-foundedness* of a piece of research carried out within a particular conceptual perspective (a particular discipline) and the *conceptual adequacy* of this perspective²² – in both cases, relative to similar pieces of research carried out within another particular disciplinary perspective.

We may then express the difference between the two discipline-based enquiries (mentioned above) by saying that the one is *better founded*, but that the other gives a *more adequate picture* of the situation.

Adequacy-claims are validity-claims, “conceptual truth-claims”, as it were (but different from propositional truth-claims). Briefly stated, and this is my double point in this connection: (i) the question of *conceptual adequacy* is a *validity-claim* which in principle is *discursive and “redeemable”*, (ii) but which is also used *comparatively*, or *gradually*: “more or less”, “better and worse” – similar to what is the case for justifications.

Add to this that concepts shape our statements as well as our values. The adequacy-question is therefore relevant for truth-claims as well as for value-claims.

Doubts as to the claim: "truth is absolute, justification is gradual".

My doubt as to the view that truth-claims are *always* "absolute", whereas justifications are gradual, could thus be tested by a discussion of cases for which this view might be seen as unreasonable.

To be sure, I would not deny the *paradigmatic difference* between truth-claims and conceptual adequacy-claims, nor would I claim that there is always some "spill-over" from the question of conceptual adequacy to that of truth – claiming that since conceptual adequacy-claims can be seen as gradual, all truth-claims are gradual to the same extent.

I furthermore assume that for *singular statements* the two validity-claims could normally be analyzed independently, and that the suspicion of a possible "spill-over" is not supported. Take the statement: "In Germany, *Rechtsradikalismus* is often found among young men in the impoverished cities and villages of the former DDR." Here I see no immediate danger of a "spill-over" *from* a possible "gradualist" element in conceptual validity-claims *to* the (empirical) truth-claims of the statement.

"Spill-over", for comprehensive theories?

But it remains to be seen whether the same holds true for *comprehensive views and theories*.

However, even if it should turn out that we in such cases have what we might call a "hermeneutical holism", indicating an interwovenness between concepts and propositional content, I would still maintain (contrary to philosophers like Rorty) that conceptual adequacy-claims in principle can be discursively criticized or justified.

So far my point consisted in indicating that some cases of discipline-based research can be said to be "more or less conceptually adequate", independently of their empirical well-foundedness, and that, as a matter of linguistic usage, this could be expressed by saying that one perspective, one case of discourse-based research, is "more true" (or "less true") than another. At this level, of linguistic usage, I therefore disagree with the view that "the expression 'is true' has no meaningful comparative use".²³

But if we take *simple statements* from mathematics or from some empirical discipline, the “absolutist” view of truth-claims will gain ground.²⁴ However, looking at our example of the two disciplinary perspectives, we could argue that even though we in this case could refer to the sociological research as giving “a *truer* picture” of the situation in which we are interested, it is possible to distinguish between the *empirical truth-questions* and the *conceptual adequacy-questions*.²⁵ We have pointed out (we have assumed, for the sake of the argument) that in this case the economical research is methodologically (and thus empirically) more satisfactorily carried out than the sociological research; in addition we have pointed out (assumed) that the concepts were more clearly defined in the economical research; nevertheless we have suggested that the concepts of the sociological research were more appropriate to cope with the situation as it is here conceived, and that for this reason the sociological account of the situation could rightly be said to give a “more true picture” of the situation at the universities.

Furthermore, this shows how the question of conceptual adequacy plays a role for what in everyday language possibly could be called “the truth of the story”, and for what could be seen as “the comparative truth” of one story relative to another (of the “same” situation).²⁶

But even so (the argument goes) it is possible to keep the distinction between “conceptual adequacy-claims” and “empirical truth-claims”.

We could thus argue that this example is interesting because it illustrates some of the interrelations of the two validity-claims: It shows that a comparative use of the predicate “true” may have an epistemic point, but it does not undermine the analytic (and paradigmatic) distinction between the two kinds of validity-claims, and in that sense we could still maintain that paradigmatically “truth-claims” are “absolute” and “conceptual adequacy-claims” are gradual.

Singular statements versus comprehensive theories

To the latter remark it could be responded that this example might be analyzed in terms of a contrast between *singular statements* and *total views*: At the level of singular statements it makes sense to distinguish between the empirical truth-claim and the conceptual adequacy-claim, but for a theory as a whole this distinction gets somewhat blurred. In short, it could be argued for a difference between validity-claims for (singular) statements and validity-claims for comprehensive theories:

The (empirical) truth-claims and the conceptual adequacy-claims are more easily distinguished *for singular statements* than *for comprehensive theories*.²⁷

Comparison of different disciplinary perspectives?

Returning to our case of the role of the university in a given society, it could rightly be pointed out that in this case we have a subject matter situated in a lifeworld for which we *presuppose* that there is a (sufficiently) common understanding of what this case is all about. And we furthermore *presuppose* a reflective and hermeneutic ability to move between disciplinary perspectives. This is how a comparison between two (competing) conceptual perspectives is possible. This is how we could rightly claim that the one is *more* conceptually adequate than the other, and hence that one account gives a "truer picture" than the other.

To indicate a contrast: The same is *not* a case of a radically new "world-disclosure" (*Welterschließung*), that is, of a fundamentally new and hitherto unrealized conceptual perspective, representing another scenario altogether as to the validity-claims involved, in the sense that the conceptual adequacy-claims cannot be compared across different "world-disclosures".

Relative conceptual blindness

Another case may also be mentioned, in order to indicate a contrast: Consider a modern society in which basic concepts from economic theory (and practice) have increasingly become the notions in terms of which the citizens understand themselves and their world, not only within the social institution of market interaction, but also in the political and the cultural sphere. In short, the scenario is the following: These people tend to understand themselves and their world in terms of neoliberalist notions of market relations and of *homo economicus* acting strategically to maximize utility, also in personal, interpersonal, and political contexts and interrelations. So it is, spontaneously and without critical awareness of the degree to which there is a need for a more refined repertoire of alternative conceptual perspectives in order to cope with an institutionally differentiated modern world. This case could be described as one of relative "conceptual blindness", of which the agents themselves are not fully aware.

If so, we have a case of an *ideologically biased understanding* (and hence of "false awareness" or "alienation"). In this case we could (for the sake of the argument) assume that the propositions uttered within this restricted conceptual perspective were "empirically true" and still assume that it makes sense to characterize them as a "half-truth". A comprehensive view, uttered predominantly in terms of these notions, could thus be characterized as "ideological".

However, in this case the agents themselves have no immediate possibility of comparing their conceptual perspective with alternative perspectives (and of trying to evaluate their relative strength and weakness in different contexts). Since this (relative) "conceptual blindness" is *not seen by the agents themselves*, they cannot critically compare different conceptual perspectives as to "conceptual adequacy", nor can they analytically distinguish between questions of conceptual adequacy and of empirical truth in order to evaluate to what extent their (present) empirical claims could be seen as biased by their conceptual bias.²⁸ This is different from the former example (the one of understanding modern universities).

Discourse versus rhetorics

In cases of unreflected "conceptual blindness" (and "conceptual poverty") the use of straightforward discursive procedures might turn out to be insufficient, since relevant counter-arguments could be reinterpreted and neutralized within the conceptual framework that is criticized.

Certainly, real dialogues might do the trick of overcoming such "conceptual blindness", for instance due to the concrete confrontation face-to-face with other persons who are thinking differently. Or it might be due to successful presentations of concrete cases suggesting another conceptual perspective. But thereby we move away from the paradigm case of *discourse* based on mutual "convincing" (*Überzeugen*), in the direction of *rhetorical* ways of changing the conceptual perspective of one's interlocutors. However, such a rhetorical intervention could be justified to the extent that the other person retrospectively and freely would recognize this change as an epistemic improvement. If so, we could talk about legitimate rhetorics in contrast to an illegitimate one.

All in all, this indicates that the question of "conceptual adequacy" is a versatile and interesting question, that opens for intricate problems related to conceptual creativity and criticism.

What about philosophy?

We return to the question: what are the "candidates" for truth-claims and conceptual adequacy-claims? Singular statements or comprehensive theories? And in what sense and in which field?

So far we have mainly referred to a few cases from the scientific field. But in a *philosophical text* (like ours) we should also raise these questions for *our own* utterances and perspectives: The self-critical awareness of one's own use (and possible misuse) of language, in reasoning and arguing philosophically, is a genuine philosophical activity.

We shall, in that respect, restrict ourselves to a few comments on some main aspects of Apel's transcendental-pragmatic reflections on *truth and justification*. But first we shall pursue the question of the interrelationship between concepts and truth-claims by briefly referring to some crucial points in Richard Rorty's naturalistic pragmatism.

Rorty's holism and its shortcomings

Due to his oscillation between a *descriptive (sociological)* and a *normative (philosophical)* discourse, Rorty is hard to grasp. But if we focus on his reinterpretations of arguments for *pragmatic preconditions*, which by him are reinterpreted in terms of what we (according to Rorty) *can do*,²⁹ or in terms of *predictions* about future events,³⁰ it is reasonable to regard his explicitly naturalistic (Darwinian) pragmatism as an empiricist pragmatism. With this assumption his counter-arguments against presuppositional, transcendental-pragmatic arguments make sense.³¹

1. Arguments of self-reflection are by Rorty reinterpreted as arguments *for the other* (not for him).³² In an empiricist perspective (which epistemically is an *observer perspective*) the question of the epistemic uniqueness of *the first-person singular* is not adequately perceived.
2. "Good arguments" are reinterpreted in terms of *instrumental efficiency, as tools*.³³ In an empiricist perspective the normative question of *good reasons* apparently disappears and thereby also the epistemic distinction between *überzeugen* and *überreden* (convincing and persuading).
3. Applied directly on himself, the arguments for pragmatic preconditions are by Rorty conceived as *unintelligible*³⁴ – expectedly so, when seen in an empiricist perspective.

4. Mutual discursive relations (between discussants) are reinterpreted as *behavioral adjustments*³⁵ – which is consistent for an empiricist naturalism.

We have already indicated how one may distinguish between *conceptual adequacy-claims* and *empirical truth-claims* in concrete scientific enquiries and how one (in principle) may discursively assess both claims. In Rorty such a distinction is hardly possible. His arguments seem to be inherently constituted by his conceptual perspective. In this sense the two validity-claims seem to merge into one.

We could certainly pick up some separate truth-claims within his overall argumentation and treat them separately. (For instance: is it true that it is hard to dig a tunnel with a scalpel?³⁶ And so on.) But still these arguments are shaped by a *hermeneutic holism* in the sense that the overall interpretive scheme seems to constitute the arguments made by Rorty. Hence there is a *spill-over* between *conceptual adequacy-claims* and *propositional truth-claims*, and the graduality of the former apparently *influences* the latter.

Not immune for criticism

This does not mean that Rorty's work is beyond discursive assessment and criticism. Without judging the adequacy and strength of the various kinds of validity-claims, we could, as a reminder, briefly refer to different possible objections against Rorty, related to the various validity-claims:

1. From a transcendental-pragmatic point of view this case (Rorty's arguments, as referred to above) could be seen as one of "unintelligibility" (*Sinnlosigkeit*), due to *performative contradiction*.
2. From an analytical point of view this case could be seen as one of *insufficient conceptual clarification*, not least as to the oscillations between descriptions and normative assessments. (This is a question of *conceptual clarity* and also of *conceptual adequacy*.)

Both objection 1 and objection 2 could be classified under the *validity-claim of intelligibility*, if we want to stick to the traditional scheme of four paradigmatically separated validity-claims. If so, the validity-claim of intelligibility entails various claims: (i) performative consistency, (ii) conceptual clarity, and (iii) conceptual adequacy.

3. His conceptual oscillations on this crucial point could lead to a suspicion concerning his *intellectual insincerity*. This would be an objection in terms of a violation of the (non-discursive) validity-claim of *truthfulness*.
4. It could also (possibly) be argued that Rorty makes *empirically false statements* – for instance about those he calls analytical philosophers and what they are doing. This would be an objection in terms of *truth-claims* (empirical truth-claims).
5. To the extent that such false statements are found in his writings for a broader audience who is less able to judge their tenability, he could also be blamed on moral grounds. This would be an objection in terms of *normative (moral) validity-claims*.

In short, this illustrates how Rorty's work could be assessed and criticized according to the various validity-claims. Along these lines we could start talking about his work as being "partly weak" and "partly strong".³⁷ But my point is now that Rorty's work should be seen as a "hermeneutic whole", shaped (for one thing) by his empiricist pragmatism, entailing an avoidance of some kind of philosophical (i.e., transcendental-pragmatic) arguments on the one hand and an inherent structuring of his arguments on the other, the consequence being that this is a case of a *holistic "spill-over"* between conceptual validity-claims and truth-claims.

His writings thus represent a relevant counter-case to our earlier argument taken from situated scientific enquiries (between economics and sociology), in the sense that there is more of a "merge" between conceptual claims and truth-claims in the Rortyan case than in that of the two scientific enquiries. This is no big surprise. This is what we would expect of a *comprehensive philosophical doctrine* as opposed to *situated scientific enquiries*.

If so, this point leads to intriguing questions as to the kind of truth-claims that are made in philosophical work (either by Rorty or by mainstream philosophers). Negatively speaking, we should as philosophers try to avoid performative (and other) inconsistencies, and we should avoid conceptual confusion. Positively speaking, we should express ourselves clearly and understandably. But there is still an intriguing question as to what kind of truth-claims we are really making *qua* philosophers.

Re-educative ambitions

In this connection I would add one more point: Rorty's texts are explicitly shaped by his *re-educative ambition* of promoting "new vocabularies" or "re-descriptions" (should we say, new "paradigm shifts" or *Welterschließungen*).³⁸ This Nietzschean or Heideggerian ambition, taken seriously, entails a critical questioning of the very idea of "conceptual adequacy" and of "empirical (or theoretical) truth": By fundamentally new re-descriptions there will be new concepts and a new world (as it were). This kind of basic re-description is thus not an issue for straightforward discursive procedures.³⁹ The promotion of radically new conceptual frames for self-understanding and for the understanding of others and the world will thus tend *to blur* the distinction between "überreden" and "überzeugen" (as we mentioned earlier) – hence an epistemic "shock" might be useful or even required to promote such changes. However, retrospectively these "jumps" should (hopefully) be apt for *reasonable reconstructions* undertaken by those involved. But before the change has taken place, there is (in the radical version) no argumentatively rational indication of where to move, nor any argumentatively rational way of making that move.

Such ambitions (of fundamental re-description) might be criticized as a kind of *hubris* held by romantic intellectuals. But even so there is a point to be taken seriously, namely, that of conceptual creativity and of "paradigm shifts" in some form or another – not only conceived within the history of the natural sciences (as by Thomas Kuhn), but also applied to broader cultural changes.

However, in this respect, cautious analyses of historical cases do represent an important task, in order *to learn* from earlier attempts of radical re-descriptions.

Along these lines one could say that even when the possibility of basic re-descriptions is taken seriously, this does not mean that this possibility is *equally possible at all levels*, as it were. *Cultural* changes, changes in our self-understanding and identity, is one thing, changes in *the formal structure of self-referential arguments*, as in transcendental pragmatics, or in *basic act-inherent knowledge*, pointed out in transcendental praxeology,⁴⁰ are something else.

In short, both in a historical perspective and in a self-referential perspective the very idea of fundamental changes of "vocabularies" will have to be carefully analyzed and discussed. But to the extent that such re-descriptions are taken seriously they do change the scenario and thereby make Rorty's various moves more intelligible.

What remains as a serious practical challenge is the fact that in many discussions the different participants often bring with them conceptual presuppositions of which they are more or less unaware and

which in various ways might represent cases of conceptual poverty or conceptual blindness.⁴¹

All in all, this means that some of Rorty's points are well taken when applied moderately and (self-)critically.

Looking carefully into the way the concepts are used

These remarks to the "variety of validity-claims" with special focus on the interrelationship between *intelligibility-claims* (including claims of conceptual adequacy and clarity) and *truth-claims* (propositional and theoretical) are undertaken in accordance with the assumption that the concepts we use, also in talking about (gradual) justification and (absolute) truth-claims, require that we look carefully into the way these concepts are used, in various relevant cases and at different levels. Sure, in philosophy it is required that we think and talk in general terms, but it is also required that we look at the more nuanced usages of the concepts in various cases. If not, our general schemes might be confusing and not enlightening.

This critical point, directed against position-oriented thinking, holds true, I think, and it is relevant for the interrelation between intelligibility-claims and truth-claims both in Rorty and Apel. For one thing, these two philosophers do not only disagree on the possibility (or impossibility) of the regulative idea of absolute truth; they also disagree on the notion of justification, since this notion is epistemically ambiguous in Rorty. In this sense they have different notions both of truth (claims) and of (rational) justification. They have different notions because they have fundamentally different philosophical approaches – not so different (I would claim) that no mutual criticism and dialogue are possible, but different enough to make an abstract and schematic comparison fairly problematic.

Transcendental pragmatics versus transcendental praxeology

The standard objection from transcendental-pragmatics against my case-oriented, praxeological approach consists in insisting on the self-reflective test:⁴² Can I make these claims without presupposing a regulative idea of absolute truth?

As to my response, just a brief remark: all along I have tried, critically and self-critically, to find the best arguments. I have tried to formulate and present them appropriately. In so doing I have been obliged by that which I see as the best argument. In this sense I

presuppose that these arguments are tenable against relevant counter-arguments. But being aware of my own fallibility, I am open for criticism, for changes and improvements. This insight indicates the inherent urge for the continuation of the enquiries and of the discussion. All this is carried out with a performative self-awareness. I would therefore not accept the general transcendental-pragmatic objection, without a more concrete criticism.

Let me add another self-critical point. True, in philosophy we can often reinterpret and thus "get around" many of the counter-arguments that are raised against us; but as long as we are genuinely discussing, we are not only obliged by what we until now see as the best argument; we are also aware of our obligation to the even better argument(s). These obligations are inherently constitutive for discursive procedure. For this reason I join the transcendental pragmaticians against Rorty.

But even so, the question remains: How should these performative preconditions be appropriately formulated? And how far do they reach (before other types of arguments take over)? These are questions to be discussed. Here I shall restrict myself to some brief remarks on the notion(s) of consensus, with reference especially to Apel.⁴³

Notion(s) of consensus

We may start safely: Since no reasons, no arguments should be excluded, and since we reflectively recognize our fallibility, there is a permanent urge for inclusion of new and supposedly better arguments, an urge for the even better argument. From our situation here and now, this is an urge for improvement, against what is seen as *less* good arguments (grounds or reasons). But does it require that we (implicitly) presuppose a regulative idea of a consensus among all possible participants under ideal conditions?

What does it mean to talk about "all possible participants"? In negative and concrete terms: "yes" – nobody should be excluded! But in positive and ideal terms, who is "everybody"? Everybody able to participate? Or should "possible participants" also include all those who are "concerned", but unable to participate? If so, should it embrace all those who are vulnerable in a morally relevant sense, humans as well as non-humans?⁴⁴

We shall not here pursue this question about the possibility and impossibility of inclusion of the various potential participants and moral subjects.⁴⁵ We restrict ourselves to a few remarks to the notion of

consensus, or rather, the notions of consensus, for again we have the problem of conceptual ambiguity.

We begin with a truism about the relationship between the notions of a rational person and consensus. (We do not here start with strictly self-reflective arguments, but with the broader notion of conceptual arguments from absurdity.) If some theory or statement is true, then all discursively rational persons should agree upon it. This is no deep insight, it is a tautology to the extent that this is how we (here) define a discursively rational person, that is, a person who realizes that true theories and statements are true and thus agrees with other rational persons on these issues. Truth implies consensus. Recognized truth by rational persons entails consensus.⁴⁶

This means that it is somewhat inappropriate to say that we in these discussions "seek consensus". We rather seek "better arguments". But if we came up with the best argument, then consensus follows, among rational persons. Hence it is also somewhat odd to talk about consensus as the "goal" of argumentation.⁴⁷ And this means that it is odd to talk about consensus as a "criterion" for truth.

It is worth noticing that there is an "externalist flavor" to the term "consensus": In the spectator perspective we *observe* that the participants reach an agreement, even though we, as observers, have no competence for (or interest in) evaluating the argumentation that takes place. That is alright, but this externalist perspective is inadequate *for the participants*. They argue, they follow the argumentation and judge the strength and relevance of the various arguments. A participant does not agree because others agree, but because he or she, like the other participants, finds that the presented arguments are the best ones.

However, among semi-externalist theoreticians, as Rorty and Rawls, it is understandable that terms like "consensus" are used – for instance: we simply observe that an overlapping consensus has come about, but in *epistemic resignation* we do not question its validity, nor do we recommend a discursive improvement of the comprehensive doctrines and the social identities and conceptions of needs and interests that are involved.⁴⁸

Theoretical discourse versus practical discourse

However, arguing is not merely a question of finding better arguments. It is also a question of reaching mutual understanding, of role-taking and of mutual learning-processes and recognition. When we are interested in *practical* discussions (for instance, concerning the just norms for the regulation of interaction) we may say that a free and open

consensus among those concerned represents (in some cases at least) the very definition of normative rightness.⁴⁹ Roughly stated, in such cases consensus implies (normative) validity. This is the opposite of theoretical discussions (of truth-claims), where truth entails consensus.

Practical deliberation and consensus-making, essential for the idea of *Rechtsstaat* and of deliberative democracy, are evidently decisive for the reason why Habermas, in his general theory of validity and redemption, has focused so strongly on a notion of consensus. But Habermas has now realized that he in his earlier writings, for this reason, tended to overlook the epistemic difference between truth-claims and normative validity-claims,⁵⁰ in short, that he operated with an ambiguous term of "consensus" instead of seeking sufficiently clear and precise concepts, to allow for a distinction between the epistemic status of consensus in the kind of normative discussions mentioned above and the epistemic status of consensus in theoretical enquiries and discussions.

"Consensus", once again

There are certainly more distinctions to be made concerning the term consensus. We have, for instance, the question of consensus for simple statements and the question of consensus for complex theories. And theories are of different kinds, more or less empirical, more or less theoretical. Furthermore, in philosophical reflection there are subtle conceptual and pragmatic arguments; for instance, a consensus concerning unavoidable pragmatic preconditions (as in Apel) is apparently not conceived the same way as a consensus concerning some empirically oriented scientific hypotheses, nor conceived the same way as a consensus concerning just norms and mutual recognition. Whereas a discursively obtained consensus is crucial in the latter case (that of social norms and mutual recognition), it is the reflective insight of constitutive preconditions that is crucial in the core of transcendental pragmatics – in these cases of philosophical reflection, consensus follows when rational persons understand that these preconditions are unavoidable.

The core insights of transcendental pragmatics are thus not to be conceived in terms of consensus in the same way as consensus can be said to play a crucial role in normative (discourse-inherent) discussions.

Furthermore there are cases (as mentioned earlier) of consensus of a "tacit" kind, as in lifeworld practices and lifeworld traditions. The thematization and discussion of such inherent forms of consensus raise

other questions again, for instance: to which extent can they be thematized and discursively redeemed as universally valid?

Finally, consensus can in many cases of socio-political controversies be obtained in various ways and in various degrees. Agreement *for identical reasons* is just one case. Stable agreements may in many cases be obtained by an open discussion leading up to a sufficiently strong overlapping conviction, even though the different participants do not weigh the various reasons in the same way. The different discussants may for instance share *the same core reasons* but still have different opinions of what is seen as more peripheral reasons. Or the participants may assess the various reasons differently and still agree on sufficiently many points to the effect that a stable agreement is established. These cases should be seen as rationally obtained and stable agreements. They are not merely compromises obtained by strategic reasoning. But if we stick to a narrow notion of consensus, namely consensus by identical reasons, we may wrongly regard all other agreements as compromises in a strategic sense, thus disregarding that we may have a wide range of rational deliberations and discursively obtained agreements.

Why the term “consensus”?

We may ask: With these interpretive problems related to the term consensus, why insist on this strong notion of consensus, as presupposed in our argumentative speech-acts as an unavoidable regulative idea?

Sure, at the outset we may say that in arguing we cannot, without performative self-contradiction, exclude possible arguments and still make validity-claims. We should not exclude arguments, and in practical discourse we should not exclude the voices of “those concerned”. These are meaningful requirements to our discussions here and now.

But in what sense does it follow that we thereby have, and have to have, a meaningful notion of a consensus, obtained by all possible participants as rational participants under ideal conditions? Why do we need the notion of a consensus (for identical reasons) as a *regulative idea*, in terms of an unavoidable ideal presupposition? Exactly in what sense is it required, inherently in our argumentative speech-acts, that we implicitly have a regulative idea of an ideal consensus obtained within an unlimited argumentation community?

At least, this will have to be shown, by a careful pointing-out of performative contradictions inherent in various attempts to deny or

neglect or modify this regulative idea. In each case this would be an “argument from absurdity”, in which absurdity is seen as a meaninglessness due to some performative contradiction. And this is what Apel is doing in his *Sinnkritik*, in his appeal to performative inconsistency as an absurdity – but merely in general terms, without case-oriented analyses.⁵¹

Hence there is a problem because the basic term of a consensus is ambiguous, and there is a problem seeing in exactly what sense it is an absurdity to deny or doubt this general claim of a consensus as a regulative idea related to an unlimited communication community. Again: what is absurd will have to be shown, clearly and convincingly, in each case.⁵²

Idealizations and “Sinnkritik”

Apel’s notions of idealization and regulative idea are based on a reflection on constitutive pragmatic necessities. As mentioned, the access to these preconditions is that of *Sinnkritik*, and this could in my view be interpreted as *arguments from absurdity*, where the notion of *absurdity* is that of *performative contradiction*. Then it is not enough to make sweeping statements, claiming that in all cases the absurdities found are equally absurd, as it were. This *has to be shown* by cautious analyses of the various cases.

But when that is done, it might turn out that there are differences, maybe even gradual differences, between the various cases of meaninglessness, as I have tried to show elsewhere.⁵³ This means that the question of variety and even the question of graduality re-emerge within the Apelian approach, concerning the epistemic status of the constitutive preconditions.

Sure, neglecting counter-arguments within an argumentation represents a performative contradiction. This is a genuine reflective insight. But the presumed performative contradiction implied by the rejection of the regulative idea of an ideal consensus seems to be dependent on particular *theoretical* conceptions, as found in Apel’s philosophy of language.

Reflection versus Theory

For self-reflective reasons, in a performative perspective in which the first-person perspective is crucial, the core of transcendental pragmatics is the reflectively recognized obligation for accepting the better

argument and searching for even better ones, together with others whom we recognize as co-discussants. This is the crucial point, and this is "where we are", where we stay, when we argue and reflect. The attempt to find and formulate theoretically dependent conceptions of underlying preconditions and regulative ideas is a "secondary activity" that is more questionable and less certain than immediate reflective insights.

Summing up

To conclude: I disagree with those who claim without reservation that "truth-claims" are *always* absolute and *never* comparative and gradual. My reasons are, firstly, (i) that there is a variety of truth-claims, including "adequacy-claims" on the conceptual level (and there are truth-claims for simple statements as well as truth-claims for complex theories), and, secondly, (ii) that in some cases at least it does make sense to talk about truth comparatively and gradually. It makes sense not only as a semantic fact, but as an epistemic point.

This leads to intricate questions as to the interrelationship between conceptual validity-claims and truth-claims. In some cases the distinction between the two can and should be upheld, in other cases it is not so easy. In this respect there are differences between singular statements and comprehensive theories, and between empirically oriented scientific statements and hermeneutically comprehensive theories.

In positive terms: I do think that reflections on the interrelationship between truth and justification should be undertaken by a self-reflective approach, looking for speech-act inherent preconditions, that is, by a transcendental-pragmatic approach in which the first-person perspective, in its interrelationship with second- and third-person perspectives, plays a crucial role. I also maintain that there is a variety of validity-claims. Thus case-oriented analyses are needed in order to obtain an adequate understanding of the uniqueness of the various claims. Finally I assume that a further analysis of this variety of validity-claims will in fact show that their ways of being "redeemed" may differ and that in some cases we use a comparative conception of validity, for instance of conceptual adequacy, and thereby the redemption of theoretical truth-claims could also, in some cases of comprehensive theories, be "affected" by the graduality inherent in the chosen conceptual perspective. Furthermore, there are various notions (and cases) of practice-inherent certainties, and in this sense there are various "truth (like) questions". But paradigmatically, and by explicit

definition, truth could still be analyzed in terms of "truth-claims" which are to be "redeemed" discursively.

This scenario represents a "melioristic" version of transcendental-pragmatics: There is a core of self-reflective certainty, and then there are various validity-questions to be treated according to their special role and status, for instance by the use of flexible arguments from absurdity. In that sense this is a defense for a flexible approach to the interrelationship of "truth" and "justification", but also a defense for the pragmatically unavoidable obligation for better reasons inherent in our truth-claims, and thus, in the end, a defense for the notion of universal validity.⁵⁴

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- ¹ Cf Apel 1998 (pp. 81-193) and in Böhler et al. eds. 2002, Habermas 1984, 1999 and in Brandom ed. 2002, Lafont 1994, Rorty in Brandom ed. 2000, and Wellmer 2004.
- ² Such as the conception of truth-questions as propositionally articulated truth-claims (somehow neglecting truth-questions in terms of practice-inherent “tacit knowing”), and such as the distinction between four different validity-claims (somehow neglecting for example the interplay between conceptual adequacy-claims and propositional truth-claims). See later.
- ³ Similar points in Wellmer 2004 (pp. 244-266).
- ⁴ Similar points both in Heidegger and Wittgenstein.
- ⁵ Cf Wittgenstein „On Certainty“.
- ⁶ To talk in Rortyan terms (about a Heideggerian point).
- ⁷ As in Hegel et al.
- ⁸ Boris Rähme, *Zur Rede von Wahrheitsansprüchen und ihren Konsequenzen*, paper at Hans-Jonas-Tage, Berlin, July 2000: “... der Ausdruck ‘ist wahr’ hat keine sinnvolle Verwendung im Komparative” (p. 6).
- ⁹ Cf Heidegger in *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* on the term “wahrer Gold”.
- ¹⁰ Cf Skirbekk 1993, ch. 2 and 4.
- ¹¹ Cf Yu 2006.
- ¹² Or “intransitive” (to use a Wittgensteinian term) in the sense that they are based on personal experience and cannot be properly conveyed by propositions. Cf Kjell S. Johannessen, “Rule Following, Intransitive Understanding, and Tacit Knowledge”, in Fjelland 1997, pp. 205-227.
- ¹³ Hence we may ask whether the term “truth-claim” is an appropriate term in such cases.
- ¹⁴ To the extent that they are talked about, it is rather in philosophical seminars than in everyday life or scientific discussions.
- ¹⁵ In that sense, we have cases of truth-claims that may “oscillate” between discursible propositions and implicit certainties. Cf a similar point in Habermas 1999.
- ¹⁶ Cf Wellmer 2004, pp. 244-266.
- ¹⁷ Cf Habermas in *Wahrheitstheorien* where he chooses to focus on theoretical truth-claims, not on perceptions (reprinted in Habermas 1984, p. 152): „The cognitive paradigms, from the meaning of which truth can be explicated, are not the perceptions or the singular statements by which perceptions are communicated, but general, negative and modal statements.“ (My translation).
- ¹⁸ Cf Knut Erik Tranøy in Fjelland 1997.
- ¹⁹ As in Apel’s famous article “Fallibilismus, Konsensstheorie der Wahrheit und Letztbegründung”, cf Apel 1998.
- ²⁰ Again, cf Habermas in *Wahrheitstheorien* (Habermas 1984, p. 152).
- ²¹ We could also allow ourselves to call this answer “true”, as long as we make it clear what we mean by using the term in this way.
- ²² The question of well-groundedness may re-emerge for these adequacy-questions, but now in terms of questions within the philosophy of the sciences and the humanities.
- ²³ I have earlier tried to show that in some cases there are gradual uses of the expression ‘true’. Now the same point is made for the conceptual perspectives of different disciplines.
- ²⁴ Here we may add a methodological point: this reference to discipline-based perspectives and enquiries could serve as a useful reminder of the general point that our choice of cases, from which our thoughts are largely guided, is never an innocent matter.
- ²⁵ That is, done “in theory”: We have not done the concrete job with concrete cases.
- ²⁶ In this example we describe an economic account of a social situation, an account with inherent claims of conceptual adequacy and truth. However, to the extent that economics as a *theoretical* project primarily aims at *formal coherence*, fairly independently of how the social world is conceived by its agents, the question of conceptual adequacy and of empirical truth will have to be conceived accordingly.
- ²⁷ This remark leads to the question concerning the extent to which a given theory is primarily based on empirically tested singular propositions and to which extent it primarily is hermeneutically established and developed as a comprehensive doctrine.
- ²⁸ As an example, consider the different statements about human motivation in classical economics and in sociology or psychiatry (e.g. Freud).
- ²⁹ Cf Rorty in Brandom ed. 2000, p. 10, on “presupposing” being reinterpreted in terms of “things I can decide to do or not to do” – if not: “... they seem to me empty”.
- ³⁰ *Loc.cit.*, p. 56, “... I would ... be tacitly making an utterly unjustified empirical prediction ...”.
- ³¹ Cf Apel as well as early Habermas and Wellmer.
- ³² *Op.cit.*, p. 8.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10: “... the reciprocal adjustment of our behavior, the strategic coordination of that behavior in ways which may prove to be mutually profitable.”
- ³⁶ Cf Brandom 2000, p. 9.
- ³⁷ *Op.cit.*, Habermas says (p. 32) that “Richard Rorty is one of the most outstanding analytic philosophers, consistently arguing in an informed and astute way.” But Habermas also says that “the tradition of analytic philosophy” is “the only

tradition in whose language Rorty has learned to argue" (p. 31).

³⁸ How new and revolutionary? This is an appropriate question since Rorty seems to stick firmly both to his (explicitly contextual *and* critically reinterpreted!) US-identity *and* to his *de facto* empiricist pragmatism.

³⁹ *Op.cit.* (p. 37), Habermas says: "Rorty wants to say: the paradigm shift transforms perspectives in such a way that epistemological questions as such are passé."

⁴⁰ The term praxeology, see *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Routledge 1998.

⁴¹ Cf the case of ideological blindness and alienation, referred to above.

⁴² For the term "praxeology", cf Skirbekk 1993.

⁴³ Cf Skirbekk 1993, and "Contextual and Universal Pragmatics: Mutual Criticism of Praxeological and Transcendental Pragmatics", in Fjelland 1997, pp. 293-325. Critically to the term consensus (in Habermas), cf Harald Grimen, "Consensus and Normative Validity", *Inquiry* 1997, pp. 47-61.

⁴⁴ Cf Skirbekk, "The Discourse Principle and Those Affected", *Inquiry* 1997, pp. 63-72.

⁴⁵ Cf Skirbekk 1993 ch. 7. Also "Verantwortung – wem gegenüber? Die Inklusionsfrage nicht-diskursfähiger Lebewesen und der Begriff Menschenwürde", in Burckhart and Gronke 2002, pp. 407-424.

⁴⁶ The practical problem is how we could become so rational, as persons, and how the setting can be adapted accordingly, institutionally and culturally.

⁴⁷ This might sound like a category mistake. But sure, in some sense we can talk about discourse as a way of (re)establishing mutual understanding and hence we could say that consensus (in this sense) is a goal of the discourse.

⁴⁸ But in epistemically oriented theoreticians like Apel and Habermas, the discursive participation in the search for better arguments is seen as decisive, and in that sense it is amazing that the term consensus is so frequently used by these theoreticians.

⁴⁹ As to the question of a possible normative content, cf Cristina Lafont (1994) and also the debate between Habermas and Tugendhat, e.g. Habermas 1990 (e.g. p. 83) and Tugendhat 1993 (pp. 161-176).

⁵⁰ Cf Habermas 1999.

⁵¹ Since these performative contradictions are strictly *performative*, they do imply a special emphasis on the *first person* perspective. Cf the debate between Apel and Wellmer.

⁵² For an attempt to analyse some main candidates (according to Apel) of ultimately justified performative preconditions, cf Skirbekk, "Rationalität – universal und pluralistisch? ", in Burckhart and Gronke 2002, pp. 89-104.

⁵³ Cf note above, and also Skirbekk 1993.

⁵⁴ Cf the dualism in Boris Rähme's paper.