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RATIONALITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

By

Vasile Pirău

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Philosophy

1998

ABSTRACT

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The aim of this dissertation was to explore in what sense rationality secures the

ground for the possibility of cross-cultural understanding and to question what kind of

understanding, if any, can be valid across cultures. My goal is not to directly answer

these questions; rather it is to show why it is meaningful to raise them. My project

explores the relativist challenges posed by recent upheavals in post-analytical philosophy.

In this respect, I discuss the arguments of Wittgenstein, Winch, Quine, Davidson, Hollis

and Habermas (such as "language games", "forms of life", "indeterminacy of translation",

"charity", "bridgehead" and "communicative rationality") regarding the possibility of

understanding other cultures and to see how they treat the nature and the relevance of

rationality for such understanding. This is a debated issue in the tug of war of adversary

claims arguing over the relevance and meaning of problems that arise in the clash of

cultures in multicultural societies, though we may notice that these disputes repeat battles

fought long ago. In the light of the contemporary distrust of a unique and self-sustaining

rationality, postmodernist tenets, which are inclined toward a persuasive relativism, give

up hopes of establishing the universal premises of understanding over cultural divides and

securing the validity of a single language of the mind from skeptical doubt, as once

Descartes too ambitiously dreamt. And yet, since the idea of cross-cultural understanding bears on the ability to achieve a rational consensus among people with different cultural identities, this issue has far-reaching practical implications in the context of splitting differences and conflicts between interest groups we witness today.

After a comparative scrutiny of different attempts to move between the radical alternatives of rationalism and relativism, I stand close to Habermas's view of communicative rationality. By exploring the context transcendent power of the rational potential of language-use oriented toward communication, he gives up the monological and one-sided positions and moves over a wide spectrum from language theory to sociology to develop better conceptual weapons than the other participants in relativity debate I have discussed so far. Habermas's idea of understanding is tied to the validity claims redeemed and vindicated in any speech act and bears on critical assessment of arguments which provides for the intelligibility and the possibility of dialogue between different linguistic and cultural frameworks. On the basis of the critical thrust of communicative rationality, he points to a diagnosis of the pathologies of modernity accounting for systematically distorted communication, and provides "a yardstick" for the assessment of the disturbances bearing on understanding. Nevertheless, several critical objections to Habermas's project reveal gaps and ambiguities in his sometimes shifting view. In thinking about these problems I believe that a ***three-tier reconstruction*** of rationality may be an appropriate approach of the three-fold structure of reason on the analytically distinct levels of phenomenological, scientific-theoretical and normative discourses. However, the convincing story about the promise yielded by this project remains yet to be told.

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INTRODUCTION:

1.1) ON THE AIM AND THE DIFFICULTY OF THE PROJECT

In what sense can rationality secure the ground for the possibility of cross-cultural understanding? What kind of understanding, if any, can be cross-culturally valid? The aim of my project is not directly to answer these two questions; rather it is to show why it is meaningful to raise them. My endeavor is designed to explore the arguments of Wittgenstein, Winch, Quine, Davidson, Hollis and Habermas regarding the possibility of understanding other cultures and to see how they treat the nature and the relevance of rationality for such understanding. Even the minimal feasibility or desirability of my account is highly debatable in light of the contemporary distrust of reason.[1] On views fashionable among post-analytic and postmodernist thinkers, conceptual reflection on rationality is an artificial and "self-indulgent" intellectual habit which turns its back on real problems. No doubt it is risky not to take seriously cautions against a theoretical exercise like the present one, but in what follows I will try to show why addressing the two questions raised above is neither a gratuitous nor an idle enterprise.

Without anticipating arguments which are to be developed later, I will present two minimal reasons for pursuing these issues.

i) By linking the themes of rationality and cross-cultural understanding I mean to imply that **if** we could bring a theoretical proof for a common rationality, **then** on this ground we could establish conceptual bridges over the yawning gaps of understanding that separate different cultures. Obviously this is a debated issue in the tug of war of adversary claims. At one end of the rope, the modern intellectual tradition inspired by Descartes believed that a common core of humanity consists of a reason that provides the

universal ground of understanding among all individuals. At the other hand, the more recent tendencies inclined toward relativism, find the earlier view, if not a matter of wishful thinking, at least a very hazardous theoretical ambition. For instance, postmodern critics such as Winch, Rorty, Lyotard, and others, argue that the notion of a transcontextual rationality is meaningless, and, consequently, stress the breakdown of understanding across incommensurable linguistic frameworks or cultural multifarious discourses. Nonetheless, I find the possibility of such skeptical contentions not to be persuasive enough to discourage theoretical exploration of a common basis of understanding and the pursuit of a practical ideal which depends on possible agreement about cultural values, conventions, interests, and patterns of behavior.

ii) Since the idea of cross-cultural understanding bears on the ability to achieve a rational consensus among people with different cultural identities, this issue has far-reaching practical implications. It may inspire us to behave responsibly and to value the importance of rational agreement in the context of nationalist hatreds and clashes between interest groups we witness today. Insofar as the only alternative to dialogue and understanding is terror, brute force and degenerating wars, such a discussion suggests deep pragmatic reasons for responding to the problems of contemporary conflicts. Perhaps, it is needless to say that a conceptual solution to splitting differences, which threatens with cultural fragmentation, may bear on survival of the world as we know it. In the long run, the commitment that motivates my present approach is to address the question whether we should assume the risky but heroic mission of addressing the problem of moral and social dysfunctions of our time or we should be satisfied by getting comfortably immersed in mere concrete petty horizon of everyday life. While one cannot

assist with a skeptical indifference and impotence to how the world we live together is being torn apart by terror and ethnic or religious wars, the theoretical engagement into the issue of rational communication between cultures is an intellectual duty. But, it is a goal much beyond my reach to address the whole range of social and political complexities that bear on the topic of this paper. My endeavor remains inherently incomplete and only alludes to such contemporary historical dilemmas. To be able to clarify such practical consequences properly, it would be necessary to amass enormous and detailed empirical evidence, and would go beyond the limits and more modest intentions of this project.

To achieve its goal, the dissertation must address the skeptical and relativist challenges, which restate traditional philosophical quarrels over the nature of reason and knowledge. As such battles were fought many times in the past history of philosophy, we realize that the pursuit of rationality that underlies cross-cultural understanding goes on a path between two extremes. They are comparable with the mythological dangers represented metaphorically by the Scylla of a transcendental rationality that overoptimistically provides an underlying basis for a universal mind, and the Charybdis of incommensurability and deconstructionism that makes the idea of a general human understanding an implausible ideal that must be abandoned. The first is advocated by philosophers who were committed to the traditional sense of reason, the latter is assumed by post-analytic and post-structuralist thinkers who have reshaped in a great extend the intellectual fashion of our time.

I shall make a comparative scrutiny of the merits and weaknesses of different attempts to move between these extreme dangers. To avoid the pitfalls presented by the radical alternatives of rationalism and relativism, I will follow Habermas's view, which

has been often described as an attempt to restore the philosophical project of modernity. In the end, in the light of his guidance on the path of examining and evaluating different theories regarding the possible conditions of understanding across cultures, I will assess the value and the adequacy of his concept of communicative rationality. It seems to me that Habermas's theoretical attempt to secure the universal and unavoidable rational presuppositions of communicative action presents the most promising contemporary approach to rationality. He restores a sense of rationality that preserves its cross-cultural relevance and relies on a universal communicative competence. On this view, speakers engaged in dialogue inescapably make validity claims, such as propositional truth, normative rightness and expressive sincerity, which are redeemed and vindicated discursively in the process of linguistic exchange.

My concern will remain essentially theoretical, for it strives to go beyond the phenomenological maze of diverse militant appeals of various ethnic or minority interests as expressed in immediate political agendas or promoted in apparent idiosyncratic lifestyles. My project does not aim so far, nor could it, given the inherent constraints of its theme. Though breaking with the giveness and immediate facticity of the lifeworld, the pursuit of rationality that provides a bridging ground for understanding across cultures calls again and again for social and historical knowledge. This undertaking requires a continuous engagement with the intellectual tradition and a rethinking of past beliefs and commitments. The question is whether we should resign ourselves to giving up the classical ideal or should we strive to save it. In order to answer, I need to explore the justification for the sovereign and autonomous reason which makes a general concept of human understanding possible, and which has been the intellectual heritage of Descartes's

rationalist project. He attempts to offer a paradigmatic description of the single reason that transcends the peculiar and varying forms of cultures. Moving on a wide spectrum from vehement denial to manifest acceptance, in the last four hundred years philosophers of different orientations took a stance in one way or another toward the Cartesian Reason which inspired the paradigm of modern thought.

I will make good on the claim that abandonment of the solitary flight of the rational understanding over cultural differences imagined by Descartes gives rise to the problems and dilemmas which will be addressed in what follows here. In this respect, some previously mentioned critical arguments will be further tracked down, but only to the extent that they bear upon the implausibility of the Cartesian project and its later demise. Giving up the ambition of the Cartesian subject erodes confidence in attempts to build any notion of a single rationality and a transcultural idea of understanding. After all, critics observe, such a rationality is itself in need of legitimation and is just an expression of Western culture which has been unfairly imposed to others. As soon as we are ready to step beyond the self-confident biases rooted in our own tradition[2], the possibility of understanding people remote from us, and the meaning of rationality itself, remains subject of philosophical debates. In addition, the dialectical queries on these heavily argued issues reveal once more why they are an unfinished business of philosophy.[3]

The difficulty and the importance of my project lie in the need to construct a sense of the conditions of cross-cultural understanding in the light of the philosophical failure of traditional attempts to establish a universal reason and the lack of persuasion of empirical arguments for a plurality of rationalities.[4] But reaching my goal requires going

against long held beliefs that are not easily dislodged. To show this I need to analyze the philosophical background and to say something about how questions bearing on the ideas of rationality and understanding arise in the space of modern thought.

In this section I will try to reconstruct Descartes's response to the question whether reason can provide a universal basis for reaching an understanding between inhabitants of different cultures. Is there a rational bridge that can link different linguistic and cultural meanings, and provide a basis for mutual discussion and agreement? What would be the nature of such a rationality? When Descartes confronts the issue of cultural plurality, he attempts to overcome the difference of customs as well as the idiosyncrasy of opinions and personal preferences by pointing to a substantive concept of Reason. This reason is autonomous, formalist, and immune to revision. With this idea Descartes hopes that a universal idea of human understanding can be secured. Only after exploring the nature of his inner consciousness can man find the clue for truth. That is why Descartes begins his metaphysical argument by asking, "*What am I?*" A concise formulation of his answer is this: I am a thinking substance (*res cogitans*) in contrast with matter which is extended *(res extensa)* and in continuous motion. In the tradition of Plato and Aristotle our essence is the rational mind consisting not only of the ability to ratiocinate but also of the awareness of one's own thoughts and their intelligible contents.

In consequence, in coping with the issue at hand, my first step is to reconstruct the Cartesian conception as the point of reference for the arguments that will be discussed in this paper. The ensuing section will present historical and anthropological arguments, which challenge Descartes's concept of reason and raise doubts regarding its empirical adequacy to social life. We will see that field research in ethnography and anthropology

prompts the demise of the Cartesian programme and lays out the premises of relativism which will be discussed in the following chapters.

1.2) THE CARTESIAN BACKGROUND

Descartes describes the contrast between a unique, sovereign reason and peculiar and ever changing cultures. Reason is the master voice within various discourses and imageries that are rooted in the unreliable world of "customs and examples". Hence, the language of the mind must be abstracted from the maze of everyday life in order to reach the certain ground of understanding, which is beyond any skeptical doubt.[5]

In the *Discourse on the Method* (1637) Descartes vows not to allow himself to be persuaded by what he finds in the book of the world unless on the evidence of reason.

> ...so long as I merely considered the customs of other men, I founded hardly any reason for confidence, for I observed in them almost as much diversity as I had found previously among the opinions of philosophers... they showed me many things which, although seeming very extravagant and ridiculous to us, are nevertheless commonly accepted and approved in other great nations; and so I learned not to believe too firmly anything of which I had been persuaded only by *example and custom* (my emphasis). Thus I freed myself from many errors which may obscure our natural light and make us less capable of heeding reason (*Discourse on the Method*, 1988, part I, sec. 10, pp. 24-25).

How could other nations hold "extravagant and ridiculous" beliefs since, as Descartes himself suggests, rationality (as well as "good sense") is equally distributed in all humans? He also claims that the diversity of our opinions does not imply that some men are more rational than others; it only means that one may choose different paths of viewing things. Reason is equally shared and therefore it is not fair to blame it when we go astray. In his *Meditations* he assumes that mistakes rather occur when our will goes beyond our understanding in making judgements. Therefore, errors of thinking may follow from our peculiar interests, wishes and desires, not from reason itself. What is

disturbing here is that Descartes seems to refer to entire forms of life, "great nations" to use his own words, that could get lost in the pursuit of truth, not only that individuals are liable to err. Whole lifeworlds could be misguided by biases rooted in their cultural beliefs.[6] But while cultures may be misled, the light of Reason is trustworthy and beyond doubt. Descartes makes that point clear again:

> I have recognized through my travels that those with views quite contrary to ours are not on that account barbarians or savages, but that many of them make use of reason as much or more than we do. I thought, too, how the same man, with the same mind, if brought up from infancy among the French or Germans, develops otherwise that he would if he had always lived among the Chinese or cannibals; and how, even in our fashions of dress, the very thing that pleased us ten years ago, and will perhaps please us again ten years hence, now strikes us as extravagant and ridiculous. Thus it is *custom and example (my emphasis)* that persuade us, rather than any certain knowledge (*Discourse*, Part. 2, sec. 16, p. 28).

Therefore, Descartes thinks he is justified in adopting a skepticism toward knowledge received through distorting "custom and example". Since a "majority vote" does not count as a proof for him, a solitary well-guided mind alone finds the way out of the confusing cultural imagery. Thus, one's individual reason is opposed to a collective culture built upon corrupting "*customs and examples*". Self-sustaining certainty provides an escape from the prejudiced labyrinth. According to Descartes's account of the human condition, in order to avail oneself of Reason, one must be liberated from the errors which deceiving customs instill. This departure from "messy" cultural beliefs enables well-directed minds to reach a set of clear and distinct ideas which are so reliable that no reasonable human could refuse to assent to them. If lack of understanding or miscommunication still occurs, that does not mean that the truth is less compelling. It is just a sign that the sober standards of lucidity and logical cogency were disregarded.

At one time Descartes fears that we all may be led to error by a malicious demon

"of the utmost power and cunning", who uses all his skills to deceive us. We would have no way to find out if we all were prisoners of a mystifying appearance, walking in a dreamlike unreality. We can cite that metaphor like the situation of a traveler to a strange land of liars who are careless about truth, and, disregarding any kind of norms, are totally dishonest. Such a traveler could make no sense of their verbal behavior. Nonetheless, Descartes cannot accept that a benign God could tolerate that. A generalized delusion is inconceivable in a world ruled by a good and inherently non-capricious God. Descartes would have never forgiven "*le mechant Dieu*" for making humans so ill-suited to the pursuit of truth. Notwithstanding, he concludes that there is no proof for suspecting God's benevolence. Therefore, it is fair to assume that we are equally endowed with a capacity for clear and distinct ideas and can understand each other. It is not God's fault if people misuse their reason. Cultural misery is tolerable and curable; we may get lost on the maze of the world of extravagant and distorting customs but we can discover the right direction by following the guidance of reason. As for the possibility of always being wrong, without ever being aware of it, of course, a just God could not have done this to us.[7]

Or could He?

Descartes faces this question when he has to specify the relationships between self-evident intuitions reached in the light of reason and reality external to the mind. In this respect, there is a distinction between insights into necessary truths, a kind of intellectual intuition such as "*a cause must be as great or greater than its effect*", and impulses, a kind of inclination to believe opinions like "*the heat which I feel is produced by fire*". The former is grasped by reason in all minds as clear and distinct ideas. The

latter are not intelligible but sensible and can be subject to doubt. By the senses we can have only a confused notion of matter like an image or an imprint that result form the influence of the body over the mind and are potentially distorted by cultural biases or personal habits and prejudices. So, on the one side, Descartes considers the reason which apprehends in the way of geometry the necessary attributes of being that possesses qualities describable in mathematical terms. On the other side, the empirical formation of beliefs and opinions is tinged by custom and example that may cause fallacies, and consequently may push understanding between people to chaos and inherent conflict. Descartes knows from his own life that people are torn apart by faith and interests, since as a young soldier he himself participated to the religious wars. He tries to overcome the emotional distress that causes our liability to err by founding the self-intelligibility of rational arguments on the trust in God (*Natura Naturans*). If God exists, then we can count on our sense experience and on our reason. An essentially good Creator would never deceive us. Nevertheless we still can go wrong because we are fallible insofar as judgements occur in the intellect, which is finite, and their selection involves the will in the form of "assent" and "dissent" which is infinite. To avoid fallacious thinking we have to make a proper use of the cognitive abilities God built into our selves and to conduct our beliefs in the light of reason toward what is clear and distinct. Descartes appeals to the divine guarantee to enhance the reliability of rational understanding and credibility of the epistemic subjects; then he seems to have forgotten about the Creator and tries to manage without him. (For that eloquent omission Pascal never forgave Descartes). The burden falls on our selves. Once we are endowed with reason, we are responsible for bringing our understanding under its rule or we will go astray. Failure to

fulfill this duty is not only an epistemological mistake leading to error, but a mishandling

of our abilities and a betrayal of God's trust and therefore a sin.

And yet reason is backed up by God in its solitary, meditative journey that

transcends the particular and exuberant world of culture impregnated by sense

experiences and prejudice. Quine calls this attempt to free reason from the mundane

captivity of daily life a move outside of the world, a kind of "cosmic exile" (see Ernest

Gellner, *Reason and Culture*, 1992, p. 99). Descartes's reason freed from "custom and

example", functions as a public, egalitarian and universally valid court and its first ruling,

without right of appeal, is to enact the very existence of the Absolute Warrant. Should

we still doubt the voice of cultures, inherently distorted by prejudice and bias, as a mere

deception? So far as God's benevolence would be incompatible with such a way of being

generally deceived, this hypothesis is not quite plausible. But Descartes shows the

contrasts between the clarity of reason and messy variety of customs, and in order to

insure that reason prevails, he postulates its autonomy and sovereignty. But how could he

be wholly confident that his truth-seeking mind is not driven by his own cultural bias?

What makes him immune to the kind of fallacies for which he holds people accountable?

In this respect, at the end of his contemplation, he may have forgotten to pray to his God

of order and sobriety to spare him the confusion or mystification that lead astray other

people.[8]

In conclusion, the rationalist tradition inspired by Descartes claims that human

reason is identical in all ages and societies. But is it? The ideal of certainty, initiated by

Descartes, was permanently damaged by attacks against the logical order, which provided

a model for the workings of the mind. One was mainly theoretical and came from the

research in the foundations of mathematics, which damaged the credibility of any attempt to reduce mathematics to logic. Although this kind of internal criticism is not my concern here, I will refer to it shortly in section 2.4 of the next chapter by making a few suggestions which are prompted by the need of redefining rationality. I will show there that the pattern of rationality sought by Descartes and intrinsically associated by Frege to the prerequisites of logical reasoning appears open to questioning. But it is not my intention to expand these considerations further as they lead too far from the aim of this dissertation.

Another blow, somewhat more extensive and more direct, against the sober and organized Cartesian reason came from outside, from the exotic fields of mistrusted social sciences such as anthropology, sociology and psychology. We shall see that this kind of criticism gets new strengths from a more analytically oriented attack which is launched from the mid-ground of linguistics which is covered by a relatively recent philosophy walking in the tracks of latter Wittgenstein. Above all, these debates signal the demise of the Cartesian ambition to secure understanding across cultures on the basis of a universally valid reason. The anthropological and sociological approaches show reason and understanding to be bound by cultural practices. And that is why I need to address these issues. First, in the next section I will question the plausibility of the prerogatives of Cartesian reason and challenge its claimed priority to the specifics of culture. Then, in the ensuing chapters I will discuss the attempt to demolish the universality of understanding built on the ground of context-free rationality from a culturalist perspective, which proves instead that languages express closed articulated world-views. But before that, I need next to examine some empirical considerations from social

sciences which lay out realistic premises for the criticism of the attempt to build up knowledge of other cultures on a substantive notion of reason abstracted from culture. In the end we must recognize that we are bound to look for a more limited, but more appropriate and feasible project of understanding than the one the overly optimistic Descartes once imagined.

1.3) A CHALLENGE TO THE CARTESIAN PROJECT: THE CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF REASON

The goal of this section is to show that Descartes's aim to secure human understanding by transcending the world of *"custom and example"* was vulnerable to an empirically oriented criticism coming from social sciences.

We have noticed Descartes's attempt to explain the understanding of others in terms of a universal reason that provides a substantive basis for a generally shared human identity. But the conviction that rationality fixes the essence of the mind and provides for the basic capacity with which we are equally endowed, to successfully undertake the unending quest for truth, is not my main concern here. My occasional references to the traditional belief in the rational essence which insures human identity (which has constantly fascinated philosophers, and amongst them Descartes is a leading voice) are relevant only insofar as they warrant the appeal to a universal ground for a generic understanding between people. But we shall see that once reason comes under the target of sociologists and anthropologists exploring the social roots of rationality, it loses its traditional autonomy and is shown to evolve from cultural practices. In consequence, the concept of understanding loses its credibility and must be redefined in the context of a

new pluralist setting.

A line of attack against Cartesian rationality was revealed by its inadequacy in dealing with the hitherto ignored implications of cultural difference and otherness. The challenge to the universality of reason began when newly discovered lands with cultures unknown to the old continent were fascinating European travelers eager to explore the variety of God's creation. They returned home with descriptions of exotic moral beliefs and patterns of behavior which contrasted with the customs familiar to their own world. The outcome was to concentrate attention on the cultural variation and apparent inconsistency of man's moralities. But to be different, Enlightenment philosophers (like Rousseau) argued, does not mean to be irrational. They soon fashioned the romantic ideal of the Noble savage, as the genuine incarnation of human nature, undistorted by the civilization that imposes formal conventions, moral prejudices, and cultural biases.

Later, with the methodological development of descriptive social science, field researchers questioned the validity of the European claims about reason which were then imposed upon apparently "strange" people and remote cultures. But many thinkers refused to accept a more flexible pluralistic rationality and reacted with skepticism to the alleged discovery of unfamiliar styles of thinking and religious patterns of alien cultures. Intolerance toward other kind of reasoning or behavior of pre-modern people was expressed in the pejorative connotations of words like "primitive", "pre-logical", or simply "irrational".

The reductionist view of reason which disregards differences between cultures and identities of other people by subjecting them to the norms of reason and morality accepted by Westerners was called into question by, among others, James Frazer. His

collection of stories on sympathetic and homeopathic magic in *The Golden Bough* (1913) was very influential. He assembles there a wealth of ethnographic material concerning unfamiliar beliefs and cultural practices and explains them by associative principles. Frazer makes his bizarre stories intelligible and charming, notwithstanding he fails to account for the order and the similarity of human vision. His implicit recourse to a kind of Humean principle of psychological association yields limited results in this respect. Frazer is bound to just empirically show that cultural practices (either religious or scientific) have coagulated accidentally from perceptions and impressions like a "rolling snowball". However, he clearly suggests that the standards of judgement and meaning frameworks we use in interpreting experience depend on the way of life in which we are embedded. From this viewpoint, the self-evident logical principles (contradiction, implication, etc) associated by Descartes and Kant with a changeless universal human nature are in reality acquired by people following their rules of specific cultural practices. Different habitual ways of organizing social life form different practices of rationality in different cultures.

Emile Durkheim shares with Frazer, and against Descartes, the supposition that the study of culture cannot simply be discarded as irrelevant for the understanding of what appears to us as reasonable behavior in other societies. But Durkheim criticizes Frazer's Humean methodology because it reduces the universality and necessity of reason to empirical contingency and, in general, he accuses empiricism of irrationalism for denying the logical structure of understanding. Nevertheless, his own research conclusions converge with Frazer's claim that the cognitive categories of the mind constitute a common rational core that the intellect acquires in the empirical process of

religious rituals. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), published two years

after Frazer's work, he uses the "ethnological" investigation of primitive religions to

prove that rationality is not rooted in the illusory Cartesian mental substance but

originates in what he calls "*savage*" practices.[9] Thus he develops the hypothesis

supported by ethnographic evidence that conceptual structures are not to be deduced

transcendentally, but appear as dependent variables of social interaction rooted in

religious ceremonies like magic rites. Durkheim argues that "the categories of human

thought are never fixed in any one definite form; they are made, unmade and remade

incessantly" (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, [1915], 1976, p. 15). They are

collective representations expressed in universal concepts showing the mental state of the

group and providing for its integrity. Although mental structures and general ideas are no

longer related to an immutable reason, they provide for social cohesion and are a common

basis necessary for understanding between different communities. Unlike Kant, who

postulates an *a priori* structure, Durkheim collects evidence from anthropological

fieldwork to support his thesis: people began to think alike because they were engaged in

the same rituals. This cooperation within cultures makes social life possible and provides

for its sociological comprehension. The conclusion of his anthropological survey of

savage mentality is that fundamental categories of thought are not transcendental, or

created by God, but they are religious in origin. Within religious rituals held at regular

intervals, the remaking of rationality is achieved by means of reunions, assemblies and

meetings wherein individuals manifest their social need for upholding and reaffirming in

common their collective representations. Religious practices provide a symbiosis

between moral demands and a cosmological propensity. The first is oriented toward

action and regulates drives, the latter draws a portrait of the world by transposing reality into an intelligible language. In this way Durkheim explains the elaboration of logical rules and the generation of concepts which are applied to organize (to classify and systematize) things (see *Elementary Forms*, p. 428-9). Hence individuals bound within social life can compare their world-views, "disengage that which they have in common and thus, in a word, generalize" (*Elementary Forms*, p. 432). Because gods are conceived, not perceived, people can unproblematically agree on the same divine powers. While sensual imagery is in perpetual flux, the conceptual network consists in a corner of the mind which is "serener and calmer". It is the relative immutability and universality of the impersonal concept that makes cross-cultural communication possible. Durkheim says, "[a] concept is not my concept; I hold it in common with other men, or in any case, can communicate it to them..." (*Elementary Forms*, p. 433).

So finally, although Durkheim is committed to dismiss the priority of reason which genetically evolves out of early peculiar cultural practices, he seems to return to Descartes when he stresses the universal possibility of communication based on a commonly shared conceptual network, which is valid beyond the historic and cultural boundaries. Thus, socialized individuals can interactively negotiate meanings, and exchange concepts which are defined as "impersonal representations", "outside of time and change", and are in principle communicable to all human minds (see *Elementary Forms*, p. 433-4). Consequently, the trouble we experience in understanding other civilizations is explained by an imperfect or partial assimilation of the meaning of the words we use. Such semantic mistakes, which may appear as outright lies or mystification, can be avoided once we see the constructive role played by society in the

formation of conceptual patterns. Minds instilled with "*logical life*", (Durkheim's own suggestive expression) can comprehend that truth must be free of personal bias and relatively invariant over different lifeworlds. In order to furnish a common rational and transcultural ground for communication, objective ideas must be abstracted from the subjective private horizon of unstable, ever changing perceptual appearances. Durkheim argues,

> This is possible only from the moment when, above the fugitive conceptions which they owe to sensuous experience, men have succeeded in conceiving a whole world of stable ideas, the common ground of all intelligences. In fact, logical thinking is always impersonal thinking, and is also thought *sub species aeternitatis* - as thought for all time (*Elementary Forms*, p. 436).

Durkheim repeatedly acknowledges that, as far as rationality is impersonal and objective, it represents the collective thought that can provide a basis for universal understanding.[10] Descartes could not have hoped for more. But for Durkheim, the interactions and relationships between actors which involve both representations and practices are no longer to be regarded as an irrational influence upon a pure though corruptible Cartesian reason. "Quite on the contrary, the collective consciousness is the highest form of psychic life, since it is the consciousness of the consciousness" (*Elementary Forms*, p. 444). Therefore, humans are rational just because a higher disengaged social life of the community is pulsing inside of everyone, and "this impersonality naturally extends to ideas as well as to acts" (*Elementary Forms*, p. 446).

In conclusion, Durkheim agrees with Descartes that rationality consists of a conceptual make up of the mind that makes universal understanding possible. Nevertheless, instead of looking for metaphysical arguments regarding the reality of the self as a thinking substance like Descartes, he discovers reason as evolving out of cultural

customs such as primitive magical rituals. Durkheim agrees that the "*cogito*" is universal

currency in linguistic exchange since it is abstracted from "communal thought". Reason

is not sanctioned by a benevolent God but is genealogically rooted in savage's "unreason".

Max Weber was surely aware of Durkheim's approach, though he is not interested

in finding rationality in the remote mythological world of the savage. They both explore

the worldly roots of reason in religious practice and argue for its social rather than the

metaphysical character. Unlike Durkheim, though, Weber does not explore why all men

are rational on the basis of ethnographic data. While seeking a value-free, impartial

standpoint, he ends up showing the function of a religious prejudice which in his view

informed the pattern of rationality that made possible the rise of capitalist world order. In

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1920) Weber pays tribute to Descartes.

He remarks on the role played by the Cartesian orderly, sober and detached reason in the

configuration of Protestant virtues which provide for the underlying rationality of the

modern social and economic order. Weber contends that despite Descartes's allegiance to

the Catholic dogma and his education acquired as a loyal disciple of the Jesuits from "La

Fleche" College, his "*cogito_ergo sum* was taken over by contemporary Puritans", who

exploited the ethical significance associated with it. He argues that the Cartesian reason

gave a peculiar tendency toward asceticism to the Reformed faith (*Protestant Ethics*, p.

118). Through Puritan tendency toward the uniformity of life and the pattern of rational

conduct on the basis of the Christian idea of worldly *calling*, inspiring self-restraint from

consumption and luxury, sobriety and duty, asceticism was carried out of monastic cells

of the saints into everyday life. For Luther this is the state in which the individual ought

to live and against which it was impious to rebel. As Weber contends, *calling* is not a

condition prescribed by Heaven but a chosen destiny to be pursued with a sense of self-responsibility. For Protestants in general, all men are in the same relation with God and hence the privileged status of the priest as a mediator with the divine is abolished and replaced by the view that everyone equally partakes of the sacred. Nobody in the world is more sacred that anybody else. In particular, this morality of sobriety, orderliness, and uniformity opposes the wasting of wealth as an irrational behavior and facilitates the capitalist way of thinking. Thus, the Protestant ethics influenced the idea of rational organization of the society through rational planning and accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to savings, commitment to labor and investment, free selection of means to achieve utilitarian ends and standardization of production (see *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1930, 1950, pp. 171-2).

Nonetheless, Weber introduces the alienating process of instrumental reason. Whereas initially it established the ideological premises of capitalist development, later it justifies a crushing bureaucratic system which deprives the individuals caught within it of their freedom. He emphasizes that the moral idealism rooted in the Protestant ethics which disregarded and despised the utilitarian pursuit in the material world was soon in conflict with the obsession for profit and efficiency of the rising bourgeois society for which it initially provided the rational foundations and legitimation. Weber describes this paradoxical situation in an inspired metaphor: the "light cloak" on the shoulders of the saint expressing the readiness for religious resignation and withdrawal from the material world, "which can be thrown aside at any moment" (*Protestant Ethics*, p. 181) will fatally become an "iron cage". The new system will end up crushing humans under unprecedented inexorable power of commodities and subjecting their lives to the

annihilating power of bureaucracy (*Protestant Ethics*, p. 181).[11] Weber assumes, "the

intensity of the search for the Kingdom of God commenced gradually to pass over into

sober economic virtue; the religious roots died out slowly, giving way to utilitarian

worldliness" (*Protestant Ethics,* p. 176). Practical idealism rooted in Protestant rationality

of life will be replaced by the "capitalist orgy" of the accumulation of profit, the

ambitions for controlling the market and the lust for money. Capitalism will end with the

unprecedented inexorable power of material commodities over the lives of men.

Unlike the generic Durkheimian idea of a rationality that is coextensive with

humanity itself, Weber's notion of rationality as being rooted in the peculiar Protestant

tradition is narrowly tied to the Puritan ascetic ideal and to the way of life of the middle-

class in the new economic system. This kind of rationality provides the content of a

particular attitude, ("the spirit of capitalism"), which allows for there being other

rationalities in other societies. By contrast, from Durkheim's point of view, all human

beings in a community are rational so far as they learn norms through rituals and acquire

the same basic logic and moral principles. For Weber, what was induced and culturally

transmitted was a new pattern of rationality stressing the demands of sobriety and rigor

drawn from the Protestant religion. On his interpretation, the principles of social

organization differ from the ecstatic practices of magic wherein Durkheim located the

rationality of natives. The differences between them reflect a theoretical divergence

about understanding. While for Durkheim all people are rational and can communicate

with each other so far as the conceptual network is universally inculcated to everyone

through socialization, Weber allows for irrational individuals in a rational world.

Moreover, instrumental reason could be trapped by a paradox which has undesirable and

absurd consequences as long as it remains silent about values and says nothing about the

nature of ends to be accomplished. So one cannot use one single ruthless-mindedness

and calculable efficiency. There is no single idiom, no "single conceptual currency" as

Gellner says, which would enable the multiple and sometimes contrasting ends, and the

array of assertions to be cross-connected, systematized and expanded (see Gellner,

Reason and Culture, chap. 9).

In sum, the anthropological arguments show that Descartes's notion of reason and

his belief in a conceptual understanding that flies over the gaps between cultures and

transcends the differences are not altogether defensible. If in the Cartesian coronation

ceremony rationality was anointed king over all cultures, in empirical ethnographical and

sociological research we get into the shadow of the tower of Babel, the mythical place of

linguistic confusion, where *custom and example* endowed with priority and authority

become again the ruler. This conclusion goes against Descartes who fears that to adopt

such path would lead people to personal confusion as far as they would no longer be able

to distinguish truth from falsehood and may succumb to social and political chaos. That

is why to rely on arguable opinion instead of certain knowledge means to be led astray on

the path of *un-reason.* In this respect, the anthropological and sociological study of

diverse forms of life challenges the Cartesian project of rational understanding. Once we

accept the demise of the Cartesian project, we have to abandon the wishful thinking that

rationality abstractly fixes human nature and provides a universal warrant for

communication between people irrespective of the specifics of cultures.[12]

Comparative studies of different cultures following Durkheim and Weber have

provided sociological and anthropological evidence suggesting that we must surrender the

idea of reason as a self-sustained decision procedure that grounds trans-cultural

understanding on the basis of a universal idiom of communication. In the next chapter,

we shall see that Peter Winch argues that since there are no explicit unchanging rules

wired in our heads by God, they arise out of a particular context of symbolic modes of

social life within which they function. In order to make intelligible such peculiar criteria

and values from potentially idiosyncratic ways of living, one has to accommodate oneself

to and get familiar with the cultural practices of subjects under investigation from within

their world. Therefore, on this view, the ascription of rationality to people from a culture

alien to ours does not make sense as long as they plainly reject our standards. From this

perspective, the demands of consistency or efficiency are rendered inapplicable to natives

who can find witchcraft and magic as justifiable as modern medicine or science. By this

reasoning, Peter Winch thinks that we may not apply our rules to a tribal community like

the Azande which does not recognize these rules. Therefore we cannot judge natives on

the basis of catching them in a contradiction to which they are persistently blind. He

claims that our habitual modes of thought, rational standards and interpretations within

lifeworlds are as much reflections of our particular time and place as our customary

modes of social behavior. Since every culture as an idiosyncratic form of life has its own

fundamental frameworks, judgements of people caught in one specific tradition must be

interpreted with respect to the views they share and agree upon. It would be non-

permissible to judge their intellectual beliefs or standards of behavior from the view of

another tradition to which they do not consent. The questions suggested by Winch's

approach are: Can we consistently judge a person belonging to another culture as being

irrational, or even rational? How are we to decide cross-culturally what patterns of

rationality have a genuine intellectual authority over alien natives?

I will address these questions in the next chapter, which will carry on the anthropological arguments hinted above. In what follows, I need to discuss briefly the internal logic which guided the progression of my argument in the ensuing chapters and to clarify the strategy I deemed appropriate to carry out the issue in the way I did.

1.4) THE SEQUENCE OF THE ARGUMENT

Now I will summarize what is to come in each chapter and indicate how it fits into the plan of the work as a whole. Having identified difficulties with the Cartesian standpoint, in subsequent chapters I turn to considerations bearing on the development of an adequate concept of rationality for cross-cultural understanding.

In *chapter two* I will examine more radical arguments for the abandonment of the Cartesian conception of reason than those presented here. In the introductory chapter we have seen that anthropological and sociological research suggests that rationality emerges within contingent social practices rather than being rooted in a faculty independent of empirical conditions. Now we will examine the claim that rationality is a matter of culturally-bound linguistic frameworks. Peter Winch who seeks more flexible patterns of intelligibility for grasping diverse cultural practices has advocated such a view. His perspective rejects Descartes's belief in the universality and the intelligible basis of reason.

Winch develops a two-fold interest in the conception of rationality and the problem of cross-cultural understanding in relation to a new idea of social science. He draws from the later Wittgenstein's culturalist view of language and from the empirical basis of anthropological research. To comprehend Winch's arguemnt we need to explore

Wittgenstein's claims that the complexity of life cannot be conveyed by the simplicity of some metaphysical fictions like Descartes' notion of rationality. He argues that one can only look from the single window of one's home-language as a relatively enclosed world of meanings in which a specific perspective on understanding is constructed. Second, we will see that Winch's view rests on social and cultural grounds and supports the suggestive, but still elusive, formula that different societies or native communities live in distinct worlds. These claims, based upon field research in anthropology and linguistics like Evans Pritchard's study of Zande magic, lead to the denial that there is anything universal across different cultural practices. They imply that if we are ever to understand other cultural frameworks or conceptual schemes we must rely on a notion of rationality which makes sense only from "within" a given context. In consequence, understanding other cultures becomes problematic for Winch. Since he cannot explain how an anthropologist can still do his job in the field, I will show that Winch generates a *"research paradox"*.

Without anticipating the subject which will be discussed further, it seems obvious to me that arguments drawn from Winch justifies a retreat into relativism. This is a consequence of his support for a double abandonment: first, he gives up the very notion of a *one objective reality* (or *a single world*), which is to be described as culture-laden and inherently multiple; second, he discards the rational choice among beliefs and actions as meaningless. This surrender pushes the traditional ideal of reason through the mill of the radical thesis of incommensurability, which grinds the idea of culturally loaded "forms of life" and makes room for the supposition of incommunicable "linguistically articulated worlds ". Consequently, Winch assumes that the conception of the nature of

social science is consistent with the explanation of criteria of rationality that are relative to a cultural context. He argues by referring to the problem of apparent irrationality that logical understanding has at best a very limited applicability to the intelligibility of radically different cultural practices.

On the basis of this outline discussion, we can anticipate each section of this chapter. The account of rationality and understanding across cultures is linked with the problem of making sense of linguistic meanings that give us access to one's world. The chapter proceeds as follows.

In section 2.1, *"From Language Games to Forms of Life"*, I will trace the background of Winch's relativist conception and I will briefly describe his view which implies that Descartes's notion of rationality "flies in the face of ordinary language" and needs to be abandoned. In this respect, a more plausible alternative seems to be provided by Wittgenstein who claims that social activities can be interpreted and properly understood only within ways of life construed as language games.

After having summarized Wittgenstein's account of language games, we can turn to the use Winch makes of this thesis when thinking about the possibility of understanding other styles of thinking and kinds of behaviors. In section 2.2, *"Whose Rationality, What Understanding?"*, we will present Winch's conception of rationality and knowledge of different cultures as it emerges from his "new" idea of social science. From this perspective, section 2.3, *"Irrationality or Misunderstanding"*, will discuss the problem of apparent irrationality as a result of misunderstanding rather than an expression of an incoherent or a defective mind.

There are certain difficulties with Winch's view that I will review and assess. In

section 2.4, *"A Rejoinder to Winch: 'Latent Rationality' versus Consistency"*, I present

three objections to Winch's position. First I show that, if holding inconsistent beliefs is a

sign of irrationality, then Western culture is not different from native communities like

the Azande, which are caught in a contradiction. Second, in contrast with the formal

rationality tied up with the logical form, I introduce a concept of "latent rationality" which

fits better with the elusive character of life situations. Third, the methodological question

is could an investigator ever escape from the framework of a home language and get

immersed in another remote and possibly idiosyncratic form of life? Sometimes Winch

implies that a field anthropologist is supposed to be able to contrast and evaluate disjoint

planes representing different belief systems and to grip the multiplicity of world-

perspectives. To understand how the relativist constraint can be eluded, Winch must

explain why the anthropologist reserves for himself a privileged access to a neutral state

of mind, a special position which is essentially denied by relativists to inhabitants caught

in their symbolic home-lands. What makes possible the social scientist's success in

understanding people coming from alien cultures? The vicious circularity of

understanding implied by Winch's relativist tenet cannot avoid *"the research paradox"*.

In addition, we will show that the notion of apparent irrationality as applied to Zande

natives by Evans-Pritchard can be consistently generalized, inclusive to our own culture.

It seems to me that the imputation of irrationality does not demonstrate mental

incoherence. As we shall see, it may indicate instead an inner conflict (in the observer or

within the cultural framework) resulting from the antagonism between instrumental

reason centered on success and efficiency (in the pursuit of practical ends) and the goals

of preserving the coherence of thought (by pursuing truth, rightness or sincerity).

Finally, in section 2.5 I will try to sum up where we stand in the argument by emphasizing that the explanation of the breakdown of communication between cultures is inevitably related to the issue of translation which mediates understanding between speakers of different languages. If one agrees with Winch that grasping meanings is bound up with a specific concept of rationality and proceeds within a language system, one cannot avoid saying that the translation that mediates linguistic communication and makes possible understanding between inhabitants of different cultures bears on relativism. For instance, in order to become aware when an alien speaker behaves irrationally, the question is whether the participants in conversation could exchange equivalent meanings. It is this linguistic bridge of understanding which has been so dramatically narrowed by Winch. So, the discussion of the problem of translation is a logical step and, insofar as it has been famously carried out by Quine, turning to his point of view becomes not only relevant but quite necessary to the issue at stake. This idea will be carried out in the next chapter.

Therefore, we have shown that linguistic philosophy threatens to deepen the problem of relativism so far as it bears on cross-cultural understanding. In *chapter three*, *("Quine and the Problems of Translation: Charity vs World Incommensurability")* we turn to the work of an eminent philosopher of language who has wrestled with communication between languages by taking up the problem of radical translation. Though Quine argues for the thesis of the "indeterminacy of translation", he also introduces a principle of charity that may be useful for our purpose. The first thesis builds upon the ontological assumption of the inscrutability of reference and leads to radical relativistic assumption of incommensurable worlds. The principle of charity

locates the promise of an alternative way to avoid the unacceptable relativist stance by making appeal to a more "charitable" interpretation effective especially in the early stages of translation. Thus, after considering the semantic arguments regarding the breakdown of understanding, I argue for the fruitfulness of Quine's inquiry into the possibility of communication through maximizing (or optimizing) the agreement when reading other cultural discourses. This is what he calls the maxim of charity. The value of this methodological recommendation remains to be weighed against Quine's contention that translation is essentially indeterminate which relies on the related theses of linguistic idiosyncrasy and world-incommensurability.

The discussion sketched above is developed in two sections as follows: First, in section 3.1, I explore Quine's explanation of the breakdown of understanding in terms of indeterminacy of translation and inscrutability of reference. The linguistic divergence, which leads to the gap between two languages, points to analytical hypotheses. Thus, in 3.11, I will approach Quine's discussion of semantic difficulties posed by the problem of *radical translation*. In 3.12 I will analyze his *Gavagai-Rabbit example* which provides the paradigmatic argument: speakers of idiosyncratic languages cannot understand each other since they live in different worlds and share *incommensurable* cultural values. The relativist consequence of this example will be emphasized in 3.13.

After the examination of Quine's treatment of understanding in terms of his thesis of indeterminacy of translation in section 3.2, I will explore the concept of charity which offers an exit from this difficulty. In 3.21 I will present three objections to Quine's thesis of indeterminacy of translation which prove that his account of cultural variation of meaning is not as persuasive as many believe. Apparently Quine himself appealed to the

maxim of charity in order to save the coherence of his point of view facing the

unavoidable relativist consequences of his approach (rooted in extensional semantics).

I will show in 3.22 and 3.23 that the idea of charity has two aspects. On the one

hand, it is an attempt to "*save the obvious*" from linguistic relativity. This includes both

logical truth and inferences as an expression of the backbone of a kind of rationality,

which must remain cross-culturally valid, as well as the empirical reference of linguistic

sentences, namely the common base of a wide range of stimulus meanings. On the other

hand, according to a methodological recommendation introduced by Quine, we are urged,

at least in the early fumbling stages of translation, to prefer accommodating the

translation scheme rather than to assume a speaker's apparent irrationality. His policy,

expressed by the maxim of charity, is to avoid translating one's assertions in "too glaring

a falsehood" and to deem one's silliness less likely than a bad translation. However,

Quine set three important limitations for the idea of charitable understanding:

first, it works in the early stages just as a "rule of thumb";

second, he is reluctant to accept endless revision of the translation scheme in order to

    avoid the attribution of irrationality; and

third, interpretation is a guessing procedure that has merely a conjectural character being

    intelligible by recourse to empirical psychology.

Finally, in 3.24, with regard to this dissertation's concern with the problem of

rationality and its relation to cross-cultural understanding, I make an allusion to Neurath's

marine metaphor depicting the human condition. The purpose of this allusion is to show

that Quine's view may face an inescapable dilemma. On the one hand, a skeptical voice

declaims the impotence of reason and the cultural and linguistic fragmentation of the

mind's intelligibility. On the other, an opposing voice advocates a universal rationality which guarantees the transcontextual possibility of understanding across languages and cultures. Insofar as Quine ponders charity against world-incommensurability, he exposes himself to the two horns of a dilemma.

To overcome such weaknesses of Quine's notion of charity, we must search for a more compelling version of this principle which can insure the possibility of understanding within a methodology of interpretation. In *chapter four*, I push further the investigations begun in Quine's theoretical horizon by proceeding on the path of one of his greatest followers, Donald Davidson. My purpose is to analyze a kind of *charitable rationality* that offers a *bridging conceptual ground for understanding* people living in different cultural and linguistic frameworks. Davidson claims that in order to understand others we need to acknowledge the intersubjective character of language and to make an appeal to the principle of charity.

The sequence of the argument in this chapter is structured in two steps. First, in the beginning section, 4.1, my aim is to show that since understanding is inherently linguistic, language must have a social character. I will make good on Davidson's insistence on the public availability of any possible language by distinguishing his approach from Quine's behaviorist treatment of meaning. In 4.11 I will examine Davidson's critical account of Quine's "*Cartesian vision*". Despite the differences between Descartes's rationalism and Quine's behaviorism, both see the private self as the point from which a subject can reconstruct a picture of the world. This discussion (recalling Wittgenstein's argument against a private language) provides the premises for the exposition in 4.12, where I review Davidson's thesis that language must be essentially

public or it is not language at all.

In the second section of this chapter, after having analyzed what kind of rationality might warrant the possibility of interpretation, I turn to question why we need such a rationality. The relativist idea of unbridgeable worlds is challenged by Davidson in two ways. First, in 4.21 we shall see that he points to the notion of charity previously suggested by Quine to impose a constraint on the process of translation. According to this principle, we are bound, as Davidson puts it, to maximize or optimize agreement. This means that we must presuppose that people we try to understand are basically reasonable. In a stronger sense, charity implies that we can rely on a minimal and necessary rationality. In 4.22, I will explore the anti-relativist connotations of Davidson's attack against the "very idea of conceptual scheme" that seems to be inherently tied to a language and makes understanding possible. This argument is necessary to challenge the assumption of different and incommensurable worlds and to argue that languages are at least partially translatable.

In 4.23, we see that Davidson appeals to charity to make understanding possible and that he goes further than Quine when enforcing the methodological demand for charity. He claims that interpretation requires constructing a "bridging" conceptual system to ground cross-cultural judgements, which should enable us to compare so-called "incommensurable" patterns of behavior, even apparently different styles of religious practice. Davidson considers that understanding creates the need for a principle of charity which can be represented as a linguistic bridge of interpretation with two main footholds: one is Tarski's theory of truth in terms of Convention T, the other refers to the possibility of making sense of one's beliefs, desires and intentions. Thus, Davidson replaces the

Quinean behaviorist notion of "stimulus meaning" with the mentalist notion of "holding a sentence true" most of the time, and suggests that people are usually true in their beliefs most of the time.

Finally, in 4.24, after presenting Davidson's account of charity tied to a version of rationality that provides for understanding beyond the limits of a linguistic context, I summarize various objections to his position. As a matter of fact Davidson is openly reluctant to accept any transcendental account of the charity principle and he restrain himself to the more modest job of showing how disagreement is possible. In such a case though, he cannot preclude the hypothesis that we are mostly or massively mistaken. Perhaps this pitfall can be avoided by turning back in the direction of restoring the prerogatives of the Cartesian reason as Martin Hollis expressly intends in building his concept of a rational bridgehead. This is the topic of Chapter 5.

In contrast to the Davidsonian plea for inter-subjectivity, in *chapter five* I explore a very strong version of a substantive reason conceived objectively, by analyzing Hollis's notion of bridgehead. We will see that the further Hollis goes, the less defensible his position becomes.

In section 5.1, I describe Hollis's reasons for supporting a substantive notion of rationality which secures the possibility of universal understanding. By presenting this view I intend to exemplify a kind of position that is stronger than the ones I have discussed so far. Hollis's explicit aim is to restore the compelling prerogatives of the Cartesian reason which are invariant for all cultures. He argues that there must be rational and true beliefs which every rational mind must accept and which set an a priori limit to relativism. Consequently, a successful translation and interpretation of beliefs

must presuppose "what a rational man" cannot fail to believe in simple perceptual situations, organized by "rules of coherent judgement" to which a "rational man" cannot fail to subscribe. The presuppositions are assumed, not discovered. They are *a priori* conditions of intelligibility and establish the universal premises of the universal language of the mind. Hollis intends to restore Descartes's hope of rational understanding. He contends that the "bridgehead of true and rational beliefs" is "fixed" rather than "floating", in the sense that there are specific inferential principles and stimulus-belief links that are presupposed by efforts at translation or interpretation. These are not conjectural, but "universal among mankind", or at least among that portion of mankind we can understand. If Hollis avoids the paradoxes and self-refuting consequences of the relativist standpoint, he must still prove the reality of such a priori universals. In fact, anthropological and sociological research found such "fixed" transcendental conditions of understanding to be irrelevant for possible cultural interpretation. For instance, the laws of logic offer no guidance for the elusive aspect of every day life and are often silent on how to revise our beliefs.

In section 5.2 I express doubts concerning Hollis's claim that reason is a universal bridgehead commonly and invariably shared by all cultures. Obviously, Hollis can answer the problem of credibility faced by Davidsonian charity by strengthening the rational ground that anchors the universality of understanding. However, although he dares to advocate a stronger view, he is exposed to the critical observations that bear upon the Cartesian project as we noticed before.

Finally, section 5.3 is presented as a transitional one. There I review where I stand in the argument and I present a bridge to the next chapter on Habermas's concept of

communicative rationality. After concluding critical remarks made so far, it may be useful to look for a way between Davidson and Hollis. It seems to me that Habermas goes a long way toward this by starting from the crossroads of continental hermeneutics and analytical philosophy. The next step of the argument emphasizes a constructive goal and will be given special attention. What follows is a twofold strategy designed to explain Habermas's alternative to Descartes as constructed in an account of communicative rationality, and, at the same time, to show how Habermas's redemption of the project of modernity aims to restore the integrity of reason over the fragmentation of value spheres.

In *chapter six* I approach Habermas's account of communicative competence in which he grounds his concept of discursive rationality and provides for the possibility of cross-cultural understanding. My goal is to show why Habermas's theory of communicative action succeeds to a significant extent in the attempt to find a way out of relativism. He intends to reconstruct the universal and necessary conditions of communication, first in terms of a formal pragmatic theory of speech acts, and then in the articulation of a discourse ethic. I will try to explain his appeal to a weak-transcendental argument which secures the universal rational ground for reaching human understanding and shows how bridges between contrasting cultures can be built. According to Habermas, speakers engaged in communication draw from the lifeworld the common background of "consensual patterns of interpretation", the presupposed solidarities which are described as "normatively reliable patterns of social relations", and speaking competencies acquired in the process of socialization ("An Alternative Way Out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject-Centered Reason", in *From*

Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology, 1996, p 605).

The chapter proceeds as follows. In section 6.1, I show that Habermas bids

farewell to Descartes with his idea of communicative rationality. I argue that the concept

of communicative reason offers two main insights: rationality is inherently linguistic and

discursive, and "communicative competence" provides the universal ground for any

possible speech act within which claims to validity can be vindicated. We can briefly

anticipate the content of the sections. In 6.1, first I will make some preliminary

consideration to justify my approach, then I will try to address the controversial problem

whether cross-cultural understanding requires a transcendental argument. We will

understand the sense of the criticism which targets Habermas for excessive formalism,

abstract universalism, impotence of mere ought, and the terrorism of pure conviction.

This recalls the objections Hegel once leveled against Kant. And we shall see that

Habermas continues in a way the Kantian line of questioning and adopts a weak

transcendental strategy of reconstruction. In 6.2 I present Habermas's theory of universal

pragmatics and the concept of discursive rationality that has a procedural character and

lies in a communicative competence shared by all speakers. The next stage consists in

scrutinizing the universal possibility of reaching consensus (6.3). First I will analyze the

idea of discourse in general and discourse ethics in particular in connection with what

makes norms applicable. Second, on this line of discussion, I will stage out a dialogue

between Habermas and Kant on the issue of moral justification. Third, I will explore

what Habermas calls the "postconventional" status of "the discourse" in the given

conditions of a growing gap between the traditional forms of life and the critical

reflective modes of argumentation. I will continue with a presentation of challenges set

upon "the discourse" by the process of cultural differentiation. This theme leads us to Habermas's attempt to redeem the project of modernity.

Finally, in section 6.4 I make an assessment of the context transcendent power of communicative rationality and I emphasize its merits. I also mention the limits and difficulties faced by Habermas's argument on validity claims redeemed and vindicated in speech acts and ideal presuppositions of argumentation (6.41). Then, I scrutinize the concept of "ideal speech situation" in a narrative way (6.42). My goal is to point out the normative value of Habermas's project in connection with some critical accounts of its idealizing consequences (such as implausible portrayals of speaker-hearer argumentative interactions and the utopian hope in a rational society). I also talk about the critical function of rationality in the diagnosis of the pathologies of modernity and I observe that he has not made yet a serious attempt to work out an articulated account of the violations of the internal idealizing structure of speech. Habermas's concept of communicative rationality which makes possible understanding via universally motivated agreement leaves unanswered questions regarding the utility of Habermas's theory of discourse. Given the broad range of his problematic (Putnam calls him a "God-thinker") and the ambiguity inherent to such an unusual extension, there are grounds for critical interpretations from many angles. Nevertheless, if we lose sight of Habermas's achievements or choose to discard his postmetaphysical and non-relativist account of rationality, we do that on our peril. I will show why the critical thrust of communicative rationality makes his postmetaphysical and non-relativist account the most fruitful and promising alternative we have explored so far.

Chapter 7 is reserved for final conclusions. It is the place where I bid a final

farewell to Descartes in the light of communicative rationality. I will review the main sequence of the argument by revisiting three sets of problems. First, in section 7.1, I conclude where we are left in the argument regarding the problem of the rational basis of cross-cultural communication. The closing remarks are a brief summary of what I think is the most acceptable of the available solutions to the problem and indicate what I think I have accomplished by all the work I have done so far.

We will observe that the participants in the relativity debate (like Winch, Quine, Davidson, Hollis, and Habermas) must acknowledge the rational pre-conditions which make possible their own dialogue and controversy on metatheoretical issues (as I discuss here). These are the universal and unavoidable presuppositions of argumentative reasoning which make intelligible the difference between them and provide for the possibility of agreement.

In the last section, 7.2, I will make reference to a larger argument which remains to be elaborated. In this respect, I argue that a three level model of rationality is a promising conceptual alternative. It is possible to show that cross-cultural understanding relies on a threefold background rationality which, properly conceived, provides the conceptual ground and justification for communication and consent among apparently contrasting ways of life. However, as my reflections on this issue are still too intuitive and incomplete, a conceptual construction of this promising project remains to be done.

Chapter 2)   *LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN AND PETER WINCH:*

UNDERSTANDING A LANGUAGE AND UNDERSTANDING A WORLD

In this chapter, I will examine radical arguments against the concept of a unique, impartial rationality as developed by Descartes. My aim is to scrutinize the notion of a culturally bound rationality which has been advocated by Peter Winch and to see how his arguments for the thesis of diverse and multiple rationalities point to ways a more plausible and more adequate notion of understanding can be conceived.

Such an approach begins from the conclusions of the previous chapter. We have noted already that the anthropological study of diverse societies suggests a "world of Babel"; what the modern tradition describes as a universal autonomous reason comes to be seen as a matter of a specific culture. Sociology and anthropology give reason to think that rationality is historically and socially bound and that therefore the Cartesian ambition to transcend human interactions is implausible and inadequate. The ethnographic researches of Frazer, Durkheim and Weber challenge the Cartesian removal of the subject from the world of culture. In addition, they show that the concept of fixed and universal rationality predisposes thinkers to accept ideas of objective knowledge and human understanding in ways that obscure their own partiality and prejudice, as well as the fact that notions of rationality evolves from social practices.

This lays the conceptual ground for the linguistic analysis which informs philosophical debates over relativism and which radicalizes the attack against Descartes's project of autonomous reason and universal understanding. In what follows, we will show why the Cartesian view could have been suspected for "flying in the face" of the ordinary language-use and for misleading ethnographic research. Such a critical attitude

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is reflected by the concept of understanding from the perspective of a culturalist view of language inspired mainly by the later Wittgenstein. On his view, "languages" are seen as linguistically articulated worldviews and correspondingly structured forms of life. They refer to and help constitute a kind of wholes which appear as multiple and different and provide the background of symbolic knowledge and customs that help the community to interpret and relate to reality. For the members of the same culture the limits of their language set the boundaries of their world or form of life. They can expand eventually their horizon but they cannot step out of it. Therefore, it is only within a linguistic framework that thought becomes possible and understanding makes sense.

Having discussed Wittgenstein's influential view on language games, I will turn then to Peter Winch's idea of social science which has been inspired by Wittgenstein's pragmatic treatment of language as use and is designed to grasp the meaning of human behavior within various forms of life. These thinkers share a criticism of the universal validity of reason, and, on this basis, rule out the possibility of understanding other cultures from outside.

Winch inherits Wittgenstein's holistic commitment regarding the understanding of different ways life as language games, and describes their contrasts in terms of idiosyncratic "rule-following behavior". Here lies a premise of the relativism which denies the a priori and universal character of reason as the cross-cultural ground for understanding between peoples. Nevertheless, since the relativist's acceptance of conceptual diversity brings the problem of rationality to an impasse, it has become problematic to know what claim can be made beyond that of custom, or culturally impregnated taste and private preferences?[13]

In approaching this discussion I intend to draw some positive conclusions regarding the need for styles of thinking that are better accommodated to the grasp of the peculiarity and variety of cultural practices and, therefore, for more flexible patterns of intelligibility of what people do and say.

2.1) WAYS OF LIVING AND LANGUAGE GAMES

In this section I will try to examine Wittgenstein's conception of language-games and its implications regarding the understanding of different ways of living. For doing this, I will scrutinize his analogy between how we make sense of the world and how we come to grips with the meanings of words within various linguistic frameworks.

We have seen that Descartes aims to base human understanding on the universally valid and certain foundations of reason as warranted by God. For Descartes, intelligible insights into necessary truths cannot be doubted, since they are in principle immune to mistakes rooted in culture and to historical revisions. This view implies that all rational people share the same ideas, the same thinking self, and their mental contents are necessarily convergent. In consequence, meanings of sentences from different languages can be unproblematically and properly translated. And yet, we remain fallible beings as far as impulses may incline us to give assent or dissent to undemonstrated beliefs. Though Descartes was convinced that if one follows the self-evident light of reason and avoids making decisions based on a capricious will, one will not go wrong either in the construction of the world or in the understanding of others. Wittgenstein challenges this view when making his linguistic turn. He replaces the mind as the "organizer" of reality with the language that provides the framework within which sense contents and meanings get structured and intelligible.

In consequence, Wittgenstein is credited (by Winch and Quine among others) for creating a new perspective on the problem of understanding of cultures.[14] In the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) he claims that what has to be accepted as "the given" is describable in terms of a language-game and "to imagine a language-game is to imagine a form of life" (*Philosophical Investigations*, 1953, sec. 19). If he is correct, then the very language through which our enculturation is achieved is intelligible only to people who share the same modes of life. Any natural language, he argues, comprises a variety of "language games", whose significance is derived from the forms of life of the communities in which the language in question is learned, spoken and put to practical use.

There is, though, an ambiguity about the contexts in which Wittgenstein's introduces the expression "language-game". Sometimes he simply presents a list of usual linguistic functions: describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements; constructing an object from description (a drawing); reporting an event; forming and testing hypothesis; presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams; solving problems in arithmetic; making up a story, and reading it; giving orders, and obeying them; making a joke, telling it; play-acting; asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying, etc. Once he says,

> A language game: bringing building stones, reporting the number of available stones... If, however there are several ways of finding something out for sure, like counting, weighing, measuring, them the statement 'I know' can take place of mentioning how I know (*On Certainty*, 1969, sec. 564).

At other times Wittgenstein calls a 'language-game' the whole form of life within which language and actions are intricately interwoven. This second sense has more global connotations, which make it suitable for shedding light on understanding alien behavior.

As Wittgenstein says, "Here the 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or a form of life" (*Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 23). In this respect, for the whole process of using words it is particularly relevant the way children learn their native language or primitives give significance to their sacred rituals.[15] Meanings cannot be determined apart from the language game in which they play a definite role. As a matter of fact, what counts as evidence for right or wrong, true or false, is subjected to public scrutiny and appears as an outcome of an eventual agreement among people of a community (*On Certainty*, sec. 281). Consequently, terms central to philosophical tenets like knowledge, real, proof, or simplicity become non-sensical outside of the distinct framework of socially recognizable and culturally impregnated patterns of experience which are transmitted through education. Such concepts make sense when used within socially recognizable patterns of linguistic practices that vary on a wide range from the ordinary language of a cultural framework, which absorbs customs and standards of judgements to distinct vocabularies which characterize professional groups like builders or comedians. As Wittgenstein puts it (*On Certainty*, sec. 61), "A meaning of a word is a kind of employment of it " within a language game.[16] "For it is what we learn when the word is incorporated into our language." He finally urges us to bear in mind that the language game is neither a device for prediction and control, nor a reasonable or unreasonable standard of evaluation. It is simply there 'like our life' (*On Certainty*, sec. 559).

Despite the flexible and somewhat confusing use of the term "language-game", Wittgenstein repeatedly stresses its significance as "processes of using words", and hence he refers not just to a set of utterances, but also to the "actions into which it is

interwoven" (*Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 7).

The recurrent comparison in Wittgenstein's later work between playing a game and using a language pervasively assimilates the role of grammar for the employment of propositions within a linguistic framework with the rules of the game that are subject to a restricted application. Correspondingly, the understanding of speaker's usage of words is like the understanding of the behavior of a player following the rules of the game. As far as an utterance is taken outside of the context of its pragmatic use and it is intended to posit *things*, it might as well be a part of mythology postulating gods.[17] For then on, our propositions, which may be articulated to provide an image of the furniture of the world, appear in a false light of God's ontologic idiom which could stipulate anything to everyone and that means that we were trapped in the bad philosophical grammar

Wittgenstein replaces metaphysically loaded essences of things with "family resemblances", an expression designed to characterize a complicated network of conceptual similarities "overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail" (*Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 66).[18] He contends that he only way of making sense of a problem regarding meaning is by analyzing multiple ways of using language. For example, we identify different things by applying the words "games", or "numbers" not because they would point to a certain essence, but rather because they form a family and are related by "family resemblance". In fact, as these words may be used in different ways, it may very well be that there is no essential nature or explicit rule, to which they call attention. Therefore, language rather can be learned in a practical way.

So, if Descartes describes the philosophical quest in terms of the solitary journey

of Reason beyond *custom and example*, Wittgenstein exhibits the multifarious character of philosophical approaches as merely "criss-crossing sight seeing" journeys made possible by tracing family resemblances to which the multiplicity of language games calls attention. And once one removes the Cartesian spectacles, the world can be seen through multiple facets represented by "forms of life", which depend not on the "ontological game" Descartes played so well with God in order to make Him reveal his divine blueprint, but on the peculiar ways different communities use language. Therefore any attempt to offer a "God's eye perspective" *a la* Descartes, to Wittgenstein creates "pseudo-problems" resulting from a conceptual confusion. Since we cannot conceive of a satisfying solution for such problems, our task is rather to dissolve them by discovering how and why the logic of our language has been misused. Philosophy can not give an account of things, but it can destroy the sovereignty of *idols*, like Descartes's transcendent Reason, which makes possible the quest for certainty and universal understanding. Our hope becomes that of putting our speech in order and clarifying the way we use our words. Though we should notice that our own way of structuring knowledge is merely one amongst many possible others. It is not a grasp of "*the Platonic order*", of an eternal and immutable being which is *the given* to be caught by all human languages in a supposedly invariant manner. The clarity that one might aim at is possible not on such metaphysical grounds, but only in the limits of a language game. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear (*Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 133).

On these reasons, Wittgenstein contends, then, that the Cartesian ideal of an universal language is not feasible.[19] The meaning of words cannot be determined apart

from the language game in which they are used and take a definite role. What philosophers have accepted as "the given" is just a metaphysical fiction that can only be described in terms of a language-game. And, Wittgenstein argues, "to imagine a language-game is to imagine a form of life" (*Philosophical Investigations*, sect. 19). In this respect, sometimes, meaning is compared with the social function played by an "official" and different meanings with "different functions" (*On Certainty*, sec. 64). Therefore to know, for instance, what is a "beetle in a box" does not tolerate a metaphysical emphasis since the term cannot be associated with a thing or an essence which may allow us to get its meaning (*Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 293, see also *On Certainty*, sec. 482). In consequence, to be clear about meaning one must look at its use within a language game which changes with time (*On Certainty*, sec. 256). "When language game change, then there is a change in concepts, and with the concepts meanings of words change" (*On Certainty*, sec. 65).

Consequently, understanding the meaning of a word or sentence is possible only within a home-language that is the familiar framework of one's language-game (*Philosophical Investigations*, secs. 7, 10, 18, 20, 40-43). This implies that the notion of meaning as a truth-condition is replaced by a procedure for ascertaining the significance of a sentence by considering (in Kripke's formulation) "under what conditions can the sentence be correctly uttered" and "what is the use or function of such utterances" (in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 1982, p. 73, after David K. Henderson, *Interpretation and Explanation in the Human Sciences*, 1993, p. 22).

Thus, if one is to "make sense" of other people's meaning and overt behavior, one is supposed to know how their utterances are related to other sentences and actions,

which must themselves presumably be understood. Such a holistic spirit is evident in Wittgenstein's critical response to Descartes's claim that intellectual certainty is an intuitive achievement which can come after the absolute doubt. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein claims that when we first begin to believe anything the "Light dawns gradually over the whole"(*On Certainty*, sec. 141).[20] That metaphor implies that what we believe is not a single, isolated proposition like '*Cogito ergo sum*', but a whole coherent system of propositions. Since there are not any self-evident or self-intelligible axioms, postulates or intuitions within this linguistic context, premises and consequences need to give one another mutual support (*On Certainty*, sec. 142). And insofar as we belong to a language community which is bound together by a common background of knowledge and upbringing, Wittgenstein claims that "we are taught judgements and their connection with other judgements" (*On Certainty,* sec. 140).

A relevant question at this point might be how can we learn to ground on reliable evidence the propositions which must be coherently used within a form of life? On this matter, Wittgenstein takes a stance against both Empiricists and Rationalists who seek for a certain foundation of understanding which is objectively valid irrespective to culture. He admits that justifying the evidence or giving grounds comes to an end, though he contends that the end is neither certain sense-datum propositions as empiricists believed, nor rational intuitions like 'cogito' which strike us immediately as undeniably true. On the one hand, he assumes that

> proposition of the form of empirical propositions is itself thoroughly bad; the statements in question do not serve as foundations in the same way as hypotheses which, if they turn out to be false, are replaced by others (*On Certainty*, sec. 356).

On the other hand, he contends that certainty is not mere a mental act of a thinking self

(what Putnam alludes to as the "disembodied Cartesian subject"). On the one hand, one's "mental state" (as "cogito") gives no guarantees of what will happen and future developments of events cannot be known for sure. On the other hand, by doubting everything, one would not understand "where a doubt could get a foothold" nor where a further test or experiment was possible.[21] For irrefutable evidence he uses the label of "subjective certainty", an expression which conveys one's complete conviction or total absence of doubt, that is what one uses in attempting to persuade other people (*On Certainty*, sec. 194). For instance, this might be the case of the unmistakable feeling of cold drops on my forehead when walking through freezing rain or, more abstractly, the experience of the passage of time which is given by successive changes of things; more directly, by the extent of our bodily dissolution. Such an empirical reality is undeniably revealed not by the Cartesian intellectual intuitions but by the senses, and insofar it can provide premises for acting without doubt, Wittgenstein calls it "sure evidence". Thus, what we accept without hesitation is not what appears to Descartes as necessary truths in the unmistakable light of reason, but what it is unquestionable support for us to succeed in what we do. It is like the chair I am sitting on, the keyboard and the screen I am using right now that make possible my present undertaking of typing this text. Obviously, I cannot deny the concrete existence of such things, which are actually used by me in the process of writing down these very sentences, without leaving room for questioning the normalcy of my mind. That is the evidence Wittgenstein assumes that we use as a support for "acting without any doubt" (*On Certainty*, sec. 196). In this respect, he emphasized the primitive importance of action by quoting from *Faust*: "In the beginning was the deed" (*On Certainty*, sec. 402). This maxim means that at the bottom of the

language game lies our acting not some set of basic intuitive and incorrigible statements either perceptive or rational (*On Certainty*, sec. 204). In consequence, unlike Descartes, Wittgenstein regards 'certainty' as a basis of acting within a "form of life" (*On Certainty*, sec. 358).[22]

Henceforth, conflicting philosophical arguments about the use of terms are likened by Wittgenstein to disputes among natives when they are faced with a new custom. Finally he contends that the results of philosophy are "the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got running its head up against the limits of language." (*Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 119). In fact, 'subliming language' is just the attempt to find a justification for our linguistic practices.

On his view, the philosophical problems arise "when language goes in holiday" - that is when a language user feels beyond any regular constraint and fails to abide by the rules of grammar. The perplexity caused by a wild user of language who creates a new grammar, violates the old one, or simply misconceive language is just like the confusion generated by a chess player who misapplies the rules of the game, makes up new ones, or conceives the game in some "static" manner. In this respect, Wittgenstein contends that,

> 'I know that that's a tree'. Why does it strike me as if I did not understand the sentence, though it is after all an extremely simple sentence of the most ordinary kind? It is as if I could not focus my mind on any meaning. Simply because I don't look for the focus where the meaning is. As soon as I think of an everyday use of the sentence instead of a philosophical one, its meaning becomes clear and ordinary (*On Certainty*, sec. 347).

Therefore, meaning lies in the intersubjective use of language within a community. To make sense of people's speech behaviors, philosophers should not interfere with actual usage of language and they must leave the things as they are. For this reason, Wittgenstein suggests that philosophy can in the end only describe world but it finally

leaves it unchanged.[23]

On such grounds Wittgenstein ruined the philosophical grammar of rationalists from Plato to Descartes and Husserl as well as of empiricists from Hume to Carnap and Quine who were seeking to rebuild the world image, and, inherently, the understanding among people on the basis of some primitive evidence (either the immediately striking certainty and undeniable truth of "cogito" or raw experience and stimulations of our nerve endings).[24]

In conclusion, Wittgenstein rejects the empiricist and rationalist claims regarding meanings which are embodied in a universal language and are expressing an impartial epistemic standpoint supposed to be so compelling for all people who deserve to be called rational. On his view, an utterance and correlated actions have no meaning outside the context of a language-game and consequently in the absence of a linguistic framework we have no system of reference to be employed when we interpret a language different from ours. Understanding alien behavior requires understanding a form of life that is a constellation of activities guided by specific rules.

Wittgenstein's culturalist view of language provides the conceptual background for Winch's questioning of the idea of rationality and for his analysis of the possibility of understanding other cultures. This discussion will be carried out in the next section.

2.2) WHOSE RATIONALITY, WHAT UNDERSTANDING?

Winch points to the similarity between language games and forms of life by arguing that they are both rule-governed and that in both contexts notions of understanding and meaning make sense only within a framework. In this respect, he cites a famous metaphor from *Philosophical Investigations* which compares the conceptual

difficulties we experience in using some terms of our language with the state of mind of savages who are confronted with something from an alien culture. Winch exploits Wittgenstein's analogy between certain features of our concepts and an imaginary alien society in which all our familiar patterns of thinking are subtly distorted. Then he suggests that what is required to understand unusual conceptual meanings is comparable with making sense of an unfamiliar behavior from a form of life remote from ours. He points out that we are not able to grasp the meaning of a word if we only consider its probable occurrence in a book and formulate statistical regularities of its use. What is left out is a significant body of tacit knowledge. To understand a word is to describe how it has been used within the context of a language. From here Winch infers that "linguistic behavior has an 'idiom' in the same kind of way as has a language" (*The New Idea of Social Science,* 1958, p. 15).

At this point, since Winch's argument makes reference to both "ways of life " and "forms of life", terms which seem equivalent in Wittgenstein, we need to make a conceptual clarification. As David K. Henderson shows, Winch makes an implicit distinction between "ways of life" understood as particular social frameworks (e.g. religion or in a given society or science in a given society), and "forms of life" understood as more comprehensive types of social contexts (such as religion, magic, business, art or science). The former appear as instances of the latter (*Interpretation and Explanation*, p. 23), but both are in Winch's focus when he examines the ideas of rationality and understanding. On this conceptual basis, he targets the ideal of scientific knowledge defended by a tradition which strives to explain human practices by empirical generalizations on the model of a method derived from natural sciences. Such a tradition

leading back to J.S. Mill assumes the reductionist view according to which a social institution is treated as no different from a physical event and is assimilated to a kind of lawlike uniformity or regularity. For instance, Max Weber often speaks about statistical reasons (chance) to predict with a fair accuracy what people would be likely to do in some given circumstances (see *Idea Of Social Science*, p. 115). Unlike Weber, who defines roles played by social actors in terms of the probability that actions of a certain sort will be performed in certain situations, Winch argues that behavior is meaningful only if it is governed by rules and this presupposes a social setting. Just as Wittgenstein rejects the essentialist view of meaning and the primacy of formal language (including logic), Winch repudiates a unified and formalist method of science. He accuses Weber for failing to realize that the notion of understanding an "event of consciousness" as employed in the "context of humanly followed rules", carries a sense which cannot overlap the sense of knowledge from the "context of causal laws" without creating logical difficulties (*Idea of Social Science*, p. 117, see also "Idea of Social Science" In *Rationality,* 1970, p. 6). The fact of the matter is that we might be able to make correct predictions about people's future actions and still not have any real understanding of what they are doing. The irreconcilable character of this situation is revealed by the contrast between counting the frequency of using a word in a discourse and providing a lawful explanation by deducing the chance of its occurrence, and being able to make sense of what is being said there. Winch says, "a man who understands Chinese is not a man who has a firm grasp of the statistical probabilities for the occurrence of the various words in the Chinese language" (*Idea of Social Science*, p. 115). Understanding consists in grasping the *point of meaning* of what has been said or done. Therefore, Winch moves

understanding from the world of statistic and causal laws to the "realm of discourse" and the conceptual relations which insures its internal coherence. Moreover, he makes a distinction between the notions of meaning and function in a quasi-causal sense, and contends that the former can never be reduced to the latter.

The main target of Winch's discussion is the idea of rationality that underlies the methodological arrogance of the positivist model of science. According to the traditional view, social events are susceptible to the same kind of explanation as natural phenomena. Nevertheless, what counts as epistemologically significant is the empirical ground and logical structure of theory, and factors such as human interactions between scientists are rejected as irrelevant and treated independently from the particular forms of activity that is represented by the research itself. Winch argues that scientists, who focus on discovering experimental uniformities, have overlooked the fact that the world is made intelligible in their disciplines through social participation in established forms of practice. They are not aware that insofar as they all share and live by the *same* beliefs assimilated in the process of socialization, they are bound by the *same* rules and take part to the *same* life-game with those they study. The fact of the matter is that the intelligibility of linguistic expressions and actions performed is possible only within a form of life, and is bound by certain "considerations" or "points" which establish what is meaningful and what is not (*Idea of Social Science*, 1958, pp. 100-1). Hence Winch assumes that, "Understanding... is grasping the *point of meaning* of what is done or said" (*idem*, p. 115). His notion of "rule-following-behavior" is interwoven with the notion of meaningful action in the manner Wittgenstein connected the concept of "rule" as used in grammar or games with criteria of identity. Therefore, the investigator of a community

should study what underlies that "sameness" of meanings which allows for communication between its members, and which explains why they hold the *same* standards and why they do the *same* kind of things. The rule-following-behavior is multifarious (from games, political thinking, musical composition, to the monastic style of life) and depends upon the variety of roles that individuals may assume or reject within a way of living.

Winch claims that in such social contexts it is difficult to anticipate how one may carry out an action. Unlike natural phenomena which are predictable, human events have a fuzzy character because they involve choice between alternatives. For instance, a social agent caught in the game of decision making, who, with understanding, performs *X* must be capable of envisaging the possibility of *not doing X*. That means that understanding something involves understanding its contrary too, and the logical requirement of consistency or coherence must be taken *with a grain of salt* and loosened up for the allusive situation of every day life.

For this challenge to the Cartesian notion of rationality, Winch is indebted to Wittgenstein's analysis of linguistic behavior as following rules of a grammar. In this respect, language use presupposes: *1)* the possibility of making a mistake, and *2)* the conceptual impossibility of being mistaken most of the time. In fact, the condition of consistency is not always observed and therefore rationality cannot be reduced to logical understanding. As Winch says, "the forms in which rationality expresses itself in the culture of a human society cannot be elucidated *simply* in terms of the logical coherence of the rules according to which activities are carried out in that society" ("Understanding a Primitive Society", in *Rationality*, 1970, p. 93-4).

Winch combines the early Wittgenstein's emphasis on the overlap between one's language and one's world (when he insists that "the limits of my language are the limits of my world") with the later Wittgenstein's holistic suggestion (*Blue and Brown Books*) that understanding the meaning of a sentence means understanding a language. From here Winch develops the idea that the inherent biases and limitations of understanding other cultures are rooted in the employment of our language and in the way we live. Our minds have been wired in the process of adopting the rules of the social game we are bound to play in our society.

So far as this conclusion precludes any neutral middle ground between two languages, it has an effect upon the methodology of social scientists in approaching other societies. When an ethnographer leaves his home culture in an attempt to communicate with an alien speaker, he cannot rely on the understanding of meanings or rationality which is peculiar to his way of life. When one comes to the issue of the differences in rationalities it make sense to ask, "*whose rationality?*" since "something can appear rational to someone only in terms of *his* understanding of what is and what is not rational" ("Understanding", p. 97). Thus Winch concludes that there is not a single universal game of rationality with only one set of rules, but many kinds of rationalities which may vary according to the cultural diversity of the forms of life. And since there is no "norm of intelligibility in general", but many and varied forms" (*Idea of Social Science*, p. 102), it is also important to clarify "*what understanding*" is at stake.[25]

For the above reasons, Winch dismisses the idea of a general understanding rooted in a common humanity. Instead, he insists upon the radical difference between forms of life and claims that the norms of rationality are not valid across the borders of a culture.

He seems to believe that making sense of an alien culture, which contains criteria of rationality about beliefs and rules of actions incompatible and incommensurable with ours, implies a task as impossible as jumping over our shadow. To do so, we would have to divest ourselves of all prejudices and biases and suspend the criteria of rationality which are inherently built into our interpretive scheme. That explains why in the radical case of a complete break down communication between cultures, when the intelligibility of alien people seems utterly impossible, the attribute of rationality applied to them is rendered empty and meaningless.

In conclusion, by choosing to adopt through Wittgenstein's idea of multiple home-languages, Winch is convinced that to understand a way of life is "to see the point of the rules and conventions followed in the alien form of life" ("Understanding", 1964, p. 181). In this respect, logic and statistics have little, if any, relevance in the account of cultures. As he proceeds with this criticism, he concludes that the idea rationality presumably wired in human mind as described by the philosophical tradition from Descartes to Frege is just a nice fiction . The considerations discussed above show that rationality cannot be reduced to logical adequacy or to cognitivist aspects but also refers to the incommensurable structures of values that makes sense of human life within of forms of life.

We have noticed that on Winch's view our rational standards and interpretations within given forms of life are as much reflections of our particular time and place as are our customary modes of social behavior. In this case, it is relevant to ask: Can we consistently understand somebody coming from another culture according to our own expectations? And if we judge people different from us as being irrational, how are we to

decide what patterns of rationality have a genuine cross-cultural validity? Provided that

every culture is a form of life, judgements of people caught in one specific historical time

or in an idiosyncratic ethnic tradition must be interpreted with respect to the views they

share and agree upon. It would not be permissible to judge their intellectual beliefs or

standards of behavior from the view of a tradition to which they do not belong.

Hence, the charge of irrationality prompted by the appearance of a flagrant violation of

logical consistency proves to be nothing else than a misunderstanding of other cultural

behavior. Naturally, one may be misled by cultural biases or prejudices, but it is

reasonable to expect one being aware of committing a mistake and willing to make

necessary belief adjustments to eliminate it. Of course, to do so, one is required to be

aware whenever one goes wrong in interpretation and to identify the reasons for which

one fails to get the right explanations. We will see next why this is a very challenging

task.

2.3) IRRATIONALITY OR MISUNDERSTANDING?

The above considerations lead us to the following question: how can one tell the

difference between irrationality and misunderstanding? In other words, when a social

researcher is struck by what appear to be irrational behavior, is he facing a defective or

incoherent mind, or, rather, is he caught in a misunderstanding caused by a faulty

interpretation? In this section I will explore Winch's answer to this question.

When Winch refers to the attribution of irrationality based on the apparent lack of

consistency, the classic example he has in mind is that of Evans-Pritchard's analysis of

Zande beliefs concerning the inheritance of witchcraft (in *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic*

Among the Azande, 1937). During an anthropological study of the Azande, Evans-

Pritchard discovered that they believed that witchcraft is an inherited skill, passed from mother to daughter and from father to son. Given the common totemic origin of the tribe that determined the structure of Zande kinship, and considering the frequency of Zande attributions of witchcraft using the poison oracle, the logical conclusion would be that the entire clan should be witches. Nonetheless, the Azande are not willing to accept this conclusion. They reject it by urging "bastardy" in their support, but this is neither evident, nor sufficiently extensive to constitute an alternative explanation. Nevertheless, they see no problem in upholding the belief in witchcraft inheritance although Evans-Pritchard himself tried to make that contradiction obvious to them. They seem to grasp the sense of the argument that their judgment is inconsistent but persist in believing in the inheritance of the witchcraft substance. Zande people remain recalcitrant to appropriate adjustments in their beliefs even though they are brought to recognize that one cannot assent to a sentence of the form *p and not-p* unless one's thought coherence is lost.

Perhaps a more equal distribution of magic abilities among Zande would have triggered changes in their society. Thus, one may assume that they were reluctant to recognize the contradiction of their beliefs because they were not willing to accept the inherent consequences which might have affected their world-order and would have, produced an alteration of statuses and roles within the clan (wealth-repartition, leadership, kinship, etc). It was easier to disregard the demands of logical consistency for the sake of preserving the customary rules they followed in their daily life.

The anthropological observations made by Evans-Pritchard have been cited by Winch in rethinking the idea of social science. He contends that we should not characterize natives as "irrational" merely on the grounds that we find them in

contradiction with our standards. Simply put, we can apply standards of logic within our form of life but these are not cross-culturally valid. Natives must be judged on the basis of accepted norms of reasonable behavior used in their own society, not on external criteria of rationality they persist in disregarding. In particular, it is a mistake to judge "an atheoretical culture" by the standards of a "theoretical" one. So it would be a proof of misunderstanding to translate Zande practice into our patterns of thinking and demand that it must respect the formal canon of "consistency".

In this way, Winch develops his idea of social science in the relativistic terms of Wittgenstein's argument of identity between language and culture. Forms of life are structured by linguistically articulated world-views and existential themes that store the cultural knowledge and basic normative attitudes which shape the way linguistic communities interpret their worlds. Each cultural framework sets up through its language a relation to the world, what is taken to be real is inherent in a language system and becomes a cultural category. Winch says,

> What is real and what is unreal shows itself in the sense that language has... If then we wish to understand the significance of those concepts, we must examine the use they actually do have - in the language ("Understanding", p. 82).

In short, Winch thinks that we should not characterize natives as "irrational" on the grounds that we catch them in a contradiction with our standards and persist in doing so. The standards of logic from our form of life are not cross-culturally valid and a Zande should not be criticized for violating the rule of consistency that does not fit into the articulation of his own culture. Natives may be judged only on the basis of norms of reasonable behavior current in their society.

The real challenge for the anthropologist is to emphasize how the native's social

and symbolic practices reflect the specific modes of identifying and distinguishing activities that are ingredients of a language game incommensurable with our own. Winch says, "our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language we use", but we do not have a category that looks at all like the Zande perception of "magic" or revelation of "witchcraft substance" ("Understanding", p.319). Those animistic ideas are not at all like the conceptual devices of our methodological strategies aiming at the articulation of a theory in terms of which to grasp a quasi-scientific knowledge of the world. It is a mistake in principle to judge "an atheoretical culture" by the standards of a "theoretical" one.[26] To translate Zande practice into our patterns of thinking and to press them it to follow to our formal canon of "consistency" would lead to misunderstanding.

If we were able to find some cross-culturally valid criteria of rationality uniformly applicable to different cultures, we could measure degrees of rationality on an objective scale, and judge in certain cases that beliefs shared by other communities, like the Azande, are more or less rational than the analogous counterparts in our belief system. Alasdair MacIntyre (in "Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing?" and "The Idea of a Social Science" in *Rationality*, 1970) and Martin Hollis (in "The Social Destruction of Reality" in *Rationality and Relativism*, 1982) endorse such a cross-cultural rationality and find no difficulty in applying it over the yawning gaps between different cultural frameworks. Winch disagrees by arguing that the rules of rationality may be shared by agents within a way of life, but vary from one community to another (as well as patterns of behavior from overt verbal manifestations to moral commitment). He agrees with Wittgenstein that what lies behind such cultural differences is the fact that participants in other kinds of social practices are involved in different language games.

On this account, a culture, like a natural language, apart from satisfying some common needs of speakers, gets shaped and grows within the context of the constraints of particular historical influences or mentalities and under the determination of a distinct geographic and economic environment. This implies that the grammatical peculiarities of one language cannot be evaluated against each other, much in the same way as different global ideals of living, criteria of successful or meaningful behavior and the moral norms of justice or of the good and the evil, cannot be assessed or criticized by means of a inter-cultural comparison. Insofar as such values are incommensurable, their comparison is not only illegitimate but idle, and at most tells something about our preconception or prejudices about other forms of life. The very recognition of cultural identity and diversity of belief systems leads to the conclusion that people must be understood on the basis of norms accepted as reasonable and current in their own society and they can be meaningfully accused of irrationality only if they violate their own standards governing the behavior and articulation of thought. Therefore the concept of rationality which underlies one's capacity for understanding is applicable only within a cultural framework and varies from one cultural framework to another.

For the foregoing reasons, Winch assumes that it is not only implausible, but false that Zande natives may share something comparable with us. Western thinkers sometimes interpret "the magic" of so-called primitive societies as a kind of proto-technology, as an early and naive attempt to get control over nature (e.g. healing or bringing the rain) by using religious means considerably less effective that scientifically-informed techniques.[27] To the extent that such parallels can be drawn, ritual-symbolic activities regularly suffer by comparison, and are even made to look irrational when

natives show a counterproductive resistance to more efficient Western methods. In the case described by Evans-Pritchard, the Azande stubbornly preserve their magic practices by insulating them against empirical refutation, making logical or economical arguments insufficient to erode their faith in supernatural powers.

Winch labels such a comparative procedure a mistake that exhibits a misunderstanding rooted in the methodological procedure of imposing the image of our culture on more "primitive" ones. (A classical example of privileging the inquirer's standpoint is Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*) Since the forms of life at stake are so different, it would be wrong to evaluate them in the same way, by using the same criteria and concepts. On this view, because incommensurable practices underlie a plurality of standards of rationality, the ambitious project aiming at the grasping of trans-cultural judgements would be at least implausible if not plain nonsense. Therefore, the ethnographer's ascription of irrationality to Zande people is pointless because they live a world and speak a language different from what he is accustomed with.

In his study "Rationality" (in *Rationality and Relativism*, 1982), Charles Taylor agrees with Winch's denial of trans-cultural applicability of the logical rule of consistency to Azande. But he does not adopt Wittgenstein's explanation of incompatibilities rooted in language-games incomparable to ours. Taylor declares that contradiction does not matter here at all. He argues that the apparent "irrationality" would become more evident if we could make a theoretical description of the peculiar nature of witches and witchcraft within our conceptual scheme. But this is exactly what Winch claims that we cannot reasonably do. The fact is that, beyond the pragmatic concern regarding how practices and customs actually function in their own world, natives do not seem to be interested in

how things really are in terms of truth-conditions or in justifying what they say and believe. They are not at all seeking for validation or confirmability of their propositions as we are. Were they to adopt such a broader epistemological perspective familiar to our conceptual scheme, some of their central tenets would collapse (maybe from unavoidable inner contradictions). But this would mean that they will end up accepting our goals of the articulation of knowledge, and obviously they don't do this. So Winch may observe against Taylor that by holding the implicit supposition of cultural reducibility we have just fallen on the premises of the argument of linguistic convergence he already rejected. He maintains that because of the incommensurability of norms imbedded in different cultures there is no rational basis for choice or translability between them. Moreover, we may not achieve an adequate account of inhabitants of a community foreign to us by holding them accountable to rules they do not consent to. Thus, understanding the proper nature of a given practice under study is possible only in its own terms, namely by describing what appears as meaningful behavior to the bearers in the way the consent to. The social scientist who aims to assimilate a pre-theoretical culture alien to our way of life, like that of the Azande, falls into a methodological error which renders inaccessible to him the specific character of the idiosyncratic style of rationalizing centered on ritualic symbols and religious practices. The real challenge is to emphasize how native's specific modes of identifying and distinguishing between their peculiar social activities provides for their pattern of intelligibility which remains incommensurable with ours.

According to Winch, insofar as the Azande and the anthropologists share contrasting forms of life and speak different languages, it is senseless to suppose that both sides are starting from the same concept of rationality or reality. Consequently, the

anthropologist has no right to judge the belief in witchcraft and magic by the scientific

standards of Western culture because there is no common ground between linguistically

articulated world-views that are intricately interwoven with forms of life. They are

intelligible to themselves within their everyday lifeworld, and it is in this ordinary

framework that the members of a language community come to an understanding on

central themes of their private and public lives.

> Language games are played by men who have lives to live - lives
> involving a wide variety of different interests, which have all kinds of
> different bearings on each other ("Understanding", in *Rationality*, p. 105).

Above all, rationality offers an insight into the fundamental issues of a way of life. It

implicitly tells something about the deep sense of existence in terms of death and

survival, love and hatred, solidarity and loneliness, innocence and guilt and therefore

cannot be reduced to the cognitivist tenet of adequacy of correspondence-truth. In

consequence, understanding bears on

> different possibilities of making sense of human life, different ideas about the
> possible importance that the carrying out of certain activities may take on for a
> man, trying to contemplate the sense of his life as a whole ("Understanding", p.
> 106).

If one is totally immersed in one's home-language, the question arises how one

can ever escape from such a framework. It is often tacitly accepted that a social

investigator, an ethnographer, or a lexicographer, is supposed to be able to contrast and

evaluate divergent sets of meanings and belief-systems, and to have a grip of the

multiplicity of world-perspectives. Insofar as privileged access to a neutral state of mind

is in principle inconceivable, there is nothing to guarantee one's success in understanding

meanings of people coming from an alien culture and sharing religious customs and a

way of living incommensurable to one's own. The anthropologist himself cannot escape a

paradox which undermines the credibility of his findings. And, as we shall see in the next section, this is not the only problem Winch has to solve.

2.4) A REJOINDER TO WINCH: LATENT RATIONALITY VERSUS CONSISTENCY

In this section I will identify some difficulties with Winch's position. My intention is neither to develop a detailed criticism of his conception nor address the complex issue of the irrationality of the world but is to point to a significant alternative which is ignored by Winch when he addresses the problem of rationality and understanding between people. My main goal is to indicate that things may be approached from a different perspective which involves three possible undertakings.

a) First, I will argue against Winch that there is something we share in common with the Azande. Ironically, the salient feature which crosses the border of cultures seems to *be holding contradictory and incoherent beliefs* rather than the logical rule of *consistency*. My goal is not to recount here the intricacies of Winch's claim but to point to some conceptual difficulties presented by it. The point is this: Winch is right in accusing Evans-Pritchard for mistaking Zande faith in magic with our theoretical explanation for natural phenomena, but he is inclined to account for irrationality only in terms of misunderstanding and this is inadequate. Whenever a social scientist is surprised by an apparent absurdity coming from his research subjects, he should rather be advised to review his empirical records, to doubt his competency, and to withhold his judgment. For instance, one may raise the question whether we should keep quiet in humility about primitive and bloody religions or any barbarian customs for the sake of accepting difference. There is overwhelming evidence of unusually wild, evil, or simply

crazy behavior by people living in different times and places. Nobody is immune to such descriptions. If we follow Thomas Kuhn, even scientists, who represent the model of rational behavior in our culture, can proceed with their research in an irrational manner. So even they make an exception. This shows that the problem of irrationality should neither be discarded as illusory nor restricted to "aliens" who seem incomprehensible to us. From here, the argument will lead in two directions.

b) I will then suggest an explanation for the conflicts between our deepest and often tacit commitments, so deeply seated that they often go without saying. For doing so I must go beyond Winch's conceptual solutions. First I shall try to understand why people are irrationally committed to conflicting beliefs by drawing from Habermas's distinction between communicative action designed to reach understanding and strategic action oriented toward success and efficiency. Then, I shall point to a kind of "latent rationality" which explains why people can behave rationally, but which leaves room for their sometimes being mistaken.

c) Third, I will show that a social scientist following Winch will unavoidably be led to a paradox which makes understanding of other cultures unintelligible. The point is that one cannot both deny in principle the possibility of understanding others and still attempt to understand them.

Needless to say, it is not my purpose to make an extensive analysis of these complex issues. I will present some general considerations which may be relevant for showing why Winch's approach fails to be convincing insofar as it begs the question of irrationality and misunderstanding. Let's begin with a somewhat ironical observation.

a) When we scrutinize our own culture we may discover that the imputation of

inconsistency Evans-Pritchard made against the Azande can just as well be made against Westerners. It is enough for recalling the ongoing irrationalities of our time to reflect on the moral principles, which are, we are told, the hallmark of our civilization. Imagine the smell of urine and terror from train cars transporting people to death camps or children left alone thirsty and hungry in the ethnic wars, with nothing to expect from today and frightened in the dark prospect of the future. If the memory of Nazi atrocities begins to fade, more recent tragic developments in Bosnia or Rwanda can refresh the bitterness of our twisted fate. Such grotesque happenings are not imputable to a Jungle tribe but to our "civilized" world. We may remember the countless victims pushed and pulled by the insatiable will for wealth and power of their masters. They are the "big brothers" depicted by Orwell in his imaginary totalitarian society (*1984*), political leaders demanding worship and unconditional compliance. If one does not succumb to moral indifference toward undeserved suffering or surrender to cynical acceptance of injustice, one should bring from the oblivion and honestly confront resentful contradictions of one's own belief system. The schizophrenia that threatens the logical coherence of our own western culture is clear from the many situations which involve inconsistent beliefs (e.g. in the United States, the contradiction between liberal equalitarianism and the institution of slavery and the persistence of racism, or the Vietnam era paradox of free-speech guaranteed by the Constitution in contrast to stopping the spread of ideas which allegedly pose a danger for the U.S. government). Whether these are examples of hypocrisy, short sightedness, or plain failure of understanding is an open question.

Since real people do make casual mistakes of reasoning, can one legitimately assume that the principles of logic are built in our minds and thus provide for the

rationality of our thoughts? The utopian hope of a perfectly organized world with some ideally rational people is an expression of the anti-fallibilist reason, which supposedly permeates the mind. As we have noticed, Wittgenstein and Winch argue that this is just a logical fiction, which cannot be taken literally if we are to match the fluent reality of the life-world we are caught in. Their arguments make sense against the long held tradition which identifies rationality with logical form. On this view, when individuals fell into error, either because of ignorance, stupidity or emotional distress, this just tells something about a faulty application of a norm or about human psychological imperfections. Such situations do not count as a proof that the logical principles are somewhat flawed or misleading so far.

Such an heroic attempt is illustrated by Frege: "If everything were in continuous flux, and nothing maintained itself fixed for all time, there would no longer be any possibility of getting to know about the world, and everything would be plunged into confusion" (Toulmin, *Human Understanding*, p. 55). Without a certain foundation, which must be kept insulated against irrationality, knowledge would become irremediably vulnerable to skeptical attack and could plunge into indefinite darkness and infinite regress. Then nothing could be said. All we have to do is to keep quiet. But Frege and others did not give up. They made a sharp distinctions between prescriptive "laws of thought" and our membership card to the club of rational beings, and the descriptive "laws of thinking", subjected to behavioral contingencies. The first were proper concern of logic, the latter were merely the factual and subjective business of cognitive psychologists in the field. Let's say one individual chooses by ignorance, silliness or conscious intent to deny God, or fails the test of concrete multiplying procedure. These

are just historical and personal "gropings" irrelevant to the philosopher of rationalist persuasion and they merely emphasize the potentially illogical character of individual behaviors.

But Frege was later shocked by a discovery of an inescapable gap in the terms of Russell's paradox that undermined the foundations of his formal system. Then, in the 30's, belief in the formal rationality typified by logic and mathematics was shaken by Godel's incompleteness theorem regarding elementary arithmetic. Henceforth, the possibility of contradictions could no longer be prevented. In the outcome, the anxiety generated by the awareness that "irrationality" can't be conclusively excluded erodes the pursuit of ideal language and the hopes in a possible universal and conceptually clarified ground for understanding. In addition, insofar as God is dead, as Nietzsche emphatically proclaims, it became senseless to appeal to the Divine Warrant, as modern philosophers often did. The Nietzschean exultation has become again meaningful in a new light :"The Night came upon the Falling Idols".

In the long run, the surrender of the logical pattern of rationality may spell additional trouble for the supposition of the identity of the rules of logic and the standards of rationality as these are applicable to distinct modes of social life. In different contexts as exemplified by disciplinary communities of scientists or religious societies, particular behavioral acts can be seemingly non-logical, and yet, they can count as rational within the cultural context. Hence, in such cases the symmetry does not hold. Nevertheless, whenever a violation of the inner rules of reasonable conduct occurs, the label of "irrationality" is much stronger and intricately associated with "illogicality" than in the above situations when symmetrical application supposedly fails. To substantiate this

latter claim, imagine the case of a scientific practitioner who unjustifiably refuses to obey compelling experimental results or a religious believer who, when feeling a deep frustration, is in an avenging mood and curses or shakes his fist against God. These examples point to capital sins against formal rationality. They describe how one's behavior makes no sense and clashes with the framework of one's personal commitments. Finally, such deep logical violations can have a ripple effect moving through all layers of beliefs, and that may consequently put in question one's mental coherence and, subsequently and the "normalcy" conditions that must be fulfilled by the mind. In addition, had one admittedly accepted a guidance as the best way to adjust one's behavior, the refusal to comply with that guidance lead to the frustration of one's own ends. And therefore one is at risk again of being a candidate for the accusation of "irrationality".

However this last claim has been subjected to a legitimate criticism which cannot be ignored. It has been observed that things are not as simple and clear as they are described above and that the mere fact of having a certain end *(E)* and inconsistently acting to preclude the most appropriate means *(M)* is not sufficient for the conviction of "irrationality". As Charles Taylor argues, the agent might not realize that the correct description of his end was *(E)* or, more likely, that *(M)* was the right choice of means to reach that end. Implicitly, in such a case the agent either lacks the awareness that what he was doing is incompatible with M and, thereby, he was frustrating his own goals or he may be simply unwilling to acknowledge the contradiction imputable to him.

Long ago, skeptics raised these objections by arguing against any absolute culture-free values like the ones represented by the criteria of rationality and logical inferences.

They rebelled against the arrogance of reason based upon logical principles that were supposed to cross-culturally decide in matters of truth, identity and difference and determine the judgements of correctness, rightness, and goodness. Insofar as their arguments are tied to relativism they are justified to imply that the absolute knowledge and infallible moral deliberation are nothing else than mere illusory projections of purposes and expectations which can only make sense within the cultural boundaries of a given community. Of course, if they were not just a subjective expression of a wishful thinking rooted in self-deception and despair.

Wittgenstein and Winch agree with this line of thinking at a heavy cost: as the light of reason is fading in the relativist darkness, understanding loses it way. The skeptical denial of the universal validity of reason erodes the footholds of linguistic bridges between cultures and renders dramatically implausible the understanding of other forms of life. Unlike Frege, they admit that it is at least irrelevant, if not misleading, to impose logical standards as the rules of rationality.

Wittgenstein's and Winch's critique of logical understanding undermines the traditional credibility of the universal basis of rationality. Nevertheless, it seems to me that their emphasis on cultural idiosyncrasies reflected by language leaves out an argument which may be drawn from their perspective. The analogy between language games and rule-following behavior implicitly refers to a possibility of committing a mistake. People caught in different life-situations can simply follow or disregard the standards of rational conduct in much the same way a speaker may abide or avoid the criteria of meaningfulness when engaged in a language game. So we may anticipate one observing a rule and doing x or disregarding that rule and not doing x, as one may choose

to act in a specific way or do the opposite. This tells about a possibility of a fallacious thinking that leads to holding inconsistent beliefs and reveals a feature shared by us and native people. It looks like that apparent irrationality crosses over the borders of cultural frameworks. There are, of course, differences of degree as some people may appear more reasonable than others. But one may claim that this is just a matter of empirical psychology, since human thought is generally shaped by particular interests, wishes, desires, and dreams which may conflict with the pursuit of truth or with purely moral considerations of action. Therefore, it seems to me that, considering our own cultural incoherence, the case of Zande self-contradictory behavior, which is described by Evans-Pritchard and capitalized by Winch as an example of cultural idiosyncrasy, may not be an isolated and particular situation. In this light, natives should not appear any less rational than we are. Their frequently inconsistent beliefs should not be held to "fly in the face" of the ordinary rationality of our home language. It happens that humans may irrationally hold some conflicting beliefs, prefer some commitments at the expense of others and even could be able to justify on reasons even their most abominable and evil decisions. In this respect, Evans-Pritchard, and other symbolic anthropologists (Leach, Turner, Skorupski), and political scientists (Protho and Grigg, McClosky) emphasize the underlying political and economical uses of the relevant beliefs. In particular, Evans-Pritchard finds twenty two reasons to explain why the Azande failed to perceive the "futility" of their magic. Among others, inconsistent beliefs are linked to limitations of relevant information within that way of life, to the attempt to save by a refute-proof procedure larger and more significant subsets of the contradictory system of beliefs, or, simply, to the support or legitimation of social and political institutions. (After all, Zande

idea of *witchcraft substance*, which triggers unequal distribution of tribal statuses, can be associated with the notion of *innate nobility*, which played a role in the legitimization of the status quo in the feudal layered society.) It is not a singular situation when people are not willing to accept an equal share of a common heritage in order to insulate the beliefs regarding their social hierarchy and to preclude a more democratic partition of wealth and power. Despite the cultural particularities, perhaps, Zande resistance to acknowledge the contradiction in which they are caught and which were made obvious to them by the "outsider-anthropologist" can be also understood as a confusion in the face of the unexpected and undesired consequences which may trigger the collapse of their world order.

At this point, the question is whether scientists who establish the paradigm of reasonable behavior for our culture, constitute an exception from the type of irrationality so common to ordinary people. But, Thomas Kuhn shows that scientists can often behave irrationally in at least three ways.

First, during the revolutions, they decline being bound by the methodological norms of research and therefore they step outside the framework of rules which govern the scientific game. When they are disoriented by a lack of certainty, they may proceed in a counter-inductive way and become overwhelmed by a sense of personal worthlessness or social despair. In such times of crisis, the theoretical and formal reasons, which support the conservative views, count as weaker factors for scientific choice than emotional grounds or irrationally held beliefs which determine the abandoning the old paradigm of thought. If members of disciplinary communities who are engaged in a kind of activity inherently rational could behave irrationally and

disregard evidence, shall we condemn members of a remote and peculiar tribe for doing the same thing?

Secondly, Kuhn's analysis of the psychological dimension of the commitment to a paradigm has shown that even beyond the confines of religion, it is easier to reveal inconsistent beliefs than to change them (see *The Structure of scientific Revolutions*, 1962, esp. chap. 10). Our inability to change a belief, even if it is proven to be either illogical or false in the light of the empirical evidence, has to do with our emotional make-up and is in general a psychological matter. In this respect, Kuhn's scrutiny of the psychology of scientists reveals their conspicuous tendency to pursue in an apparently irrational or at least non-reflective way the pre-given paradigm according to which their world is structured.

Third, Kuhn argues that the progress in science is not a matter of rational debate but the result of an irrational fatality. He learns from Max Plank's dramatic description of the dynamics of science that physicists do not give up their commitments and they prefer to stubbornly resist to any revision which might be demanded by formal reasons or newly discovered empirical evidence. According to Plank, the new world view wins the battle not on the basis of scientific rationality, but because the advocates for traditional world-view get older and inevitably die. Then, the new generations of young scientists, more flexible and open to the new kind of revolutionary arguments, fill up the stage, replacing the old generation which gradually passes away. Once the conservative view vanishes, the new scientific spirit will finally prevail, until, in its turn, it will be swept away by a future wave. Therefore, Kuhn shows that a tendency to unreflective dogmatism so familiar to political ideologies, is also present in more objective and better conceptually

structured scientific fields.

In conclusion, on the basis of the foregoing considerations, we may argue that whether imputations of irrationality can be treated as Frege did (as individual mistakes), such apparent irrationality should not also count against the possibility cross-cultural understanding, as Winch suggests. In fact, it is undeniably that different people can usually exchange some common meanings in communication. When they don't, bad faith or personal motives could play a more significant role than cultural differences than extreme intranslability.

b) One implication of the foregoing analysis is that imputation of irrationality is caused by a conflict between pragmatic reasons for deciding what to believe and intellectual reasons regarding the cognitive evidence for believing. Whereas the pragmatic reasons imply accepting a statement only if the expected utility of doing so is greater than that of not believing it, the intellectual reasons require rejecting any statement that is less credible than some incompatible alternative. We remember the Azande's resistance to recognizing that they are caught in a contradiction and their perseverance in holding the belief in magic responsible for their inconsistency.

I will develop this issue by anticipating an argument to be developed in chapter 6. In many circumstances there may be a tacit conflict between an instrumental reason aimed at efficient use of means to reach preestablished ends and a reasoning aimed at rational consensus. In the first case, people are strategically motivated by justifications rooted in their own pragmatic interests of manipulation and control of other people. In the latter, coherence becomes a condition for the comprehensibility of speech and action is oriented to reaching understanding through linguistic communication. In this case

rationality applies to the procedure of discursive vindication of claims to validity (truth, rightness and truthfulness) which tied up to argumentation.[28] A cogent argument consists of a problematic speech act for which a certain validity claim is put between brackets and the reason through which the claim is to be established. In both cases there is an guide of action, either the maximization of profit for instrumental reason or the inference of rules of the participation in discourse and logical or moral principle. In the case of the Azande, for instance, this conflict can be understood perhaps by the prevalence of their instrumental interest for preventing their social order from collapsing and preserving the social status-quo at the expense of the discursive redemption of the validity claims. One might doubt their honesty and sincerity in defending their bloody customs of opening victims' body to search for the blackish substance of witchcraft. Obviously, since only after the murder they could check victim's intestines to look for what they took as the signs of guilt, Evans Pritchard could have justly challenged the rightness of their practice. The fact that they might have sacrificed a person, possibly innocent even according to their standards is at least strange and their genuine ignorance or indifference in matters of truth seeking is hard to defend. Such things provide for their shocking lack of meaning transparency and make the their customs not only unacceptable but hardly intelligible. And yet they may find themselves satisfied with the grounds of their customary actions impregnated by an instrumental rationality immanent to their form of life.

Therefore, we may conclude that the concept of understanding hinging on the impunity of logical form may lead us to an implausible reconstruction of ourselves as rational beings. In this light, our portraits are overly simplified as well as wrongly idealized. Such considerations argue again for giving up a too ambitious notion reason

and, instead, to look for a kind of weaker concept of rationality more suitable for grasping the elusive and fluent character of a way of life. Perhaps, we would then be more accurate in our cultural self-praise and more successful in understanding why people from other forms of life sometimes appear irrational to an outsider who does not understand the complexity of the values that guide their decisions.

In a nutshell, I will introduce this conceptual innovation in contrast to the utopian demands of formal rationality and I will refer to it as *latent rationality*. Although my idea is vague and needs to be further elaborated, I use the notion of latent rationality in contrast to formal rationality. By so doing I want to suggest that logical prerequisites may be applied to human thought and behavior only if we take them "with a grain of salt". For instance, if coherence and consistency are more properly loosened constraints upon the mind, we could expect people to hold conflicting sets of beliefs and to act in contradictory ways and still be rational. (In fact, to be mistaken makes sense only provided that one can be correct as well). For this reason, I think it is relevant to replace the utopian idea of a formal, actual and instant rationality of conceptual schemes and logical understanding, with the weaker supposition of a latent rationality. It is latent because it evolves as a potential background which works in time and does not strike instantly (as Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, comes out ready made from Zeus's head); in daily life it appears much slower and often remains tacit, hence less obviously visible; it is more fallible than rationalists like Descartes and Frege tend to think, as well as more flexible and complex than the formal logic. Had this conception of latent rationality been better elaborated in its details and intricacies, we would get to a more clear understanding of the process of learning and interpretation of meanings.

This is because, first, in a dialectical way, to be irrational makes sense only against the background of rationality. However, it seems to me that it is more appropriate to contend that the rationality which underlies our behavior is latent (suggesting that it evolves in time and remains often tacit and concealed rather than becoming instantly obvious and visible). When implying that it is potential rather than actual we should understand that one *can* be rational, even if sometimes one does not properly actualize this capability and may act or think inconsistently. For instance, a religious believer is not prevented by his faith from cursing. And yet, raising his fist against God would be a sin insofar as the religious way of life establishes the basic framework of guidelines for what is normal or rational to do. It is obvious that one is seen as doing wrong only by reference to the norms of reasonable behavior one fails to observe. To repent or ask for mercy is to acknowledge committing a mistake by being led astray, and is usually expressed by emotional distress and sorrow for disobeying the rules that must shape the conduct in the most elementary life situation. Of course, one may not sin all the time or being at ease when doing evil things in much the same way people cannot be mistaken all the time. What has been irremediably altered then? A world of sinners in which people lost the will to believe is comparable with a world of liars where people give up the need for truth. In both cases the rules of the game are changed.

Therefore, being regretful for doing something irrational is possible only against the coordinate system of latent rationality which is backing up our actions. We may tell a lie from time to time, but a compulsive liar becomes pathological case like fighting with God and will not be seen as a normal person by his fellows.

Secondly, by considering the background of latent rationality, instead of logical

requirements it becomes more intelligible how a ripple effect may affect different tiers of thoughts and commitments by avoiding subsequent possible changes which are not socially or individually acceptable. Thus, in order to preserve inconsistent sets of beliefs one may inaccurately present them as being obviously correct (as one "stacks the deck" of cards cheating the partners in the game). In this respect, the idea of latent rationality points to the habit of rationalizing or justifying even decisions bad or dangerous for ourselves or for our community. In consequence, instead of discarding the problem of apparent irrationality as an effect of a faulty understanding, we have to face it knowing what is to be changed according to what is recognizable as a good reason in the light of truth, rightness and sincerity. This provides the best available knowledge and the moral principles we can use in our relation with the world.

Intuitively we may agree that when people see each other as enemies, the background of latent rationality get even more concealed after the veil of fear and anger, which replace confidence between them. In such moments the bridges of communication seem to be broken and people behave like religious fanatics driven by emotional distress rather than by reason. For instance, in times of wars or social unrest the psychological background is shattered, and the sympathetic or charitable inclinations are undercut by nationalist hatred or the spirit of upheaval.

We have said already that the above considerations point in a non-systematic and mostly intuitive way to a significant option ignored by Winch's discussion of the problem of rationality and understanding. My purpose has not been to explore the complex issue of the irrationality of the world, but to show an idea of rationality in everyday life that is latent, tacit and potential rather than formal and actual. Better articulated, this alternative

may be more promising than the traditional reason of rationalist thinkers like Descartes and Frege.

c) Now let's see how Winch pushes the social scientist who seeks to understand other cultures into an unavoidable paradox. We have noticed that once we go on the path of "custom and example" repudiated by Descartes, it seems that the interpretive understanding of ethnographic studies of different cultures reveals the unintelligible blend of languages from the mythical tower of Babel. The notebook of the field investigator of an alien community, if it does not simply record "gibberish", may bear testimony to the way he reads his own provincial form of thought in the speech of his subjects. He may wonder at the inscrutability of the native mind and merely raise questions about what "symbolic utilities" could explain native behavior. The investigator can identify what is responsible for communication and if this is partly derived from the rationality of cultural framework or from the uniformity of speech dispositions which unites the members of a language community. At the individual level he may explore to the private "mystique" or personal "mythology" and inventiveness of his informants.

Winch argues that, given the impossibility of any neutral ground and the absence of a kinship based upon a universally shared human nature, we have to determine whose rationality and what understanding are in ill-conceived use. Of course, in Descartes's eyes, an inquiry like this may seem strangely. Nonetheless, it becomes reasonable in our time as the fragmentation of understanding on a broad spectrum of ethnic divides and group interests pushes us as never before toward the slippery slope of relativism.

However, Winch's arguments over the conceptual difficulties encountered by the notion of understanding lead to a paradox sometimes called the "research paradox", at

other times, the "anthropologist's paradox".[29] If it's true that social scientists are irremediably trapped in a system of beliefs they acquired in the process of education and enculturation, then they lack access to commitments or meanings characteristic of a different world. The fact of the matter is this: insofar as field investigators accept that the behavioral aspects of the population under study do not correspond to their linguistic and intellectual abilities, they should not begin a research which is doomed to lead nowhere since the subjects investigated are beyond their reach. Nevertheless, anthropologists continue to accumulate evidence gathered through historical or ethnographic research to support their arguments for the relativism. By doing so they fall on the two horns of a dilemma they cannot escape. Either

(1) Winchian social scientists can be successful in understanding other cultures, in which case the methodological claim that

(2) one cannot transcend one's cultural heritage to grasp meanings remote from one's own would be senseless;

or *(1) is false* and investigators, who are well instructed in Winchian social science, know from the start that

(1') their field-work is merely an idle undertaking condemned to fail in principle; but since they are doing that anyway, this entails that

(2') they are doomed to failure and therefore to act consistently, their research shouldn't be done in the first place.

From the opposite alternative, i.e. the perspective of a monistic rationality rooted in the universality of logical reasoning, the paradox never arises. According to this standpoint, there is only one way to go about the pursuit of knowledge, and by analogy,

one single moral path. However, Winch thinks that, in the absence of a single rationality for all contexts, such a perspective is neither defensible nor desirable. He argues for the possibility of multiple rationalities, and opens the door to relativism. In this matter, we have seen, Winch follows Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein knows that although one looks to the world out-there from the single window of one's home language, there are more things "between heaven and earth" than can be conveyed by philosophers' simplifying categories. After learning this lesson (once taught by Hamlet), we shall no longer hide the complexity of the world under the simplicity of some logical or grammatical fiction.

2.5) RATIONALITY AT A CROSS-ROADS AND THE RELEVANCE OF TRANSLATION

In order to know where we are in the argument and why I should turn to the issue of translation, we must draw some provisional conclusions. In the light of foregoing considerations, we arrive at a strategic cross-roads from which we are confronted with a difficult conceptual choice: either there are multiple rationalities and an absence of communication across them, or there is a single rationality that succeeds in bridging up dialogues among cultures and historic times. The first has relativistic consequences, the latter leads to a somewhat implausible and idealized notion of reason.

We have seen in this chapter that, in contrast with Descartes's substantive notion of reason, Wittgenstein and Winch make a linguistic twist in the interpretation of rationality. Consequently, the mind has been replaced as the "organizer" of reality by language which structures the "sense contents" according to determined conceptual schemes. If reason is universal, the difficulty of understanding never arises - that is, if all minds are necessarily rational, linguistic meanings can be consistently used in different

languages. Hence, all language are conveying the same ideas and the problems with translations never arise. Such a thesis was challenged by a skepticism coming from anthropologists confronted in the field with the eccentric and exotic behaviors of people from remote cultures. They learned that what happens in other minds alien to us is hardly intelligible and remains a matter of informed guesses rather than a simple extrapolation of the rules of rationality from our Western civilization. Many times, at least in the early fumbling stages of interpretation, social researchers are aided in their attempt at translating alien utterances by lucky coincidences rather than by reason. Therefore from this point on, we need to scrutinize the linguistic routes criss-crossing different ways of life as the extensive issue of understanding appears intricately related to the problem of translation.

In sum, in approaching the problem of understanding other societies in terms of understanding a language, the question that arises is to what extent can we understand persons belonging to different cultures and apply to them our criteria, rules and values when they seem to behave irrationally. In this respect, I have presented elements of Wittgenstein's theory on language games which are applied by Winch to a relativistic and idiosyncratic reconstruction of rationality within different cultural frameworks. Here we find a new conception of social science which yields a study of relatively enclosed linguistic worlds to which specific understandings of rationality are inherently relative.

If we accept Wittgenstein's and Winch's portrait of the plurality of rationalities, the question becomes, is it possible to consistently pair sets of sentences from two divergent languages? If a language represents the specific vehicle of cultural meanings, the problem of understanding a cultural pattern raises the question of translability of that

language. Therefore, the answer to the above question requires the discussion of the possibility of translation as a semantic mediation which insures the possibility of understanding between contrasting forms of life. We have seen above that Winch and Wittgenstein explain how the linguistic idiosyncrasies account for the potential breakdown of communication between an ethnographer and his native subjects. What we have found so far, is that the problem of irrationality interpreted as misunderstanding rather than a defective mind is inherently related to the problem of possibility of the linguistic bridge provided by translation that insure the match of meaning between speakers of different languages. Nevertheless, it seems to me that if Winch is right, then social scientists that follow his methodology cannot consistently understand an alien custom or behavior since there is no common ground between their culture and the culture they try to understand. In such a case, the scientific enterprise of describing remote societies in anthropology and sociology remains senseless and the research paradox is unavoidable.

In the next chapter I move on from where we were left by Winch. We shall notice that following Quine's famous version of the response to the above question can lead to an illuminating path. I will analyze how Quine contrives the case of radical translation, which is somewhat artificially contrasting with real life cases that show a relative compatibility between speakers of different languages. Then I will approach the way he introduces the concept of charity in connection with the issue at stake in this paper. That means that the interpretation of foreign utterances raises the need for a supposition of rationality to be consistent with our own. My discussion is intended to show that this is a very complex problem which cannot receive a simple solution.

Chapter 3) *W.V. QUINE:*

THE INDETERMINACY OF TRANSLATION AND

WORLD-INCOMMENSURABILITY

Quine's skeptical treatment of "radical translation" based on his holistically

inspired attack on meaning has been particularly influential among analytic philosophers

of language. I will consider his view of translation only insofar as it fits into the problem

of the dissertation regarding difficulties we encounter in understanding an alien behavior.

In addition, this discussion continues the topic of the previous chapter by following a

common thread between Winch and Quine. They both start constructing their theories

from the holistic premise suggested by Wittgenstein's dictum according to which

understanding the meaning of a sentence means understanding a language (see *Blue and*

Brown Books). They may agree, though for divergent reasons, that when an investigator

leaves his home-culture in the attempt to communicate with an alien speaker he cannot

rely on any neutral middle ground. The farther he goes from his customary framework

pushing forth his ethnographic study, there is less reasonable basis of comparison, or, as

Quine puts it, "less sense in saying what is good translation and what is bad (*Word and*

Object, [1960], 1964, p. 78)".

We will see that Quine's analysis leads on two paths. First, in trying to cross over

the linguistic bridge offered by radical translation, we will see why it is too weak to hold

a process of communication. In this respect, I will scrutinize the relativist implications

of Quinean "Gavagai"-"Rabbit" argument for the indeterminacy of translation. Quine is

more concerned with "outward uniformity" of behavioral dispositions imposed by society

when inculcating a language which presses for "smooth communication" (see *The Pursuit*

of Truth, [1990], 1992, p. 44). On his view, we may think of understanding as an empirical matter of making associations between words and experience in terms of relevance relations. In this respect, uniformity that unites us in communication within the linguistic community bears upon "patterns overlying a chaotic subjective diversity of connections" between environment and behavior (see *Word and Object*, p.8). Such social regularities which shape verbal dispositions and may provide for an interpretation scheme of a social practice representative both for community and for individuals within it. Complex behavioral associations could explain with a good deal of linguistic uniformity verbal dispositions to give assent or dissent to various sentences within a community of speakers. In this respect, Quine provides in *Word and Object* an inspired analogy: "Different persons growing up in the same language are like different bushes trimmed and trained to take shape of identical elephants. The anatomical details of twigs and branches will fulfill the elephantine form differently from bush to bush, but the overall outward results are alike (*Word and Object*, p. 8)." This parable suggests that communication presupposes no similarity in nerve nets in a way comparable with "trimmed bushes", which are similar in their outward form but different in their inward twigs and branches.

Second, I shall follow the suggestion made by Quine in the maxim of charity which imposes a constraint to understand people's beliefs by "maximizing agreement", what implies that we are bound to find people rational. I will follow Quine's suggestion to prefer a charitable reading which make exotic or strange behaviors appear more plausible to us. This issue is particularly important for opening the possibility to rebuild the rational bridges of communication severely damaged by the thesis of linguistic incommensurability. Nevertheless, in what follows, we will discover that in a subtle way

relativism is rooted in the implicit hypothesis that "the Cartesian subject", that is, the paradigm of any thinking self can construct the world. This aspect will prompt the discussion in the next chapter. What follows here will be structured as follows.

In section 3.1 I will focus on how Quine explains the difficulties of translation and suggests that linguistic divergence finally points to analytical hypotheses. The question is do we have anything at hand to bridge meanings over the gap between cultures? Quine's answer may come to rest only on the "bundle" of stimulus meaning though he warns that the adequacy of an ethnographic report on a tribal community is jeopardize by two common tendencies. On the one side by having "merely muffed the best translation" and on the other, for having "done a more thorough job of reading our own provincial modes into the native's speech" (*Word and Object*, p. 77). In this respect, I will turn to Quine's semantic reasons for the thesis of indeterminacy of translation, an argument which posits in an even deeper sense the problem of radical incommensurability of cultural worlds.

For instance, when one coming from our Western culture attempts to understand an alien world, an interpretative scheme is made possible by a set of translation hypotheses of the form "when the alien says A in his Alien language, one says E in English". In general, such linguistic correlations help draw analogies between the interrelated uses of utterances performed by two speakers of different languages. Intuitively, we may assume that translation is a mapping between a source-language and a target-language that preserve meanings, or as Churchland puts it, "semantic importance" (*The Scientific Realism and the Plasticity of Mind*, 1979, p. 62). Therefore the aim of the anthropologist is to find a match between the native's idiom and his home-tongue to give him access to the meaning used by his informant coming from another culture. If no

understanding would be possible, his scientific undertaking leads nowhere and is obviously senseless. But Quine rejects such a possibility in the imagined case of radical translation. In what follows I will examine his argument, though, as he himself recognizes, it is not applicable to the regular practice of translation, since a chain of bilingual mediators could usually be found "across the darkest archipelago" between languages (*Word and Object*, p. 28). Then, in the second section of the chapter (3.2) I will show how Quine's argument of indeterminacy leads to an impasse and, more recently, to a significant shift of emphasis. The pragmatic criteria, like fluency of conversation, reveal Quine's attempt to reevaluate the efficiency of translation according to the relative success of the linguistic negotiations with an alien community. In addition Quine introduces the methodological idea of *charity*, as a binding maxim that requires "maximizing agreement" in the process of understanding apparently exotic beliefs and meanings. In this respect, Quine blames the researcher in the field for coming up with an observation of a blatant irrationality. Henceforth in this chapter the argument is developed in two steps. First I examine how Quine's thesis of the "indeterminacy of translation" point to the relativistic idea of "incommensurable worlds", then I will analyze his idea of charity and its role in the process of understanding.

3.1) FROM THE INDETERMINACY OF TRANSLATION AND THE INSCRUTABILITY OF REFERENCE TO THE BREAKDOWN OF UNDERSTANDING

3.11) RADICAL TRANSLATION

The problem of making sense of an alien overt behavior is related to the issue of understanding a different language. In this section I will present Quine's famous analysis

of radical translation (*Word and Object*, 1960, chapter 2), which supports arguments for the breakdown of linguistic mediation between completely different speakers .

Quine discusses the case of an interpreter who is confronted by the verbal behavior of hitherto unknown people and is unable to understand them. This poses the problem of what Quine describes as "radical translation" which calls attention to the inapplicability of our familiar meanings when we look for ways of equating "words" or "phrases" from our own language with utterances of an unfamiliar speech. The procedure of mapping out the expressions of the source-language and of the target-language requires a double task. First, to notice the social regularity of assent and dissent that may be elicited in the face of various stimuli. Second, to be aware that the non-observational sentences (like the ones implying the likelihood of truth of statements about sensory events) "face the tribunal of sense-experience not individually but only as a corporate body" ("Two Dogmas of Empiricism", in *From a Logical Point of View*, 1953, p. 41). But in the early stage of interpretation all the evidence available for constructing a translation scheme is behavioral evidence. Quine emphasizes that the first steps of understanding, through radical translation, of a hitherto "untouched" linguistic community, begins with recognizable relations between sensory stimuli (for which Quine uses sometimes the expression "surface irritations" - see *Word and Object,* p. 22) and verbal dispositions. One learns the "talk of things" which is "not to be distinguished from truth about the world "(*Word and Object*, p. 26) by being taught how to associate words with words and other stimulations within a conceptual scheme. The relative social regularity of patterns of "assent to" and "dissent from" some sentences are directly coordinated and determined by various sense-impingements. Hence, the observational

sentences are designed as linguistic representations of the sensory surface irritations. Their "cognitive significance" (urged by logical empiricism) is based on their association with particular classes of stimuli. Therefore, insofar as linguistic meanings have to do with how sentences relate to the world, in order to make sense of a native's speech act, all a Quinean lexicographer can afford is to pair observational sentences of his home-language with apparently equivalent observational sentences of the foreign language in the way they are commonly associated with the same classes of stimuli. This is to produce a mapping based upon a similar "empirical content" in such a manner that the verbal dispositions of the two speakers to assent to or dissent from the paired sentences coincides. If this is the proper aim for the anthropologist challenged by the understanding of an alien culture, he still falls short of providing a correct translation. Quine's argument is that the criterion of "empirical evidence" available to the investigator cannot serve as a sufficient ground for a uniquely correct translation, because linguistic meaning is radically undetermined by the systematically ambiguous "dispositions" of its speakers. On the one hand, the equivalence relation required by the pairing of sentences of the two languages must be understood "holoprastically: "that is, as not telling one anything about the similarity of internal structure and components of the equated sentences or about the referents of whatever components there are" (Henderson, *Interpretation and Explanation*, p. 17). On the other hand, in order to supplement this appealing but essentially incomplete behaviorist description, Quine finds it necessary in the formulation of a translation scheme to postulate a set of "analytic hypothesis" designed to explain the syntactical constructions (*Word and Object*, sec. 15, pp. 68-72). He concedes that, whereas the linguist has no access to native meanings apart from what he can glean from

the observed circumstances or utterances, the analytical hypotheses which are subject not to further checking provides the dictionary and grammar for his translation scheme. (see *Word and Object*, p. 70, "Philosophical Progress in Language Theory", in *Metaphilosophy 1*, pp. 2-19, 1970, pp. 14-15). In this respect Quine rejects that a deep cause of the indeterminacy of translation would be that rival systems of analytical hypotheses cannot conform to the totality of speech behavior and dispositions. They do fit, but dictate mutually incompatible translations of countless sentences unsusceptible of independent control (*Word and Object*, p. 72). This is what Quine calls more recently, in *The Pursuit of Truth* (1992), the serious and controversial "holophrastic thesis" which is stronger than what he defined as "inscrutability of reference". In his own characterization,

> It declares for divergences that remain unreconciled even at the level of the whole sentence, are compensated for only by divergences in the translations of other whole sentences (*Pursuit of Truth*, p. 50).

The rules and criteria of a scheme of interpretation built in translation manuals can be set up in divergent ways, "all compatible with the totality of speech dispositions, yet incompatible with one another" (*Word and Object*, p. 27). Consequently, he contends that there is no possibility for either a translation manual that can capture the meaning of one language in another in a single way, or for an ontology common to both the Alien Language and English.

3.12) THE "GAVAGAI-RABBIT" EXAMPLE

Quine's famous example refers to a field linguist's attempt to pair a source-language sentence "Gavagai" with the one word English sentence "Rabbit". The linguist is to infer the native's assent or dissent by checking various stimulatory situations such as

when a rabbit scurries by, which prompts him to utter "Gavagai?". As Quine puts it, "what he must do is to guess from observation and then see how well these guesses work" (*Word and Object*, p 29). In this respect, the field-investigator can narrow down his guesses to the most acceptable alternatives by querying combinations of native occasion sentences and "stimulus situations". Eventually, he notices that when his informant says "Gavagai" this observational sentence corresponds (with a high degree of constancy) with the ostension of the same stimulus meaning he can translate holophrastically in English as 'Lo, a rabbit'. On the basis of this rough perceptual sameness "which is close to what one intuitively expects for synonymy" (*Word and Object*, p.41), he may attempt to equate the two occasion sentences and make ordered pairs according to his translation scheme. Nevertheless, Quine points out that although stimulus meaning that represents alien's total battery of actual dispositions is all the linguist can get to estimate the equivalent of "Gavagai" with "Rabbit", it still falls short of establishing a synonymy relation because of different ways the matter may be cut up. This means, it is possible to associate "gavagai" with different sorts of things such as rabbit, undetached rabbit part, the mere appearance of rabbit or rabbithood, in general. Therefore, he concludes that in this case translation is not sufficient to fix the reference of the term "gavagai" (see. PT, p. 51). Therefore, he cannot pretend that his calibration of the two sentences is based on an identity. In his recent comments on this issue, Quine emphasizes as never before that this kind of ontological relativity is relative to a translation manual. To assume that 'gavagai' denotes the same thing as the English term 'rabbit' is to prefer "a manual of translation in which 'gavagai' is translated as 'rabbit', instead of opting for any of the alternative manuals" (*Pursuit of Truth*, p. 52).

Thus, on his view, even if we assume that stimulation differences are not relevant and we leap to the conclusion that the alien world and linguist's world are basically made out of the same sense impingements, and the similarities in stimulus meanings may prompt assent to a given utterance, their worlds remain unbridgeable because of the inscrutability of reference. Despite the equivalence of prompted assent, an uncertainty is unavoidable in the linguist's mind. Quine's contends he would not know how to solve his semantic indecision between the four sorts of things even if he keep questioning his informant: "Point to a rabbit and you have pointed to a stage of rabbit, to an integral part of a rabbit, to a rabbit fusion, and to where rabbithood is manifested" (*Word and Object*, pp. 52-3). When from the apparent sameness of stimulus meanings one is inclined to equate "gavagai" with a "whole enduring rabbit", one illicitly takes for granted that the native shares our conceptual scheme. But there is no possibility of either a translation manual capable of univocally mapping the meaning of one language into another or of proving an ontology common to both languages. The situation may be schematically presented as follows: Translation manual *M1* assigns to Alien word A English word *E1*, manual *M2* English word *E2*, and manual *Mn* English word *En*.

By contrast, the traditionalist view assumes that there is one word of the series *E1...En* that uniquely matches the meaning of *A*. Therefore one may reject the other sentences. Under the assumption of the inscrutability of reference Quine holds that it is impossible to identify which English sentence matches *A* in meaning because there is no fact of the matter out there and hence we can never tell what is the thing in the world designated by the native's utterance. This aspect is criticized by Newton-Smith, among others, as the relativist consequence of the "radical-meaning-variance" thesis according to

which the linguistic meanings are essentially dependent upon, and hence vary with the context, either theoretical or cultural, within which they occur (see "Relativism and the Possibility of Interpretation", in *Rationality and Relativism*, p. 118).[30] There is no room left for rational choice among a variety of semantic alternatives. We may ascribe meanings to an alien description of the world, but we know that ascription is merely arbitrary. The metaphor of making "the best bet in the horse race" as a parable of the rational choice is no longer applicable, since the competitors are running on different tracks. In fact, they are not challenging each other and go on divergent paths. Thus the analogy is quite misleading.

3.13) THE CONSEQUENCE OF WORLD-INCOMMENSURABILITY

Given the "indeterminacy of translation", we can no longer attach sense to what the natives say the world is. There are many different and equivalent ways of construing their verbal behavior and they involve the ascription of different theories indeterminately describing worlds that depend not on matters of fact but on the translation manual being used. As far as there is a gap of meaning between our world and native's world, and there is no rational way to say which translation manual is correct, we may conclude that these two worlds are incommensurable. Henceforth, although others' worlds and ours may be made out of the same sense impingements, beyond the sensory surfaces they remain essentially unbridgeable at the level of linguistic interpretation because of the inscrutability of reference. Such a conceptual connection is acknowledged by Quine's latest version from *The Pursuit of Truth* of what he prefers now to call the "indeterminacy of reference". He feels compelled to confess that it became finally clear to him that ontological relativity is relative to the choice for one manual of translation or another (see

Pursuit of Truth, pp. 50-2).

In consequence, Quine's thesis regarding the indeterminacy of translation implies

the radical relativist idea of "incommensurable worlds". He claims that there is no

translation capable of preserving the meanings accepted by some natives into a different

conceptual framework. When the idea of "radical translation" is later revisited in *The*

Pursuit of Truth, he adds:

> This is not because the meanings of sentences are elusive or inscrutable; it
> is because there is nothing to them, beyond what these fumbling
> procedures can come up with. Nor is the hope of even of codifying these
> procedures and then defining what counts as translation by citing the
> procedures; for the procedures involve weighing *incommensurable values*
> (*my emphasis, Pursuit of Truth*, p. 47).

Consequently, it is problematic to apply across cultures the idea of rational

understanding familiar to Western culture. Quine's classic "Gavagai"-"Rabbit" example

implicitly supports such a conclusion. Although we may suppose that for a field linguist

it is easier to count on senses in these matters and, that is, to rely upon stimulus meanings,

the linguist's disposition to equate the native's utterance "Gavagai" with our term rabbit is

arbitrary because the issue is "objectively indeterminate". Different interpretations which

can be associated with native's sentence ("rabbit", "undetached rabbit part", "rabbit-

stage", and "rabbithood") differ not only in meaning, they refer to different things. We do

not know how the native who says 'gavagai' cuts up the world. Therefore, despite the fact

that the two words have the same stimulus meaning and that the native and the linguist

grasp the same sense-impingements, a unique translation is not possible because there is

nothing in verbal behavior to guarantee it. Reference is inscrutable because of different

alternative possibilities of structuring our perceptual experience, which implies indefinite

variation of translations of language to language.[31]

Given the presence of a "realistically" perceived rabbit "facsimile" placed in the bush, the question is whether on the basis of accurately reconstructed stimulus meaning, the source-language users will assent to "Gavagai" as would English speakers. Quine's clear answer is "no". It should be recognized that the perceptual basis of stimulus meaning may at times be quite ill-conceived and even well-informed guesses can hardly be a satisfying epistemic basis for understanding. The translator is aware that his scheme of understanding the alien linguistic behavior is not completely determined by stimulus meanings. Were he interested to pay attention to the charity maxim, he would interpret alien utterances to maximize attributed truth and optimize the linguistic exchange in conversation. However, in dealing with observational sentences, the translator seeks primarily to identify and account for those stimulus meanings that allow for understanding and explication of similarities and differences between the alien linguistic community on the one side and his own linguistic community on the other. In this respect his endeavor is mainly focused on pairing sentences according to stimulus meanings that may roughly match or differ. Therefore, on Quine's view, the translator's procedure of reconstructing the stimulus meaning from samples of behavior inescapably involves the use of a more or less implicit theory of perception. We shall further see that the extreme implications of the thesis of indeterminacy of translation would lead to the impasse of truth. Quine is aware of this problem, and since he wants to preserve the pursuit of truth, he will seek a solution by appealing to charity.

3.2) THE APPEAL TO CHARITY

Quine's relativism painted in behaviorist colors is particularly coherent and persuasive. But his relativistic framework with its indeterminacy of translation based on

Behaviorism implies giving up the concept of meaning. Furthermore, the thesis of semantic "undetermination", precludes the possibility of a realist construal of scientific theories and therefore undermines the truth-searching of scientific theories. In addition some critics (Harris, Churchland) have noticed that the thesis of the indeterminacy of translation insofar as it can be itself emphasized as an explanatory hypothesis, has some self-refuting consequences. Finally, Quine's theory of language is blamed for presumably failing to account for the phenomena that anthropologists or sociologists actually discover in their research and defend in their theoretical accounts. Their point of reference is the diversity of beliefs, yet the thesis of indeterminacy says that the very idea of such diversity does not make sense since understanding breaks down in the first place. A Quinean account would be that field investigators have latched onto the first translation manual that was devised. But how could we say that beliefs are different since their are not determinate? As a matter of fact one cannot even determine what these belief are actually about.

Under the assumption of the *inscrutability* of reference Quine holds that it is impossible to identify which English sentence matches the utterance of a native because we never know which thing in the world is designated by the utterance (like one-word phrase "Gavagai!"). The issue of rational choice among a variety of semantic alternatives can never arise.

Furthermore, given the indeterminacy of translation we can no longer attach sense to what the natives say the world is. We may ascribe meanings to native description of the world, but we know that this ascription is arbitrary. There are many different and equivalent alternatives of construing their discourse and these are different

ways to ascribe perspectives in terms of mutually incompatible translations. Countless sentences, which indeterminately denote things and thus describe worlds, depend on the translation manual being used, not on the state of affairs.

Provided there is no unique bridge between our world and native's world, the question is, can there be any meaningful way to say that they are rational people even if we cannot pretend to understand what they do and say? Epistemologically speaking, we may indefinitely multiply translations, but there is no way to know which translation manual is correct. Any intercultural correlation of words and phrases, and hence of theories, will be just one among various empirically admissible correlations (whether it suggested by "historical gradations" or "unaided analogies"). And Quine concludes that there is nothing out there (in the world) for such a correlation to be right or wrong about.[32]

Where are we at the end of this discussion? Quine's skeptical argument for radical indetermination across languages exacts a heavy price. We have noticed that Quine himself explains ontological relativity as depending on one's empirically uncontrollable preference for one dictionary among possible others, each providing access to the world by a different semantic route (*Word and Object,* pp. 68-79, *Pursuit of Truth,* pp.50-52). Whether there is an out-there to be right or wrong about remains "inscrutable", and it is rather obscured than clarified by diverse manners of speaking. The question that arises, even if Quine himself does not seem to be bothered by it, is how could one know anything about the diversity of many cultures which populate the world and about their communication?

I will next consider some undesirable consequences of Quine's view, which might

have a puzzling ripple effects over the issue of understanding a verbal behavior.

3.21) THREE OBJECTIONS TO QUINE'S THESIS OF INDETERMINACY OF

TRANSLATION

In what follows, I will suggest three lines of criticism against the claim on which

Quine bases his relativistic rejection of linguistic mediation between people from

remotely different cultures. Perhaps, Quine himself had in mind such critical arguments

when he later revisited his main tenets and adopted what appears to be a considerably

weakened version.

1) First, the indeterminacy of translation leads to the abandonment of meaning and

therefore undermines an anthropologist's or a sociologist's attempt to understand other

communities. One could not know what accounts of the relationship between language

users and their world would be more appropriate or how to explain properly the relative

similarity of the perceptual judgements and the possibility of social agreement over

linguistic borders.[33] If the aim of social research is to discover the diversity of beliefs, the

thesis of indeterminacy says that the very idea of diversity of beliefs does not make sense.

How could one say that beliefs are different? Since they are not determinate, one cannot

know what these beliefs are actually about. The fact of the matter is that scientists'

linguistic investigation of other cultural practices is according to Quine under an

"empirical unconditioned variation". Of course, one can make some well-informed

guesses, but this situation "invites, however, the charge of meaninglessness". Two field

linguists might share in common dispositions to verbal behavior in all imaginable sensory

stimulations, but "the meanings or ideas expressed in their identically triggered and

identically sounded utterances could diverge radically" (*Word and Object*, p. 26). These

considerations give good reason to expect that their research attempts to make sense of *"incommensurable values"* built in Jungle beliefs will not yield *the same* translation manuals. The thesis of the indeterminacy of translation implies that: "Their manuals might be indistinguishable in terms of any native behavior that they give reason to expect, and yet each manual might prescribe some translations that the other reject" (*Pursuit of Truth*, p.48).

An investigator, who proceeds in a more *charitable* way by assuming that alien behavior is basically rational, may concede that native assumptions which appear startlingly false are "likely to turn on hidden differences of language" (*Word and Object*, p. 59). In this light it becomes obvious that some explanations which charge natives with strange, absurd or exotic behaviors are likely to be false and hence ill-suited. The more a scientist realizes this, the more he finds evidence that his interpretation scheme used to make sense of his informants' speech has led him astray. He can only reconstruct the collection of matching sets of stimulus meanings, and this may be a basis for pairing sentences of a source language with sentences of a target language. But what can an anthropologist do when he learns from Quine that there is nothing, no objective matter out there to be right or wrong about" and he is aware that his "good guesses" about alien behavior are essentially indeterminate?

This question may be pursued in two directions, following Quine's interpretation. The first may be described as skeptical awareness: social scientist must recognize that the ground for his translation is unstable and he must become aware that he has reached the *inscrutable* limit of our knowledge. One may then come to think that the scientific "output" would be "no better than whistling in the dark".[34] Such a bitter and

disappointing judgement could affect the motivation of any cognitive endeavor (at least for natural languages) and therefore applies to Quine's theoretical effort as well. As epistemological aspects are of little concern here, I will not develop this considerations.

A second direction made possible by Quine's more recent arguments is more constructive and requires more careful attention. It can be drawn from a shift of emphasis from the skeptical attitude hinging on the operationally basic notions of semantics (like distinct or synonymous meaning) to pragmatic considerations regarding chances of a successful communication. It seems obvious to me that Quine is inclined in his later work to adopt a weaker standpoint as he stresses the flexibility of knowledge of a language and the process of understanding through conversation rather than on the rigorous semantic rules regarding the likeness of meaning. To substantiate this claim I will have to look comparatively to *Word an Object* (1960) and *The Pursuit of Truth* (1990) and to measure the conceptual distance between these two stages in the development of Quine's thinking. If initially he attacks *indirect quotation* as the misleading idiom of propositional attitude, in his more recent works he seems to treat the issue of intentional insights into one's mind with more tolerance. He even argues that his investigator "imagines himself in the native's situation as best he can", and claims that *"empathy"* sustains all the way the radical translation (*Pursuit of Truth*, p. 46).

Earlier, in "The Double Standard" (*Word and Object*, sec. 45), Quine is interested in the issue of *indirect quotation* so far as it has evident affinities with the problem of translation. He distinguishes between *direct quotation*, which merely reports an empirical fact and leaves possible implications to us, and *indirect quotation*, which is projection of our own wishes and beliefs in the reading of other's speech. If the first fulfills the

demand for objectivity of the scientific spirit, the latter express a propositional attitude which is about wishes and beliefs. A translator's interpretation may "feign" native's state of mind in the subjective and falsifying light of what seems natural and relevant to himself. Eventually, the social investigator may go on and superimpose his own expectations over the subjects and speculate as he pleases upon the causes and intentions of their utterances. However, Quine calls attention to the fact that we must "switch muses" that beguile our representation and that "the essentially dramatic idiom of propositional attitude will find no place" in any scientific description (*Word and Object*, p. 219). The interpretation of overt verbal behavior in the terms of indirect quotation is altered by the descriptions made with the help of irreducible intentional idioms which amount to the indeterminacy of translation (see *Word and Object*, p. 221). For this reason, Quine recommends we use the direct quotation in order to provide an information reliable and up to the standards of scientific knowledge. It is clear what sorts of difficulties he is concerned with when we remember his "Gavagai"-"Rabbit" argument: one reason why the field linguist cannot meaningfully equate the two different words as responses to rabbit is that assent to these sentences may be prompted only by the assumed presence of a rabbit; that is, believing that a rabbit is there, and, of course, this brings about intentionality. As Quine thinks that the appeal to beliefs creates difficulties and confusions, he prefers to equate the two sentences on the basis of irritations of sensory surfaces. What's wrong in principle with the idiom of propositional attitudes puts on the same foot Brentano's thesis of the irreducibility of the intentional idiom and the thesis of indeterminacy of translation. Quine infers that "the relativity to non-unique systems of analytical hypotheses invest not only translational synonymy but intentional notions

generally" (*Word and Object*, p. 221). Thus, translation as an interlinguistic mapping is essentially indeterminate relative to the totality of speech dispositions. Therefore, Quine's conclusion is that a scientist can keep his window open to truth or the ultimate structure of reality only by using "the austere scheme that knows no quotation but direct quotation and no propositional attitudes." (*Word and Object*, p. 221). Consequently, to think that understanding can rely on "vernacular of semantics and intentions", would yield little scientific insight.

Thirty years later, in *The Pursuit of Truth*, Quine considerably weakens the methodological demands assumed in "The Double Standard" and reevaluates the policy that governs translation procedures at the observational level and beyond. Insofar as there is no evidence to prove the opposite, it seems reasonable to him to presume that native minds are pretty much like our own. Henceforth the possibility of translation will depend on psychological conjectures regarding what the native is likely to believe according to our expectations. This represents a methodological change since his initial attack on the idiom of intentionality. Quine concedes now that "practical psychology is what sustains our radical translator all along the way, and the method of his psychology is *empathy*: he imagines himself in the native's situation as best as he can" (*Pursuit of Truth*, p. 46). The field linguist is supposed to conceive and revise a manual of translation according to how effective is it in insuring a fluent or smooth dialogue between him and the native informant. A constant failure of communication would be explained by the inadequacy of the translation manual. Quine hopes to improve the interpreter's chances of successful conversation on the basis of an appropriate understanding of the speaker's expressions. Henceforth Quine is more interested in how a lexicographer could design and use a

pioneer manual of translation as an aid to linguistic negotiation with the alien community.

The understanding of his native informant is now judged in terms of "smoothness of

conversation", "predictability of his verbal or non-verbal reactions to observable

circumstances and by coherence and plausibility of his testimony". He admits that,

> Observation sentences continue to be the entering wedge for child and field
> linguist, and they continue to command the firmest agreement between rival
> manuals of translation; but their distinct factuality is blurred now by the disavowal
> of shared stimulus meaning. What is utterly factual is just fluency of conversation
> and the effectiveness of negotiation that one or another manual of translation
> serves to induce (*Pursuit of Truth*, p. 43).

Quine reaffirms a point of view consistent in his old behavioral and pragmatist

commitments from *The Two Dogmas*, though he seems to switch the emphasis from

semantic notions like synonymy to the understanding of expressions. He explains that in

understanding language there is a subtle interplay between word and sentence (*Pursuit of*

Truth, p. 58-9). The proof of one's understanding a word consists in one's correct usage

of the word in sentential contexts and one's appropriate reaction to such sentential

contexts. For this reason Quine assumes that the sentence is fundamental. However, he

maintains that we cannot test whether one understands a sentence except by observing the

use of a word in a multiplicity of sentences. For instance, if evidence satisfactorily

reveals that an informant constantly misunderstands a word over "ringing changes on its

sentential contexts", we are justified to hold this misunderstanding accountable for his

odd response to a sentence, and to exclude claims about the informant holding strange

beliefs or opinions.

Let's return to the question which prompted this comparison of Quine's two

theoretical stages. Didn't he warn the ethnographic researcher that there is nothing, no

objective matter out-there "to be right or wrong about" and, that guesses about the

meaning of an alien behavior are indeterminate in principle?

From the perspective of Quine's view in *Word and Object*, we can infer that there is nothing that can be done to achieve understanding, since the thesis of inscrutability sets the limit of our knowledge. But this skeptical basis for denouncing such theoretical illusions is eclipsed later by Quine's appeal to a charitable treatment of translation. I will return to this point in the next two sections. For now, I will sum up my survey by observing that Quine removes from the lexicographer's job a search for analytical distinctions like synonymy and even epistemological demarcations between understanding and misunderstanding. Though the investigator may need such clarifications, he knows he can't have them. In pursuing the aim to improve the understanding of expressions, the best one can do is to look for a gradual adjustment of one's own verbal behavior "to that of community as a whole, or of some preferred quarter of it" (*Pursuit of Truth*, p.59). The modesty and vagueness of this task, which focuses on the fluency and the effectiveness of dialog, reveal the distance traveled by Quine since *Word and Object*.

2) The second set of objections to Quine's skeptical treatment of understanding have been suggested by critics like Paul Churchland who denies that the available empirical constraints on translation are "as minimal, or as maximal" as Quine's conception claims (*Scientific Realism*, p.64).

I agree with Churchland that, guided by ordinary practice of translation, we can imagine a pair of languages across which translation is unproblematic. In this way Churchland imagines a pair of linguistic communities across which the translation is unproblematic and "homophonic", wherein corresponding words have the same sounds

(though might be different in spelling, origin or meaning), but where the alien observational sentences lack translational analogues in the correlative set in the home language. For instance, we may contrive cases where people of an alien community (as Quine exemplified in *Word and Object*, sec. 4) may succeed in making a systematic shift in their conceptual and perceptual habits. In such a case, according to Quine's conception, the similarities in stimulus meaning should be reflected in the two linguistic registers in equivalent set of observational sentences. Churchland shows that this perceptual identity which compel speakers' assent and dissent is not always as clear as Quine claims. He recalls the pairing of observational sentences from our home-language with highly theoretical sentences of a community which purged itself of ordinary observational terms and learned to speak, think and observe by using vocabulary of a physical theory. The observational terms like "red" and "hot" would be equated with the non-observational analogues "the reflection of electro-magnetic waves at 0.63 um" and i.e. with "high mean molecular kinetic energy" (*Scientific Realism*, pp. 64-5).

If Quine never questions the *sameness* of stimulus meanings, instead, he challenges the illusion that diverse intertranslatable sentences may appear as "verbal embodiments" of some cross-cultural meanings. However, he agrees that either linguistic "containment" (Quine's own word, e.g. the inclusion of Frisian in Low German) or historic "containment in a continuum of cultural evolution" (e.g Hungarian or Romanian) may facilitate a translation in English (see *Word and Object*, p. 76). But Quine's emphasis on "intracultural verbalism" here is inappropriate. It seems to me that what allows for inter-translability of modern languages from Romanian to English for example, is just the ability to express the same background knowledge incorporated in language

rather than grammatical similarities. For instance, the existence of an adequate scientific vocabulary which is used much in the same way in different languages shows that meanings of scientific terms are relatively preserved across linguistic and cultural divide (e.g. Hydrogen atom, planet, integer, etc). In this respect, a modern language like Romanian, though it has a syntax and morphology different from English (e.g "double negation) may correspond to English better than ancient tongues like Frisian, which may be grammatically closer to English (being historically incorporated to English through low German), but have no linguistic counterparts to express in equivalent ways most of the scientific, technologic and intellectual achievements of our age.

To make an even stronger counter-argument to Quine thesis, we can draw on Churchland's discussion of speakers from another world called Alpha, who have radically different sense organs and cannot share the same stimulus meaning with us. Nevertheless, translation is still "homophonic" and could go smoothly in ordinary sense. For example, consider extraterrestrial aliens who speak "scientific English" whose observational subset mirrors different aspects of reality revealed by their alien sensory equipment (magnetometer hands, gaschromatographic skin, electron microscopic eyes, radar ears, etc). Here it is the highly theoretical sentences of English that are "calibrated" (Churchland's own word) with the Alpha observational sentences, though there is no match between their stimulus meaning and our familiar impressions on sensory-surfaces. This case shows that Quine's constraints on interpretation and understanding are not merely inapplicable; it shows that his translation scheme is ill-conceived, insofar as he stresses the preservation of *observationality* (in much the same way a logical empiricist insists on *empirical significance*).

3) Finally, the third set of objections makes Quinean world-incommensurability subject to an argument which targets relativism in general. It can be stated as follows: if rationality is dependent upon the context, and if the breakdown of communication appears as an unavoidable consequence, then Quinean ontological relativism falls on the three horns of the so called "the Munchausen Trilemma": 1) infinite regress; 2) logical circularity or self-referentiality (of beliefs-reasons, beliefs-acts, habits-acts, etc); 3) ungrounded breaking off of the process of giving reasons. Is there any way of breaking up the vicious circularity which seems unavoidable for any relativist standpoint? I will further address these issues.

Rudolf Carnap in "Empiricism, Semantics, and Epistemology" (in *The Linguistic Turn*, 1967) offers a solution by distinguishing between *internal questions* "concerning the existence of certain entities within the framework", and *external questions* "concerning the existence or reality of the system of entities as a whole" ("Empiricism", p 73). The first are scientific problems which become routine and are empirical, being decidable according to the internal rules of the linguistic framework. The latter are philosophical and pragmatic problems like the rational choice between theories and are treated as pseudo-problems.

Quine rejects such methodological boundaries together with the logical-empiricist reduction of science to the ground of immediate experience. On his view, all questions are internal and, consequently, philosophy collapses into empirical science (because it involves the translation of one theory into another). On the one hand, in the spirit of the ontological relativity, there is no fact of the matter and therefore no empirical ground for choosing between two competing ontologies. On the other hand, epistemology is

naturalized and seen as a part of psychology; rational decision between theories or language rests on pragmatic grounds. So Quine thinks that once the problem of justification or validation of knowledge is treated as an internal question, the old threat of "illegitimate" circularity is no longer a problem because issue of deducing science from empirical data has been given up. If Peter Winch would replace epistemology with sociology, as we have noticed in the previous chapter, Quine is ready to reduce epistemology to psychology.

After paying this price, does Quine succeed in avoiding the trilemma? I will shortly answer without presenting in detail the main objections to his relativism made by critics (for example, Stroud, Harris, and Putnam). First, by making the validation of scientific claims an internal problem of psychology, Quine must use a "bootstrap method", which does not solve but postpones the old epistemological circularity: the warrant for empirical psychology must derive from within psychology. Second, does he successfully introduce a primitive background theory to prevent an infinite regress of language? Critics target the merits of such "background theory according to which one may determine the truth of a theory in terms of its translation into another" (James F. Harris, *Against Relativism*, 1992, p. 48), and they impute to Quine an ad-hoc strategy and accuse him of begging the question. Third, as we remember the analogy of the horse race, ontological relativity makes the best "bet" impossible and Quine could no longer treat the choice between theories or linguistic frameworks as a rational one.

Since my focus remains on cross-cultural understanding and communication, I will not pursue the problems of ontologic relativity and naturalized epistemology. The problem which deserves an answer is whether Quine is ready to throw out the baby, the

logic and observationality, with the relativist bath water. If we address this the question in other words, it becomes: how can we justify saying that two or more translations or interpretations are different? This implies that they are recognizably so and that implies that one interpretation contrasts with another or excludes another. Such a conflict can be intelligible only by assuming the cross-cultural character of logical relationships of identity and contradiction or of some ontologic criteria of sameness and difference. In this respect, James Harris argues that "the logical conflict can occur only *relative to a background theory which contains the analytic-synthetic distinction and semantic rules*" (*Against Relativism*, p.50). Obviously, Quine's theory of ontological relativity can be intelligible only if logic escapes from the relativist framework. Therefore a question Quine must answer is whether the sense of "logic" vanish in the insurmountable gap determined by radical breakdown of communication between idiosyncratic incommensurable linguistic schemes. When Quine seems to endorse Neurath's analogy (*Word and Object*, pp. 3-4) of mariners on the open sea who can rebuild their boat plank by plank while managing to stay afloat, does he take logic on board together with the whole corpus of knowledge?

3.22) "*SAVE THE OBVIOUS!*"

One may notice that Quine's thesis of radical translation is tied up to our linguistic framework within which it is formulated, and thus it loses its significance outside the borders of this linguistic framework. Thus the outcome of the self-referentiality of Quine's thesis of indeterminacy of translation makes his conceptual view relative to his home-language and therefore it can not make sense for people who speak languages completely different from ours. Quine's view refers in principle to any language and

hence it should be seen as cross-culturally truthful and acceptable. He also preserves the validity of logic as the core of rationality in contrast to the cultural peculiarities of meanings. When Malinowski imputes "pre-logicality" to his islanders by varying the translation of their utterances in order to sidestep contradictions, and Winch justifies the Zande's inconsistencies in terms of cultural idiosyncrasies, Quine claims that it would be absurd to accept as true certain sentences translatable in the form *p and non-p*. Anthropologists can make natives sound as queer as they please, but, he concludes: "Better translation imposes our logic upon them, and would beg the question of pre-logicality if there were a question to beg" (*Word and Object*, p 58). This suggests that appropriate translation elicits that coherence and consistency are cross-culturally valid and hence understanding other people should make obvious that they are bound by logical rules no less than we are.

As we have seen, Winch is ready to abandon the invariance of logical norms in order to make our understanding more flexible and to push the notion of rationality towards relativism. Quine is a different story. Unlike Winch, who emphasizes cultural idiosyncrasies of different forms of life, Quine is committed to save from relativism the universally compelling force of the kind of knowledge which crosses over cultural and linguistic divides. He sounds like the desperate captain of a sinking ship: "*Save the obvious!*" What is to be saved from the wreckage? Two things: First, simple logical particles (particularly the truth functions like negation, or conjunction or alternation). Quine believes that the occurrence of a contradictory utterance is evidence that something important has been lost in translation rather than an indication of apparent irrationality. Second, Quine further has in mind equivalent observation sentences, which can be paired

across languages on the bridge of the sameness of stimulus meaning. He explicitly

admonishes in "Epistemology Naturalized" (in *Naturalizing Epistemology*, 1987, p. 27)

the attempt to "accentuate cultural relativism" by discrediting the idea of observation, and

even describes observation sentences both as "repository of evidence for scientific

hypotheses" and "absolute" ground for community agreement. He says,

> Now this canon - 'Save the obvious' - is sufficient to settle, in point of truth-value
> anyway, our translation of some of the sentences in just about every little branch of
> discourse: for some of them are pretty obvious outright (like '1+1=2') or obvious in
> particular circumstances (like 'It is raining') (*Philosophy of Logic*, 1986, p.82).

On this basis one could offer a ground for a rough translation. On the one hand,

truth functions are considered as necessary conditions for reaching agreement in the

construction of a translation scheme. Their treatment is more fundamentally charitable

since it would be nonsense to understand some speakers as being collectively mistaken

about their own truth functional constructions or to treat them as suffering from a chronic

logical incompetence. On the other hand, according to Quine's empiricist credo,

meaning is gleaned from overt behavior in observable circumstances. In this respect,

Quine's notion of translation is also geared to a behavioral sense: what counts as an

obvious sentence to a community refers to high frequency of dispositions of the majority

of speakers to assent to it. Of course, a language community has no other choice but to

resort to observation sentences, which wear their empirical content "on their sleeves" to

anchor their beliefs. And yet, speakers' utterances may be connected to the sense

impingements in subjective ways which vary from one to another. Quine emphasizes that

high variability by saying: "One man's observation is another man's closed book or flight

of fancy". To arrive at a more objective ground, the best one can do is to survey "all

speakers of a language, or most" ("Epistemology Naturalized", p 27).

We should not have illusions. We know now that we can get as much stability as Neurath's boat can afford on restless waves. That is why Quine recommends that we approach translation in a charitable way. Quine urges us to save what seems obvious for the linguistic communities. By doing so, as Donald Davidson remarks "we make maximum sense of the world of thoughts of others when we interpret in a way that optimizes agreement..." (see "On the Very Idea of Conceptual Scheme", "Thought and Talk", Belief and the Basis of Meaning", in *Inquiries on truth and Interpretations*, 1984). Therefore charity is to be a favored alternative to linguistic idiosyncrasy bound to world-incommensurability.

3.23) CHARITY MAXIM AND PSYCHOLOGICAL GUESSES

Yet, what does it mean to superimpose cross-linguistically the constraints of a translation scheme and to map home language sentences and alien language sentences, when each set of sentences may receive a quasi-general but diverging assents in the two communities? Quine's reply elicits a charitable minimal rationality that can be described in terms of a common sense psychological background which makes translation credible. He remarks, "the common sense behind the maxim is that one's interlocutor's silliness beyond a certain point, is less likely than bad translation - or linguistic divergence" (*Word and Object*, p.59). This argument from charity says that if one's interlocutor's speech is too silly or is strikingly wrong about some matter, this is likely to turn on hidden differences of language. Therefore, a bad translation should be suspected for conveying assertions which appear startlingly false rather than doubting the intellectual competence of the native speakers. In a strong sense charity is to be understood as a minimal rationality, in a weaker sense is a methodological maxim designed to preclude

misunderstandings in the beginning of research when linguistic interpretations are just based on psychological conjectures. Quine recommends charity for the earlier stages of translation when there is little or nothing to help the dialog with an informant. According to some interpretations, what rough equivalences are more likely in linguistic pairing of sentences is a matter to be decided from the perspective of empirical psychology (see Henderson, *Interpretation and Explanation*, p.45). When the interpreter moves beyond a simple mapping of observational sentences a weaker and more flexible charitable approach is advisable: the usefulness of a manual of translation in the process of communication is judged by smoothness of conversation, frequent predictability of behavioral dispositions both verbal and non-verbal, and plausibility of messages. He contends that native utterance should still turn out on the whole to be plausible even if one fails to link them with observable circumstances (*Pursuit of Truth*, p.43, "Philosophical Progress in Language Theory", pp. 14-15). Therefore the truth-condition has been replaced with a plausibility condition which obviously counts as such for the subject and not for the interpreter. Instead of seeking the fulfillment of a simple logical demand, we use the framework of our psychological theories at hand and consider the circumstances of the subjects as we reconstruct the most plausible understanding of what they say or believe. Consequently, the anthropologist's understanding of native's style of thinking would depend on psychological conjectures about what the native is more likely to mean by his occasion sentences (like the utterance "Gavagai") which bear upon the bundle of stimuli or sense impingements. That is the reason why Quine argues (in *Pursuit of Truth*) that psychological intuition sustains the translator all along the way, even beyond the observational level, "deterring him from translating a native assertion

into too glaring a falsehood. He will favor translations that ascribe beliefs to the native that stand to reason or are consonant with the native's way of life" (*Pursuit of Truth*, p 46). Since all minds are presumed to be "pretty much like our own", practical psychology offers the guide for understanding others. In this respect, Quine thinks that "empathic" power of imagination which scrutinize the situation of the subjects under study may help the translation by opening one's access to the interlocutor's meanings.

In this light, good expectation that researchers can successfully understand alien beliefs may be aided by considering the rational ground of logic in connection with the observational dimension of speech which reflects the perceptual uniformities familiar within a way of life. However, Quine treats cases where the field researcher observes a blatant irrationality as an artifact of the researcher's procedure. Placing the burden on the methodological ability of making sense through translation rather than blaming the rational incompetence of the informants is consistent with the idea of *charity*. Quine introduces the condition of charity as a binding maxim which requires us to "maximize agreement" in the process of understanding apparently exotic beliefs. He stresses that empirical evidence available may prove that the failure to understand natives rather brings about ethnographer's mistake in translation (see *Word and Object*, p. 58). This contention points to charity maxim, which could be interpreted either in a stronger sense or in a weaker sense, though in both cases we face conceptual difficulties. First, if charity is seen as an *inviolable principle*, it compels the researcher to disregard the possibility that his informants are committing a logical mistake or are behaving strangely or foolishly. In consequence, the problem of irrationality ceases to make sense and must be completely given up. The burden for grasping errors or fallacies in subjects' speech remains with the

researcher. He inappropriately assumes responsibility for breakdowns of communication between him and his informants. (This calls to the mind the point I made in the preceding chapter about the idealizing character of formal reason, which is inapplicable and irrelevant for the elusive and fluent nature of life).

Nevertheless Quine's claim does not extend so far. He argues rather that apparent irrationality suggests that something important was lost in the process of understanding. Such a risk is more likely when translation is considerably more vague and free floating. He admits that when a contradictory utterance of the form "*p and not p*" is detected, this may indicate that some revisions of the translation system are needed, unless the competence of the researcher is called into question after all. But to know what change of interpretation is potentially more suitable, we need to understand if we face a case of genuinely irrational beliefs which fails both native's and our criteria of rationality, or if we are misled by what at first glance appears irrational to us. As soon as an ethnographer or an anthropologist is able to overcome the fumbling character of his dialog with local speakers and to improve his understanding of the native cultural behavior, he may find that the attribution of apparent irrationality was mistaken. If the researcher has been in the field for enough time to develop an efficient scheme of translation, he will be able to fluently use the native language in smooth conversations with the members of community under study. The better he manages to communicate with his informants, the less likely is the deduction of apparent irrationality.

Second, at the other extreme, if the maxim of charity is understood as merely a "*rule of thumb*" useful only for making informed guesses in the early fumbling stages of translation, it remains very ambiguous and weak. In fact, Quine maintains that a

competent researcher should not base a translation scheme on first observations, but should continue to test his manual during his linguistic negotiations with the native community. Quine agrees with the requirement of extensive empirical records, which are supposed to provide a wide pragmatic base for the proper pairing of diverging sets of sentences from the two different languages.

The social scientist who is too charitable should remember what he knows from his own home-culture. One cannot ignore that people often show a capacity to believe nonsense and to hold inconsistent opinions or convictions resulting from errors of reasoning. This does not necessarily imply that one's mind is faulty, but only that one may, willingly or not, misuse it. It is not my interest to discuss here whether people are often blinded by their pursuit of narrow interests or are overwhelmed by their emotional makeup. The problem is how the interpretation of behavior bears on Quine's version of charity.

It seems to me that charitably recognizing mistaken speech requires standards of judgement which allow one to distinguish between what makes sense and what doesn't. On this basis one is able to identify irrationality whenever a violation of these standards occurs. Moreover, one can understand the *difference* between forms of life and explain in what sense their *contrasts* amount to inconsistencies or contradictions. The point is that the interpretation of different cultural and linguistic frameworks is possible only on the basis of some criteria of rationality which should not be relative to those societies under interpretation, if they are to ground cross-culturally valid judgements and bridge conceptual schemes.

Quine implicitly suggests that the idea of charity points to the concept of

rationality and it is tied to logical norms, but he does not clearly elaborate these conceptual connections. He is aware that he must save the universality of logic in order to make his thesis of ontological relativity intelligible as it bears on the indeterminacy of translation. We saw earlier that he cannot avoid a paradoxical conclusion: logical relativity must fail to insure the workability of ontological relativity. The logical rules which constitute the basic norms of rationality provide for the understanding of other people. If they are not found in the confinement of the ship at sea, from Neurath's metaphor, where sailors can make good use of them, eventually to subject them to an ongoing adjustment as they do with the rest of their floating platform, where are they? In other words, if logic must escape relativity and the applicability of its preconditions is not context-bound, the question becomes, what warrants its universal validity? This question lingers in Quine's view of many incommensurable worlds but it is not clearly answered.

Frege once warns us that we should not identify the laws of thought, which are psychological and contingent with logical norms, which are a priori. Quine rethinks the problem as follows: were truth-functions just an internal matter of empirical psychology then the necessity of logical constraints would be abandoned and Frege's distinction would collapse. Without normative criteria for evaluation, we are unable to assess the beliefs held by foreign people and to tell how they are *different* from ours. Hence, the elimination of the epistemic concept of truth from a descriptively oriented naturalized epistemology would lead to the impossibility of any epistemological justification of our own cognitive claims. For instance, if we are to speak again in the language of the marine metaphor, since there are no rational standards, such as "rightness", in the ship's inventory, the sailors would be adrift and would have no way to know where they are or

even how to fix their boat. They find themselves completely lost, lamentable victims surrounded by the infinity of water. Wouldn't one be correct to complain with Hillary Putnam that "The elimination of the normative is attempted mental suicide"? Although Putnam continues to work in the theoretical horizon opened by Quine, he argues against his master that reason can't be naturalized. If we discard all notions of "rightness" like Quine, he asks, "then what are all our statements but noise-makings?" ("Why Reason Can't Be Naturalized, pp. 240-1 in *After Philosophy*, 1987).

Notwithstanding, Quine's idea of charity points to rationality of logic, which seems to be excepted from relativity. Though Quine's account on obviousness that warrants the validity of logic across languages and cultures, in contrast with inter-linguistic indeterminacy (on the same foot with ontological relativity), is neither sufficiently clear nor persuasive enough. In consequence, his idea of charity is bound to a methodological maxim which poses a constraint on how to translate alien verbal behavior as fundamentally rational. But understanding finally is a matter of psychological conjectures and it rests on empirical psychology. Beyond this "naturalizing" aspect, his view on charity remains so vague as to land him back in the relativism that he seemed to overcome.

In what follows I will conclude the discussion of Quine by showing where we are left by his argument. This move will justify the transition to Davidson.

3.24) CONCLUSIONS IN THE FACE OF AN INESCAPABLE DILEMMA

According to Quine, a field-linguist's attempt to build a linguistic bridge between his own home culture and a native community shows that translation is essentially indeterminate, and therefore it is too weak to sustain cross-cultural understanding. In this

respect, there is no neutral middle ground to mediate communication between a Western scientist and an alien speaker who seems radically different from everything he ever knew until then. There is no reasonable basis of comparison, or, as Quine puts it, "less sense in saying what is good translation and what is bad...(*Word and Object*, p 78)". Hence, the relativist implications of the "Gavagai"-"Rabbit" argument are unavoidable.

Nonetheless, Quine is committed to "save the obvious" which for him is that which must remain valid in a cross-cultural sense, i.e. simple logical truths and stimulus meanings. Logical rules and empirical basis of stimulus meanings may account for "outward uniformity" of behavioral dispositions imposed by society when inculcating a language designed for "smooth communication" (see *Pursuit of Truth*, p.44). Complex behavioral associations could explain with a good deal of approximation the linguistic uniformity within a speech community and verbal dispositions to give assent or dissent to various sentences. In this respect, we recall Quine's analogy between people of the same language community and different bushes trimmed in elephantine shapes. However, the "outward uniformity" which determines verbal dispositions is not matched by an "inward uniformity". Quine assumes that there is a "chaotic subjective diversity" of connections between environment and behavior. Therefore, understanding across the linguistic and cultural divide is just an empirical matter of making associations between words and experiences in terms of relevance relations. Since there is no universal way to understand all selves or to read minds, we can only make psychological guesses from behavior and adjust our interpretations according to the efficiency of our hypotheses. At this point, the maxim of charity plays a decisive role in preventing the linguist from too easily rejecting an utterance because of its apparent silliness and in requiring the linguist rather assume

that his informant is a rational speaker. This methodological recommendation directs us to explain apparent nonsense as a faulty translation rather than as a result of an irrational mind.

In sum, Quine's argument for the indeterminacy of translation particularly persuasive in its denial of the universalist project of understanding typified by Descartes's rational subject abstracting the peculiarities of cultures. Nevertheless, in what follows, we will discover that Quine is not immune to a criticism, which surprisingly puts him in the same camp with Descartes, despite the deep theoretical differences between them. Davidson accuses Quine of holding a *"Cartesian vision"* which is elicited by the implicit hypothesis that the inquiring subject can construct the world in the privacy of the thinking and sensing self. We will turn to this subtle argument in the next chapter. But before that I want to close this discussion with some far-reaching considerations that show where we are at the end of this chapter and justify where I will further take this inquiry.

Philosophers and scientists that are embarked, and Quine would agree, on the same vessel from Neurath's illuminating metaphor of human condition, crossing the unending ocean to nowhere, may be split between the two horns of a dilemma. First, they may listen to an enchanting skeptical voice so persuasive from Pyrrho and Carneades to Montaigne, Hume and Quine. It talks about the despair born out of the self-awareness of our finitude and from the disparity of our confrontation with the infinite surrounding darkness. At times, its sound could be overwhelmed by tragic and fearful accents becoming an expression of anguish in the face of the drama of life, the dread of death and the mysterious universe. I would cry to the navigators doomed to be ever engaged in this odyssey: "Don't be fooled, this is in fact the disenchanting voice of the sirens who are

paving the way for your own downfall and distress!" It is true that to stay away from the fascination of that existentialist call for sadness and anxiety, one, eventually, has to tie oneself to the mast like Odysseus, when he could not resist the attraction of sea nymphs whose singing lured mariners to destruction on the rock of their island. After all, I think that to be guided on the second alternative is more fascinating as it is more promising. That is the transcultural voice that, after Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and the Enlightenment, Habermas gives to rationality.

At this juncture let us sketch a concluding summary of Quine's argument discussed so far in this chapter. We remarked that Quine's attempt to *"save the obvious"* from relativity, is above all concerned with logical truth and inferences. In fact, his idea of charity can be used in connection with what appears *obvious* to nearly everyone in the community and may provide a ground for assent or dissent . However, one has to observe that although Quine recommends making revision of translations rather than assuming speaker's irrationality, he does not seem inclined to tolerate any a priori constraint on understanding the informant's utterances. Of course, his policy is to avoid translating the native assertions as "too glaring a falsehood" and to deem the speaker's silliness less likely than bad translation. And yet, at times, Quine suggests that especially in the early stages of translation which require first approximation-interpretive schemes, charity is compelling only as a *"rule of thumb"*. At times, the reconstruction of stimulus meanings may be made on the basis of a quite "ill-developed" theory regarding perceptual error or by simply finding charity operating in the elaborating "good guesses". But Quine himself must recognize that this is hardly a satisfactory basis for understanding. On his view, there is no other exit from such limited epistemic situations when we are pushed at the

edge of our knowledge, other than to keep testing our hypotheses and to come up with new forms of theorizing which, hopefully, prove more adequate in the light of experience. Therefore, the interpretation of overt behavior in observable situations remains just an empirical problem. The radical translator has **nothing** *a priori* at hand and he cannot have any previous knowledge of the alien language, nor get any access to bilingual help. The charitable understanding consists in making psychological conjectures regarding what his informant is likely to believe. Of course, in conformity with the prerequisite of naturalized epistemology, this procedure is limited to the scientific reliance on the best explanations presently available in empirical psychology (see *Word and Object*, p. 59, "Indeterminacy of Translation Again", in *Journal of Philosophy*, 84, 1987, pp. 5-10, p. 7)). Ultimately, Quine is reluctant to allow endless modifications of the translation scheme to accommodate each succeeding utterance's truth and to avoid attributing irrationality to the speaker.

It is fair to preclude any binding conditions on the interpretation of a foreign language. Nevertheless, as we have already observed, Quine then must face another problem. Had he given up the cross-language character of logical rules, it would make no sense to presume that translations or interpretations are recognizably different, contrasting, or excluding one from another. As I have argued earlier, it has been fairly imputed to Quine that his concept of ontological relativity can be intelligible only if logical relativity fails.

In order to preclude the dead-end that is inescapable for Quine, Davidson will try to step further through the door opened by his mentor in at least two main directions. First, he analyzes language against the intersubjective context wherein talking and

thinking subjects are intricately intermingled in conversation. Second, unlike Quine, he sends his radical interpreter to venture, in the "dark" and risky forbidden land of the intentional to capture the nature of meaning and beliefs. Davidson relies on the quasi-mentalist notion of *"holding a sentence true"* instead of quasi-behaviorist notion of *"stimulus-meaning"*. Insofar as he claims that a correct interpretation of one's speech *must be possible in principle* and *must remain publicly accessible*, he is more *"charitable"* than Quine is willing to be (see "Idea of Conceptual Scheme", pp. 188-189, "Inscrutability of Reference", p 235).

The next chapter will proceed first with a critique of Quine's Cartesian tendency in the terms of Davidson subtle remark that there persists in Quine an implicit *"Cartesian vision"* that consists in the tendency to believe that each of us can privately "construct" the world picture in the inner self. Then, in the second section, I will resume the examination of Davidson's plea for the principle of charity, which becomes the central methodological claim insofar as it provides the ground for possible understanding of other people. Despite his conceptual affinities with Quine, Davidson works on a theory of meaning as subject to an empirically informed constraint (See "Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 196). His methodology of interpretation refines the basic principle of charity in order to make sense for "intelligible error and make allowance for a relative likelihood of various kinds of mistakes" ("Radical Interpretation", in *Inquiries on Truth and Interpretation*, p. 136). The far-reaching goal of Davidson's appeal to charity is to bridge different systems of beliefs. I will deal with his view next as a conceptual alternative to Quine's linguistic theory and Winch's idea of social science. Responding to the question regarding the chance to overcome the methodological paradox and the Munchausen

trilemma raised by the relativist thesis of world-incommensurability, Davidson dares to

go closer to a concept of understanding which relies on the need for a charitable

rationality.

Chapter 4)   *DONALD DAVIDSON:*

INTERPRETATION AND THE NEED FOR CHARITY

In this chapter, I will analyze Davidson's discussion of radical interpretation and

his appeal to charity to secure the conceptual ground of understanding. Is there any way

to bridge up the semantic gap uncovered by the Quinean theory of radical translation?

The goal of the following three chapters is to present possible responses to this question.

We shall see here that Davidson accepts the challenge of Quine's thesis of indeterminacy

of translation and uses the charity principle to offer a conceptual basis for understanding

and communicating with cultures remote from our own. In his own words, the question

is "what would it suffice an interpreter to know in order to understand the speaker of an

alien language, and how could he come to know it" ("Reply to Jerry Fodor and Ernest

Lepore" in *Reflecting Davidson*, 1993, p. 83).

Davidson constructs his theory of understanding in the horizon of the analysis of

language opened by Wittgenstein and Carnap, but, above all, Quine has been his constant

mentor. Such affinities prompt references without which many of Davidson's points

would remain unintelligible. Especially, a conceptual comparison between Davidson and

Quine regarding their specific ways of interpreting the nature of language is necessary.

We will see that Davidson advocates the mentalist idea of *holding true beliefs*, which is

essentially different from Quine's behaviorist treatment of *stimulus meanings*, and this

explains their different emphasis on the notion of charity and its role in understanding

alien speech. To emphasize how Davidson has developed the Quinean heritage, I will

show how Davidson's premises regarding linguistic understanding challenges the view of

his influential teacher. Thus, before I lay out the basic elements of Davidson's concept of

interpretation in which systems of beliefs are bridged by recourse to charity, I will explore his intriguing claim that in a subtle way Quine still looks back to Descartes. In what follows, I begin the discussion with Davidson's contention that language must be social, if it is to be a language at all. From this perspective I will present his criticism of Quine. Then I will set the terms for understanding Davidson's version of the principle of charity that provides for the possibility of communication across cultures and is intelligible on the basis of the intersubjective nature of language.

The aim of the next section is to make good on Davidson's claim that a language must remain publicly accessible and therefore interpretable. In this respect, I will show that Davidson tries to distance himself from Quine's concept of radical translation and I will review his contention that Quine shares with Descartes a view of understanding as a private matter of an isolated self. Davidson remarks that there still persists in *Word and Object* a Cartesian tendency to believe that each of us can "construct" the world in the privacy of one's self. Even if Quine replaces the rational intuitions *wired in* the mind of Descartes's subject with the irritations on the sensory surface of the perceptive subject, according to Davidson, in deep sense, his approach remains Cartesian (see "Post Analytic Vision", *interview with G. Borradori* in *The American Philosopher*, 1994, pp. 49-50). This discussion is mainly intended to introduce Davidson's thesis regarding the public accessibility of language and to prepare the conceptual ground for his notion of charity.

4.1) DAVIDSON'S DEPARTURE FROM QUINE: PUBLIC ACCESSIBILITY OF LANGUAGE VERSUS QUINE'S *CARTESIAN VISION*

Quine thinks that the solitary voyage of the Cartesian subject on the neutral path of Reason beyond the cultural peculiar imageries of different communities is as

implausible as a "cosmic exile", to use Quine's own expression. This means that a universal rational standpoint is equivalent to the epistemic situation of a knowing subject that is completely abstracted from the world and makes impartial judgments in language that is universal to all people. We have noticed that Descartes is convinced that we can use the intellectual faculties which acts in the private conditions of the mind and that absolute Reason provides the underlying basis for reaching a universal understanding among people. This would be a kind of rational background that insures the possibility for two speakers of different languages to think identical ideas. From this standpoint, reason is the common core of humanity and hence is necessarily replicated in all humans.

Quine is aware that the Cartesian subject's exile outside of the world represents a leap over the limits of conceptual schemes, which is as impossible as one's jumping over one's own shadow. Nonetheless, Davidson contends that there persists in Quine a Cartesian tendency that consists in believing that each of us is an epistemic subject who can "construct" the world from what is given to the senses. The expression "*Cartesian vision*" elicits one way of doing philosophy in which one supposes that some evidence is presented to us (either raw experience, sensory data, or stimulations of our nerve endings, and on this basis we rebuild the image of the outside world and understand behaviors). Davidson says "I prefer to call such pictures empirical and Cartesian because we can develop a picture of the world all by ourselves, and we could do so even if there were nobody else in the world" (*Interview* in *The American Philosopher*, p. 50). Such individualism is yielded by the presupposition that the language or the mind "organizes" the reality provided by the senses within the structure of a conceptual scheme.

Quine might argue that this criticism is unfair. He points out in the analogy of the

trimmed bushes in elephantine shapes that although they are "wildly unlike in their inward twigs and branches" as "communication presupposes no similarity" of the net of nerve endings, they are alike in outward form and that uniformity is the pattern imposed by society, "in inculcating language and pressing for smooth communication" (*Pursuit of Truth*, p. 44, see *Word and Object*, p. 8)). Although Quine tells us that radical translation "begins at home", the paradigm of radical translation is exemplified by the recovery of a native's current language by a field linguist who is attempting "to penetrate and translate a language hitherto unknown" unaided by any interpreter (*Word and Object*, p 28, see *Ontological Relativity*, p. 46). Found in a such a helpless and solitary situation, all the linguist can do is to observe the behavioral responses to the environment of his informant and record the observed correlation between his assents to or dissents from occasion sentences which express the sensory surface irritations or stimulus meanings. The contrast between Descartes and Quine seems so evident, though, that nobody could deny it. For Descartes, a substantive notion of reason breaks the vicious circle of subjectivity of understanding and the difficulty of translation does not even arise. Quine is chiefly concerned with the empirical constraints of knowledge and the extensional theory of linguistic meaning.

Nevertheless, the Cartesian reading of Quine is defensible in the light of what Davidson calls *radical interpretation* of language. From this perspective, understanding a speech requires the construction of a theory of meaning from an informant's language and based on *evidence plausibly available* and *in principle publicly accessible* to a genuine investigator, who does not know in advance how to interpret the utterances the theory is designed to cover (see "Radical Interpretation, p. 125, 128, "Inscrutability of

Reference", p. 235). This concept of *radical interpretation* provides an account of

translation relative only to the understanding of situations in which languages are actually

interpreted. Davidson maintains that "the correct interpretation of one person's speech by

another must be *in principle* possible" ("The Structure and Content of Truth" in *Journal*

of Philosophy, 87, 1990, p. 314, also J. Fodor, E. Lepore, "Is Radical Interpretation

Possible?", in *Reflecting Davidson*, 1993, p. 72) A speaker's intentions, desires, attitudes

or meanings may remain opaque at times even to the most skilled and knowledgeable

listeners, but a correct understanding based upon the available evidence for the

interpretation of speech and truth conditions must be possible most of the time.

Although Quine, in the tradition of Wittgenstein, Mead, and Dewey, insists

sometimes that language is intrinsically social, Davidson emphasizes that this simply

involves for Quine the empiricist assumption that language is "entirely determined by

observable behavior, even readily observable behavior". Davidson argues against this

limited interpretation that, as far as "public availability is a constitutive aspect of

language", meaning is not just a matter of one's lucky guesses ("The structure and content

of truth", p. 314, Fodor, Lepore, "Is Radical Interpretation Possible?", p 72). On his view,

Quine becomes liable to the objections against private languages. Here Davidson draws

on Wittgenstein's famous private language argument to demonstrate the Cartesian aspect

of Quine's subject.[35]

In two passages from *Philosophical Investigation* (1953), "the diary keeper" (sec.

258) and "the beetle in the box" (sec. 293), Wittgenstein illustrates how the absence of

any public criterion makes it impossible to learn ostensibly the names of sensations and to

use language to describe subjective states of mind. His attack is designed to preclude the

logical possibility of a language which is accessible only to one isolated subject and is used to describe internal experiences. Davidson's contention that Quine's Cartesian vision arises from the presupposition that the reality revealed by the sensory evidence is structured within conceptual schemes by the language or the mind can be seen as a continuation of this line of argumentation. Davidson admits that Quine salvages the philosophy of language from a dogma of empiricism by purging the distinction between analytic and synthetic - that is, between the "architectonic structure of thought" and its "empirical contents". Nonetheless, Davidson thinks that Quine is himself committed to a third dogma: that of the privacy of the mind, which is even more dangerous for its perceptive solipsist character. From Davidson's point of view, Quine is seen as the heir of a philosophical tradition which attempts to rebuild the picture of the world by giving grounds in whatever reliable evidence we can find. Unlike Descartes, who emphasizes the trustworthiness of the rational intuitions, Quine relies on stimulus meanings and requires a logical structure of the propositions describing sensory data.[36]

Wittgenstein's arguments on the unintelligibility of private language challenge in general the subjectivist scenarios which purport to arrive at knowledge which can be formulated in an universal language or at least shown and perceived (like one calling "*his* beetle" or one pointing by ostension to an occurring sensation associated with the sign "S" in the diary). Henceforth, he denounces the perennial dream of philosophers to determine a kind of primitive evidence which is expressed by some objective categories. He argues that it is senseless to look for the ultimate bottom of language games since there are no intuitive and incorrigible foundations of knowledge, neither perceptive (raw experience, sense impingements, stimulations of our nerve endings) nor rational (the immediately

striking certainty of reason). We have seen that Wittgenstein contends that meaning of words also lies in the intersubjective use of language within a community. On his view, there are striking differences between the actual multiplicity of kinds of words and sentences and the singularity of what philosophers have assumed about the simplified structure of language. Although he was aware that one could look at the world only through the single window of one's home-language, he avoided reducing the complexity of the forms of life to the fictive rational simplicity of the Cartesian subject.

From such a tradition, to which Quine himself belongs, Davidson generalizes the interpretation expressed by the metaphor *Cartesian vision*. Quine is seeking to rebuild the world image and, inherently, the understanding among people on what everyone should undeniably accept. His reliance on overt behavior and stimulus meaning parallels Descartes's appeal to the certainty of his *cogito*. In this respect, Davidson can justifiably claim that although Quine, unlike Descartes, is committed to empiricism, he still bears the Cartesian hallmark typified by the belief that a subject alone can develop a picture of the world all by himself, and he "could do so even if there were nobody else in the world" ("Post-Analytic Vision", *interview,* p. 50). For this reason, according to Davidson, Quinean subject still operates in a Cartesian context.

In contrast to this tradition, including Quine, Davidson repeatedly claims that language is inherently intersubjective and must be interpretable. His criticism against any *Cartesian voyage* in the "privacy of the mind" conveys the thesis that "*nothing is hidden*". It requires that "the evidence be publicly accessible" and, according to Davidson, this is not due "to an atavistic yearning for behaviorist or verificationist foundations, but due to the fact that what is to be explained is a social phenomenon" ("The Structure and Content

of Truth", p. 314, see also Davidson, "Inscrutability of Reference", p. 235; Fodor, Lepore,

"Is Radical Interpretation Possible?", p. 72). His *radical interpreter* does not know how

to read minds and hasn't learned what someone, intends, believes, wants or means "by

opening up his brain" ("Reply to Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore", p. 81). He claims that

subjects have no possibility of analyzing thinking or perceptive behavioral dispositions in

strictly subjective sense, but only "events" that depend on the subject being in permanent

exchange with other speakers and communicating and interacting with them in a common

social environment. If we are to understand a speaker we must know how his words are

connected with what happens in the world, but Davidson does not imply that the mind is

provided with a universal grammar or linguistic universals, as Chomsky once suggested.

The connections between language and reality are established both for the speaker and the

interpreter in a public context in which people share meanings and interact socially. On

this view it is a matter of principle that

> meaning, and by its connection with meaning, beliefs also, are open to
> public determination... What a fully informed interpreter could learn
> about a speaker means is all there is to learn; the same goes for what the
> speaker believes (Fodor, Lepore, "Is Radical Interpretation Possible?", p
> 70).

He admits that we can be wrong sometimes in interpreting utterances or other pieces of

behavior, but if we always fail in understanding anyone then "the concepts of language,

understanding and thought would have no application to us" ("Reply to Fodor and

Lepore", p. 82). Had we been *always* mistaken in interpreting one's speech, it would

make no sense to say, for instance, that one has been "misled" by evidence or to talk

about one going astray in coming to grip with meanings. Therefore, he holds that the

primary and only source of understanding meanings lies in "successful interpersonal

communication" (Quine would say "smooth communication"). To accomplish that, although we could misinterpret some particular persons or utterances, we cannot always be wrong in understanding others (see "Reply to Fodor and Lepore").[37] And Davidson assumes that if we are to build a conceptual bridge between different language users, the principle of charity provides the way.

4.2) THE NEED FOR CHARITY IN RADICAL INTERPRETATION

In what follows, I will consider Davidsonian version of the principle of charity by exploiting another suggestion made by Wittgenstein in his woodcutters' metaphor. The moral of his story is that to understand what seems to be odd or irrational people is made possible only by a charitable interpretation of their behavior, that is, to find them reasonable within their specific cultural context. Davidson criticizes the relativist implications of the idea that rationality is relative to a conceptual scheme. We will see that he attempts to overcome self-refuting cultural relativism and to devise a strategy for a new explanation of understanding between people. His conception of radical interpretation points to observable aspects of verbal behavior, which should be taken, on the one hand, as evidence for a theory of truth, and, on the other (when combined with a version decision theory), as evidence for a unified theory of belief, meaning, and desire. Davidson says that "the evidence assumed available plus the constraints on the structure of the pattern of a person's beliefs, values and language, suffice to yield an interpretive theory for understanding a person" ("Reply to Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore", p. 84). However, Davidson admits that successful interpretation is possible only on the basis of the principle of charity and so depends on the condition of having a non-private language, that is, a language understood by more than one person. We shall see next how Davidson

tries to accomplish this goal.

4.21) CHARITY AND REASONABLENESS

What is the principle of charity after all? We have seen that Quine's maxim of charity is a methodological requirement to understand people as presumably reasonable. Drawing from Quine, Davidson admits that the idea of charity is an injunction to maximize or optimize agreement in the process of conversation. As such, it is a precondition that provides for the possibility of interpretation of alien behavior by social scientists in the course of dialogue with a speaker of unknown and non-familiar language. One can identify or understand the beliefs of a native or of a different ethnic group only if they are interpreted as reasonable in their own world. If this is what is meant by being charitable in understanding others, such an idea was, in fact, first suggested by Wittgenstein in the woodcutters' story.

He imagines an anthropologist who finds himself in the problematic situation of interpreting the activity of some natives that appear irrational. Such people are supposed to pile "timber in heaps of arbitrary, varying height and then sell it at a price proportionate to the area covered by the piles". If asked, they can even justify this by saying: "Of course, if you buy more timber, you must pay more" (*Remarks on Foundations of Mathematics*, 1956, sec. 44e, pp. 142-51). We must recognize that, since there is no conceptual match between us and that imaginary society, "our own familiar ways of thinking are subtly distorted" (see Winch, "The Idea of Social Science", in *Rationality*, 1970, p. 8). The difficult question we must face is in what sense one can claim that one had *understood* the behavior displayed by the natives described by Wittgenstein. Obviously, they expect to get more payment, not for a larger quantity of wood, but for a

pile covering a bigger area. Nevertheless the researcher in the field cannot simply suppose that these natives are stupid or foolish because by doing so his explanation would obscure the reasons which might motivate their behavior. If the subjects under study were thoroughly irrational, would there be anything left for the social scientist to understand? Since their reasons or causes of their behavior would not make sense to the field researcher, how could he explain their means of survival or the meanings of their customs? It is more likely that the seemingly irrational woodcutters are being misinterpreted: the scientist may be wrong about what they mean by quantitative attributes ("a lot of wood" and "a little wood") and he may fail to understand their system of payment. Were we to think that these woodcutters irrationally pursue a trade on self-defeating terms, we would be vulnerable to the criticism that we are confusing their market rules with ours. To avoid such an epistemic pitfall and describe these natives as reasonable, Wittgenstein recommends, "We should presumably say in this case: they simply do not mean the same by 'a lot of wood' and 'a little wood' as we do; and they have a quite different system of payment from us" (*Remarks*, sec. 44e). By adopting this attitude, his strategy introduces the charity of interpretation in a way which recalls Quine's advice to revise the translation schemes in order to preserve the rational character of behavior under consideration.

However this is not the end of the matter. The question is what standpoint guides the investigator's understanding when he changes his mind and decides that some apparently irrational practice is really rational after all. Wittgenstein is silent about this, though his conclusion seems to suggest abandoning the claim of value freedom in social science. His argument prompts us to consider two cases: first, if the anthropologist ends

up by being converted to the system of beliefs he investigates, then these beliefs can be understood from within and judged reasonable by his own standards. But, this is a possibility not easily accepted by the relativist who claims that social scientists supposedly cannot get out of their own cultural frameworks and are bound to use their own values and principles when interpreting others. Second, if native beliefs are not shared by the anthropologist caught in his own conceptual scheme, then he must make the difference intelligible by showing how the context features that he detects make those beliefs reasonable.[38]

The difficulty is not solved, but simply postponed since we are further prompted to ask to whom must the behavior be shown to be intelligible or reasonable? Since the natives have no problem in finding themselves intelligible, the obvious answer would be: the interpreter. Wittgenstein, Winch, Davidson, and Taylor, among others, suggest that *making sense* of a range of behavior implies *finding rationality* in the behavior at issue. This is consistent with the *principle of charity*, which states that understanding people from other cultures is feasible so far as they can be interpreted on the whole as reasonable, that is, to assume that they genuinely prefer true and right beliefs above all.

If to achieve a correct representation of those interpreted, one is bound to treat their thoughts and deeds as predominately rational, it is possible that the entire problem of irrationality could be simply discarded as a faulty understanding. The burden of proof would be on the anthropologist's ability to reconcile his linguistic hypotheses to whatever behavior displayed by his subjects. But a too charitable insight into others' minds may be inaccurate and potentially distorting. The social researcher has to know to what extent the humble search for justifications of natives' behaviors may end up with implausible

rationalizations of their intentions and their particular actions. Some people may appear in the investigator's descriptions more reasonable than they count in reality even for their own community. But one must not forget that subjects may be dishonest, and one should not ignore the hypothesis that it is human to easily accept a self-gratifying behavior.

In addition to such confusing behavioral ambiguities, the anthropologist faces an insurmountable ambivalence. In the light of his experience, he might have learned that "on the one hand, there is no notion of reasonableness without cultures, practices, procedures; on the other hand, the cultures, practices procedures, we inherit are not an algorithm to be slavishly followed" (see H. Putnam, "Reason Can't Be Naturalized" in *Philosophy - End or Transformation*, 1987, p 228).

The anthropologist must acknowledge that there are two different kinds of rationality at stake: the one that makes sense for the members of his discipline and the other that is shared by natives. In the first place, when he returns from the field, his account of the intelligibility of native behavior is designed to convince his fellow practitioners that his research report is accurate and up to scientific standards. In the mean time, he is aware that what appears as reasonable for native inhabitants is ultimately what is to be agreed upon by themselves, not only by his fellow researchers. In this respect, he may have learned during his scientific training that behavior and beliefs can get fully meaningful and understandable only when they are seen from within the cultural context. The world-image shared by people living in distinct forms of life is a *man-made fabric* that depends on the cognitive abilities and speech competence varying from culture to culture. For example, Rom Harre demonstrates that Eskimos' psychological structures and their notions of social virtues related to collectivist values, which serve them better in

their struggle to survive a harsh environment, are quite incompatible with Maori's theory of the self centered on magic powers, and their principles of acting which exhibits an extreme form of individualism. However, when a Westerner describes this wild form of individualism, he may be tempted to recall features of the culture displayed by the courtly Middle Ages of Europe (see Rom Harre, "The 'Self' as a Theoretical Concept", in *Relativism, Interpretation and Confrontation*, 1989 pp. 397-403). Such a tendency to gravitate toward the examples of a familiar history is not due to the fact that our "objectifying pattern" would supposedly be an invariable trait of human nature. Rather, as Quine once points out, "[i]t is hard say how else there is to talk,..., because we are bound to adapt any alien pattern to our own in the very process of understanding or translating the alien sentences" (*Ontological Relativity*, p. 1). Thus, a social scientist, in tailoring native beliefs and acts to correspond more "smoothly" to his own meanings and criteria of rationality is inevitably inclined to reconstrue their way of life to fit the interpretative scheme learned from his own culture and typified by the disciplinary textbooks which guided his intellectual formation. If the investigator could have still preserved something linguistically *virgin* in his self, that is, not spoiled by upbringing or tainted by prejudices, his ingenuity could not have survived the systematic corruption of graduate school. The mission of education is after all to shape one in the spirit and standards rooted in the culture, and language itself can be envisaged as an enclosed articulated world.

Davidson refers to such closed linguistic framework in terms of conceptual schemes, which provide common ways of structuring and classifying the "furniture" of the world. [39] Presumably, what counts as real content, and as reasonable to believe,

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varies dramatically from one scheme to another. These different perspectives from which cultural groups or ages "survey the passing scene of the world" are regularly described as "non-corresponding" ways of seeing the world, in which the beliefs, desires, hopes and knowledge shared by a members of a culture have no counterparts for an inhabitant of another culture. On such a relativistic view, judgements of evaluation and reasonableness are relative to their intellectual and linguistic background.

This relativist conclusion is challenged by the argument that relativism is self-referential and ultimately refutes itself, and by Davidson's anti-representationalist critique of conceptual scheme. I will briefly describe the first view (found in M. Hesse's critique of strong programmes in sociology of knowledge) and I will analyze the latter in more detail in the next subsection.

The argument that relativist programmes are liable to the strong accusation of self-refutation can be reconstructed as follows: Let us consider the proposition *(1)* as typifying the claim of relativism and consider that the judgement can be similarly restated about meanings and values:

(1) " All criteria of truth are relative to a local culture"; Therefore nothing can be known except in the senses of *knowledge* and *truth* found in that culture. Hence asserting that,

(2) "Propositions *(1)* is true" - implicitly means, if we apply *(1)* to itself, that,

(3) "Proposition *(1)* is true only relative to a local culture". In conclusion, there are no objective or extra-cultural grounds for supporting *(1)*. Therefore it is fallacious to ask for reasons to support *(1)* in absolute sense. Consequently, the cognitive vocabulary needs to be redefined in order accommodate to the postulate that truth criteria are contextually dependent. If relativism is accepted, then its claims must apply to itself and also be

relative to a conceptual scheme. The statement that the criteria of truth or meaning are relative to a culture receives a circular support being itself bound to a linguistic framework. As meanings vary across cultures, any sentence is no longer meaning or, at best, would have changed the significance of its terms outside its language-context. In sum, if the claim of relativism is true, it must apply to itself, in which case it is self-refuting. If it makes itself an exception from what itself requires (that "all criteria of truth and meaning be relative to a local culture"), then it is false. Therefore, the idea that knowledge is what is shared only within a local culture is implausible and amounts to nothing more than a strategy of epistemic self-immunization.

To be sure, an anthropologist has to acknowledge that the difficulty of interpretation tests our ability to understand remote and different forms of life and to bridge the gap between different notions of rationality. Nonetheless, the extreme case of a complete failure of translation, and the corresponding thesis of world-incommensurability, leads to a vicious circularity between rationality and understanding: inhabitants of different worlds, on the one hand, cannot understand each other just because they share incompatible standards of rationality which are culturally specific; on the other hand, contrasting patterns of rationality are *sui generis* a result of idiosyncratic structures of understanding.

In conclusion, the foregoing discussion has been twofold. First, the story of Wittgenstein's apparently strange woodcutters has shown that being charitable in understanding people from other cultures often means seeing them as reasonable within their own form of life. This view implies that reason ceases to transcend cultures and becomes relative to a specific context of a form of life. However, the problem is that

"standards" immersed in a cultural framework cannot tell what reason is since

reasonableness is already presupposed for their very interpretation and acceptability.

Secondly, this kind of consideration reveals an antirelativist aspect, which anticipates

Davidson's criticism of conceptual schemes: we realized that rationality cannot simply be

relativized to a cultural framework since relativism itself is self-refuting. As we shall see,

this line of attack against relativism of rationality and understanding is elicited by

Davidson's objections to representationalism (see *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*,

1984, esp. "On the Very Idea of Conceptual Scheme", and "The Myth of the Subjective"

in *Relativism-Interpretation and Confrontations*, 1989). This will be the subject of the

next section.

4.22) ANTI-RELATIVIST CONNOTATIONS OF DAVIDSON'S CRITIQUE OF THE IDEA OF CONCEPTUAL SCHEME

This section is designed to take us to Davidson's criticism of the idea of

conceptual scheme as it bears on cross-cultural understanding. The main target of

Davidson's criticism is a conceptual relativism which precludes understanding between

different groups and cultures and which considers experience only within given

frameworks as ordered by means of specific and unique set of concepts. In consequence,

different peoples have radically different frames of mind and ultimately belong to

"different worlds" because the reality they live in is itself relative to contrasting

conceptual schemes. The notion of "conceptual scheme" is defined by Davidson as a

linguistic system of categories which provides grids on which to base beliefs and which

structures the data of sensation ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p 183).

Such a tenet recalls the Kantian distinction between what is given to the mind

through the senses and the intellectual forms used to reshape the perceptual content. However, the kind of conceptual relativism Davidson has in mind is more recent and is illustrated by Carnap's theory of *internal questions* and *external questions* which has been mentioned already in the previous chapter. We have noticed that it is also found in Quine's ontological relativity. Though they both deal with the way we talk about objects, their projected solutions follow divergent paths.

Davidson challenges a version of conceptual relativism which associates "having a language " with "having a conceptual scheme" on the basis of their co-related variation: "Where conceptual schemes differ, so do languages." ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 184). In this respect, he targets Carnap and Quine. In order to substantiate the notion of conceptual scheme I need make a digression and refer again to Carnap's theory of internal and external questions.

Carnap thinks (see "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology" in *Linguistic Turn,* 1967) that since the logical empiricist goal of reducing the theoretical vocabulary has proven unfeasible, the best we can expect is to prove that abstract terms can be partially defined on the basis of correspondence rules and to show that they could be included in a conceptual system which has "empirical significance". To decide whether claims containing enduring non-empirical terms are true or false, a scientific theory should provide ways of talking about them in two different idioms. One way is to raise *internal questions* by using the apparatus of a particular theory to address the problem of what there is. (For example, to ask "Is there a prime greater than 100?" is answerable by using the internal methods of elementary number theory). On this basis the solution can be shown to true or false and the question to be meaningful within the theoretical context.

By contrast, *external questions* ask about features of the theory without depending on its theoretical terms or principles, and it is tinged by a metaphysical ambition. (For example: "Are there numbers?"). Since such problems are external to any theoretical framework, there is no methodological procedure that would allow them to be decided and, so they are doomed to remain unanswerable and be ruled as senseless. The only meaningful external questions are ones referring to the pragmatic choice between different conceptual systems on the basis of criteria like simplicity or predictive power, or recommending the use of a linguistic framework given the purposes which are to be accomplished. Therefore, Carnap concludes, on the one hand, that ontological questions are answerable only within a particular theoretical scheme, and, on the other hand, that existence claims are relative to a choice of conceptual scheme. On his view, there are different types of schemes, for instance the material idiom - that is, talk of material objects like roses or stones as opposed to the theoretical vocabulary which involves talk of quarks, tahions, glueons, etc. In the end, he holds the conventionalist principle of tolerance: we should be tolerant rather than restrictive or eliminative with respect to the proliferation of the different theoretical framework with their ontological commitments. Once they are articulated we can discriminate and choose between them according to our needs or interests.

Carnap's elegant solution regarding the distinction between *internal questions* that make sense inside of a linguistic framework and which present the genuine problems of science, and *external questions* with regard to the philosophical aspect of theoretical choice, which are seen as pseudo-problems, has no appeal for Quine. Quine treats all questions as internal, making all philosophical matters collapse into naturalizing science;

translation of one theory into another hinges on the notion of overt behavior in observable circumstances. What counts as the same empirical evidence, i.e. stimulus meaning, would be consistent with different linguistic behavior and consequently, no ostensive act could distinguish between sets of ontological commitments. For Quine, reference is inscrutable precisely because there is nothing out there in the world to flesh out in the same ways conceptual schemes which differ one from each other, or, in other words, there is no fact of the matter to which the terms refer (see *Word and Object*, chap. 2). As I have analyzed this issue in relation to the impossibility of translation in the previous chapter, I will not develop it here again.

Davidson thinks that if such linguistic frameworks are to preclude any way of translating one language into another, as Quine agrees, then the problem is needlessly complicated, "for then we have to imagine the mind, with its ordinary categories, operating with a language with its organizing structure" ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p 184). The question is, how could one ever determine that a conceptual scheme is different from our own? Davidson's answer is that there is no meaningful way to find that a conceptual scheme embodied in one's home-language is different from the one embodied in languages spoken by other people, except when we consider a partial rather than a total failure of translation. In order to assure a basis for comparability" for conceptual schemes, their partial translability is a necessary condition to prove the difference between them. However, the complete failure of translation makes no sense for Davidson since it requires the impossibility of equating any significant range of sentences between languages. Since understanding cannot break down completely, and the radical failure of translation may be rejected as meaningless, Davidson remarks that

we may expect that in the process of interlinguistic mediation "some range of sentences could be translated and some range not" ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 185). He suggests that Quine can posit complete non-translability and backs up the radical claim of world-incommensurability only by ignoring the actual relationships between different languages. As a matter of fact all human languages can easily be shown to be partially translatable.[40] In addition, the very idea of a conceptual scheme, which is central to this kind of conceptual relativism cannot be clearly articulated. For this reason, Davidson concludes that the notion of conceptual scheme is empty and meaningless and must be given up. In consequence, in contrast with Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation, Davidson's strategy will focus on the possible if limited, linguistic interpretation. But, insofar as speech requires a culture-laden network of finely discriminated desires, beliefs and intentions, the inter-scheme translability involves an ability to describe attitudes and meanings.

At this junction the question that arises is whether translability can be a universal criterion of languagehood. Davidson imagines a situation in which a *Saturnian* language may be translatable into *English*, while another language, *Plutonian*, may be translatable into *Saturnian*, though it is totally resistant to translation into *English*. Therefore, since translability into a familiar language is not a transitive relation it cannot function as a universal criterion. In this case, the question is how could we recognize that the *Saturnian* was actually *translating* the *Plutonian* system of concepts which is so alien and idiosyncratic to us? We may listen to what the *Saturnian* speaker tells us about what he is allegedly doing, but "then it would occur to us to suspect whether our translations of Saturnian were correct" ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 186). Had translation been

totally impossible, we may justifiably wonder if the *Plutonians* have a language after all. For this reason, Davidson stresses that the dominant metaphor of incommensurable worlds seems to reveal an unintentional paradox. Points of view and conceptual schemes can be recognized as different only if there is a neutral "common coordinate system" or a universal criterion of languagehood "on which to plot them" ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 186). But Davidson concludes that these are not possible.

One may claim that had Descartes's pursuit of a neutral standpoint in his solitary voyage *beyond custom and example* been plausible, he would have been able to divest himself of his own cultural heritage, and from the vantage point of a value-free position he could have compared different conceptual schemes. Feyerabend assumes that there is still human experience independent or free of any cultural imprint and hence that we may compare contrasting schemes by "choosing a point of view outside the conceptual scheme or the language"(*Problems of Empiricism*, p. 214, after Davidson, "Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p.191).

Davidson regards this procedure as impossible. First, he argues that a "neutral common coordinate system" belies the claim of dramatic incommensurability. He contends that the idea of translation makes no sense apart from truth, and truth is truth only within a language. Second, he argues that conceptual schemes are identified with languages and therefore to divest oneself of all conceptual schemes would require the abandonment of the use of language. But one simply cannot give up language since it is necessary for thought and is inseparable from what we are. And yet, language is bound to a concept of truth that can be understood only within a linguistic framework. Since we cannot speak about absolute *T*ruth (with a capital *T*) as Descartes imagined, the notion of

truth does not make any sense for Davidson unless we are considering it within a language. Hence, if one gives up the use of language, one would never be able to compare conceptual schemes and thus see in what sense they differ one from each other. Moreover, the criteria of identity and individuation of a thing are an essential part of one's having the concept of that thing given in the linguistic network which covers the world. For instance, if two observers from Quine's "Gavagai-Rabbit" example cannot determine whether they see the same thing or two different things, i.e., if they do not have a concept about what appears to their eyes, there is no way of knowing what that thing is. Similarly, Davidson argues that if no criteria of individuation for conceptual schemes are available, then the very idea of conceptual scheme is rendered unintelligible and conceptual relativism collapses.

In this respect, Davidson refers to two somewhat different assumptions, one made by Kuhn, who states that scientists engaged at work within different worlds set up by rival paradigms are subjected to the breakdown of communication, the other made by Strawson, who imagines possible non-actual worlds very different from the one we know and that can be described by using our system of concepts only by changing the familiar pattern of distribution of truth values over sentences. And Davidson argues that since "there is at most *one world*, these pluralities are metaphorical or merely imagined" (*my emphasis*, "Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 187).

Ontological views are structured by conceptual schemes inherently tied to a specific language and treated as distinct from the corresponding things that flesh them out. A conceptual scheme is applied to systematize, organize, and divide up a given content and to face the tribunal of existent entities in terms of predictive power or fitness

with what counts as *the reality* on a wide range of interpretations from *passing show* of experience (sense-data, sensory promptings, surface irritations, etc) to *the world* (the universe or nature) ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", pp. 191-192). In consequence, were reality relative to a scheme, there would be as many realities as there are schemes, rather than the one reality that we commonly share. And yet, Davidson contends that such relativist conception which assume the plurality of worlds there have no way of selecting a single linguistic pattern because we never know which scheme covers or represents reality correctly. The point is that ontologic models competing each other are just mistaken "metaphors" because they emphasize the idea of structuring according to a conceptual scheme. Davidson contends that it is hard to make sense of the notion of organizing the world seen as a "*single object*", unless it is understood to be filled up like a closet where we keep our clothes in a specific order. Were one required to put order in a closet, one must rearrange the things in it. Be we would be bewildered by the question, "how would you organize the Pacific Ocean?". Davidson rhetorically responds, "straighten out its shores, perhaps or relocates its islands, or destroy its fish" ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 192). Obviously, it makes no sense to think that the stuff of the world as a whole can be treated like this, though this is precisely what conceptual schemes are claimed to do while structuring things. Analogously, the failure of translation is intelligible only when it refers to some local breakdown in the process of matching some range of extensional predicates, and presupposes a general comprehensive background of successful linguistic calibration is in place. Were we unable to translate at all, either because of cultural idiosyncrasy or linguistic indeterminacy, we simply could not make sense of there being a language. And Davidson concludes that the metaphor of

organizing the closet of nature will not supply a "criterion of languagehood that does not depend on, or entail the translability into a familiar idiom" ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p 192).

An even more obvious difficulty occurs when we shift from the metaphysical collection of world-imageries to the problem of experience. The question becomes "how could something be a language that organizes **only** experiences, sensations, surface irritations, or sense-data? And Davidson ironically added, "surely knives and forks, railroads and mountains, cabbages and kingdoms also need organizing" ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p.192). Undeniably, the idea of facing the tribunal of experience in terms of being true or false about facts expresses a different view on the nature of evidence. Though, Davidson argues that such empiricist expressions designed to bring about a merely perceived reality are as irrelevant as the rationalist concepts, since they add nothing to either test a conceptual scheme or render it more intelligible.

The dualism between conceptual scheme and empirical content, world-views and cues or, simply, theory and data is described, by Davidson as irremediably impregnated with the foundationalist thesis that we can "uniquely allocate empirical content sentence by sentence", and is utterly rejected as a dangerous *dogma of empiricism* ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 189, see also "The Myth of the Subjective", in *Relativism, Interpretation and Confrontation*, 1989, p 162). It is called *the third and, perhaps the last dogma*, and appears to him as the distinctive bastion left to empiricism. This dualism follows from the thesis that our knowledge of the world is mediated by such epistemological devices as "intuitions" or "raw feelings". Based on this distinction, one could imagine alternative ways in which various minds and cultures rework and organize

the neutral content which appears as the "uninterpreted given" or the "uncategorized" sensorial flow. The knowing subject is described as a spectator contemplating and recording the stimulating passing scenes in the show of the senses. What Davidson denies is precisely the idea that different schemes or languages constitute different patterns in which things given in experience are structured and may get an articulate understanding. He alludes to Quine's conception of radical translation, which remains in principle indeterminate despite the persistence of the same or observational evidence reducible to stimulus meanings, and which depends on the distinction between an organizing scheme and its matter understood as the stream of sensory impingements.[41] Since this dualism is neither intelligible nor defensible, Davidson suggests renouncing the puzzling notion of a conceptual scheme. Whereas Davidson contests the intelligibility of the idea of a conceptual scheme, he must find another modality to account for cultural difference and otherness. For this he designs a twofold strategy of understanding as a system of beliefs that points to an over-arching need for charity and that bears upon a methodology of interpretation and a theory of truth. The discussion of his solution will be my next topic.

4.23) CHARITY: INTERPRETATION OF BELIEFS AND "HOLDING TRUE SENTENCES"

In what follows, I will reconstruct Davidson's account of understanding other people as a bridge resting on two rational footholds which are supported by the ground provided by the charitable constraint to interpret people so as to find them to be *right in most matters* and *as holding true beliefs most of the time*. Davidson repeatedly emphasizes the importance of his project for building a theory of belief, meaning and

desires. But he also stresses the role played by the theory of truth in reattaching our sentences to the world and in preserving truth value in the process of translation over the linguistic divide. We can distinguish analytically between these two aspects, though they are intricately related in his argument. Davidson takes certain observable aspects of speech-behavior as evidence for the requirements of a decision theory (of choices and preferences) and of truth-convention applicable to natural languages, and this brings about a "unified theory of belief, meaning and desires". He says,

> The story I want to tell how radical interpretation is possible should be viewed as an informal proof that the evidence assumed available plus the constraints on the structure of the pattern of a person's beliefs, values and language, suffice to yield an interpretive theory for understanding that person" ("Reply to Fodor and Lepore, p. 84).

We shall se that the successful application of his twofold strategy of interpretation prove the thesis of a partial, rather than the total failure of translation.

1) Davidson derives from the meaning-holism a methodology which sorts out degrees of beliefs, strength of attitudes and desires and meaning of utterances. On this basis he provides an account of the complex ability to speak and understand a language. His theory of meaning describes more than just a translation scheme: the meaning of utterances consists in the shared beliefs, not schemes; and the meanings of the terms used in the speech acts are employed to communicate messages. For instance, when we hear one saying "Look at that handsome yawl!" as a ketch sails by, we may ask ourselves if one is using the word "yawl" to describe something different from what we usually understand by that concept. We may wonder if one is uttering the word "yawl" in the same sense as we do, but that one has the false belief that a yawl is sailing by ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 196).

Here Davidson provides an "underlying methodology of interpretation" which is based upon a charitable presupposition regarding belief systems. He assumes that since there is no neutral coordinate system, one can never be "in a position to judge that others had beliefs or concepts radically different from our own" ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 197), as well as one can never reach the absolute Truth (with a capital T).

The lingering question Davidson cannot dismiss is how, without referring to conceptual schemes, we can ever determine that an anthropologist's view is different from the one shared by a native. In the case of radical translation understanding is doomed to complete failure. On Quine's perspective, for example, we acknowledge that other people have conceptual schemes different from ours if we fail to translate their linguistic expression into our own. We noticed that the non-translability of the word "Gavagai" into "Rabbit" is due to the impossibility of calibration between the contrasting ways in which the two speakers organize their perceptions within their different conceptual schemes. Nonetheless, Davidson calls into question the adequacy of Quine's thesis of indeterminacy of translation and argues that the weaker case of a mere partial failure of interpretation is more appropriate and more likely to occur between languages.

To clear the way for a purely extensional language Quine barred the use in science of sentences referring to wishes, feelings, emotions and thoughts. Davidson's holistic account of interpretation starts from the elaboration of themes found in Quine's work, but is not afraid to take up the issue of intentionality on the road "of darkness" excluded by Quine in the "Double Standard". Davidson attempts to get at the meaning of the source-language not by pairing *single assent or dissent sentences* to sensory promptings, as Quine does; instead he counts on what a speaker *holds true* on the basis of the available

evidence provided by the *interrelation between meaning and belief* (see "Belief and the Basis of Meaning", p 146).

In "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" Davidson transposes the interdependency of beliefs and meaning onto a causal ground. He says, "What a sentence means depends partly on the external circumstances that cause it to win some degree of conviction; and partly on the relations, grammatical, logical or less, that the sentence has to other sentences held true with various degrees of conviction" ("A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", in *Truth and Interpretation*, 1986, p 314). He agrees with Putnam that "meanings ain't in the head", in the sense that they are not determined only by conceptual or linguistic factors but also depends on the natural history of thoughts that explains how the words were acquired. Davidson further considers it a mistake simply to identify mental states like beliefs, desires, intentions or meanings with external things and happenings. On his view, a belief is but a state of a person causally connected with the evidence out-there and as interpreters we are compelled to suppose that the others' beliefs are similarly determined as ours. This leads to a relative overlapping of states of mind between different individuals and supplies the intersubjective premise for their reaching agreement. Davidson points out that "your utterance means what mine does if belief in its truth is systematically caused by the same events and objects" ("A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 318). In order to understand others' verbal responses, the radical interpreter must apply a charitable procedure which imposes the constraint of belief-attribution to speakers of a source-language in a way that maximizes, or optimizes rational agreement (see "Truth an Meaning", p. 27, "Radical Interpretation", p.134, "Thought and Talk", p 169, "Idea of Conceptual Scheme", pp. 196-197).

Linguistic communication mediated by translation may be successful on two grounds: first, when the set of sentences held true in the source-language is also held true in the target-language, and second, when there is a common ontological ground for the criteria of differentiation and individuation of things. Davidson addresses the first issue but pays little or no attention to the latter. However, to strengthen his claim, he must explain how I could know that the beliefs I hold true are, in fact, true. As Davidson is not primarily concerned with empirical support, he thinks that the evidence for a belief comes from its coherence with the system of beliefs to which it belongs. Therefore, from a coherentist perspective, he may say that our beliefs are in general compatible with the holistic pattern we share. Since they fulfill the condition of being supported by numerous other beliefs and there is a presumption in favor of their truth, the nature of beliefs consists of being *truthful most of the time*. As he puts it, "the presumption increases the larger and more significant the body of beliefs with which a belief coheres..." ("A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 319).

2) The foregoing considerations lead us to the second foothold of Davidson's concept of understanding which is bound to the principle of charity. In this respect, Davidson adopts a modified version of Tarski's theory of truth which, in order to be used in the interpretation of actual speakers' utterances, is rendered applicable to natural languages. In fact, what speakers hold true brings about their beliefs which are conveyed by the meanings of their sentences. One may be interested in how it is epistemically possible to speak in true sentences or theories about the infinity of the universe, or to say that a way of life takes a certain course or simply that I feel cold drops of rain on my forehead. Notwithstanding, Davidson precludes any reference to conceptual schemes that

structure the world, facts, or any piece of evidence. He thinks that no thing can make our theories or sentences true. All we need instead is to make use of Tarski's "*Convention T*" which stipulates a condition of adequacy for formalized languages and suggests, according to Davidson, "an important feature common to all the specialized concepts of truth" ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 194-5). Hence we are urged to consider its extended application to natural languages and to connect truth with fairly simple attitudes of speakers and on this basis to extract an account of translation and interpretation ("Radical Interpretation", p. 134). An example of this sort is the sentence "*My forehead is cold*" is true if and only if my forehead is cold. Or, in Tarski's own terms,

(1) "'*Snow is white*' is true if and only if snow is white."

This sentence is recognized as trivially true and therefore there is no need for recourse to facts or material evidence. On this view, the totality of sentences like (1) uniquely determines the extension of the concept of truth for English.

Thus, Tarski generalized this condition and made of Convention T a formal test for theories of truth. Hence a satisfactory theory of truth for a language L must entail, for every sentence s of L, a theorem of the form "s is true if and only if p", where "s" is replaceable by descriptions of s, and "p" by S itself if L is English, and by a translation of S into English, if L is not English but, let's say, Romanian. For instance the sentence:

(2) "'*Zapada este alba*' is true if and only if snow is white."

Consequently, a truth theory is extensionally adequate if and only if all T-sentences like this one it entails are true.

Davidson supposes that the evidence available is that speakers of the language to be interpreted *hold various sentences to be true* at certain times and under specific

circumstances ("Radical Interpretation", p. 135). On the one hand, the

T-sentences become:

(T) "'*Ninge*' is true-in-Romanian when spoken by x at time t if and only if it is snowing

near x at t."

On the other hand, the evidence is given in the form:

(E) Vasile belongs to the Romanian speech community and Vasile holds true '*Ninge*' on

Sunday morning at 9 o'clock and it is snowing near Vasile on Sunday morning at 9

o'clock".

The appeal to the membership to a speech community suggests that the same theories of

interpretation work for all speakers of the same language.

In general, a (finite) theory T is a truth theory for language L if and only if, for

each sentence E of L, T entails a T-sentence of the form:

(3) "E is true-in-L if and only P"

Therefore a theory T is extensionally and implicitly materially adequate if the condition

that P translates E is fulfilled.[42]

On this point Fodor and Lepore (*Holism-A Shopper's Guide*, 1992, Chap. 3)

noticed a serious shortcoming. Their objection is that we can contrive cases of

extensional adequacy by pairing each sentence in L with any materially equivalent

sentence regardless of what it means. For example, a truth theory for English may entail

T sentence of the form *(W)*:

(W) "'*Snow is white*' is true in English if and only if grass is green."

To do justice to Davidson we must recognize that in "Radical Interpretation" (p.

138) he shows himself to be aware of such possibilities when he thinks of rephrasing

Convention T without appeal to the concept of translation.[43] He also agrees that a theory

of truth is still acceptable if it entails, for every sentence *s* of the object language, a

sentence of the form: "*s* is true if and only if *p*", where "*p*" is replaced by *any* sentence

that is true if and only if *s* is ("Radical Interpretation", p 134). Hence he gives up the

requirement that what replaces *p* must translate *s*. In consequence one may also say for

instance "'*Snow is white*' is true in English if and only if "*2+2=4*", or else. Nonetheless,

Davidson is confident that a satisfactory theory of truth will not produce such anomalous

T-sentences, though they are possible ("Radical Interpretation", p 138). He demands that

the criteria of success for a meaning theory be defined in terms of its adequacy

conditions. This implies that a "radical interpreter" with no prior knowledge of *L* must be

plausibly able to identify the adequacy of a meaning theory for *L*. The interdependence of

belief and meaning is assumed by Davidson in this way: "a speaker holds a sentence to be

true because of what the sentence (in his language) means, and because of what he

believes" ("Radical Interpretation", p 134). Such an interpreter should rely on evidence

that does not assume knowledge of meaning or beliefs and can *a fortiori* confuse an

"elephant in the refrigerator" as an orange, a yawl with a ketch, etc.). But this mistaken

pattern would be possible only if one takes *T-sentences* to be interpreted in isolation and

not in the holistic constraint elicited by appropriate formal and empirical restrictions,

such as the consistency of a theory as a whole and all the proofs which apply to the

particular T-sentence and to all other sentences. Then one would be able to see the place

of sentences within the language as a whole in order to understand the role of each

significant part of the sentence and to know about the logical connections between the

sentence at stake and others. If the holistic constraint is adequate, Davidson assumes that

"each T-sentence will in fact yield an acceptable interpretation ("Radical Interpretation", p. 139).

Henceforth, Davidson purports, first, to reach the world via truth functions, and, secondly recommends the charity principle as the way to build a bridging understanding between people. In the case of people from the same speech community, it is more obvious that the same interpretations are meaningful to them. When they speak different languages the problems of translation complicate the conditions of agreement on meanings. Davidson wants a theory that satisfies the formal constraints of a theory of truth, and that *maximizes or optimizes agreement* in the sense of construing individuals as *holding true and right beliefs* "as far as we can tell, as often as possible" ("Radical Interpretation", p. 136). However, Davidson's advice is to avoid the claim that agreement would bear upon a kind of intelligence that might turn out to be nothing else than a false supposition. We should be aware that to consider that understanding rests on the charitable assumption of a human intrinsic rationality is to be taken at our peril. The only way to interpret the utterances and other behavioral aspects of an alien being as rational, for instance, as having thoughts and commitments or as being capable of communicating by saying something, is to reveal a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our standards. The method is to solve the interdependence of beliefs and meaning by holding belief constant as far as possible and assigning truth conditions to sentences of the alien language that makes native speakers seem rational according to our own standards whenever possible. Davidson defends this procedure by saying that "disagreement and agreement alike are intelligible only against a background of massive agreement" ("Radical Interpretation", p. 137). When this principle is applied to language and to

understanding native speech acts (whether or not through an interpretive inter-mediation), "the more sentences we conspire to accept or reject (...), the better we understand the rest, whether or not we agree upon them" ("Radical Interpretation", p. 137).

One may wonder how Davidson could reject Quine's recommendation to eliminate the words referring to beliefs, intentions and desires whenever possible? Davidson somewhat ironically makes the point that there is nothing to gain from the repudiation of the idiom of "propositional attitudes". He imagines the authority of a "Minister of Scientific Language" who demands that "the new man" talk only in behavioral terms of "physiological states and happenings that are assumed to be more or less identical with the mental riff and raff". The question is how could one tell if this is a new language or the shiny new phrases about "physiological stirrings" presumably borrowed from the old repudiated vocabulary may still "play the role of the messy" mentalist concepts? The retention of old expressions undermines the basis of the judgement that the new scheme is the same as, or different from the old one.

Finally, against Quine's advice, Davidson sends his radical interpreter to venture into the "darkness" of the propositional attitude to capture the nature of meaning and beliefs. Thus, he finds ill-suited the quasi-behaviorist notion of *stimulus-meaning*, and considers that understanding must be bound by the quasi-mentalist idea of *holding a sentence true* (see "Idea of Conceptual Scheme", pp. 188-189, "Radical Interpretation", p. 235). Insofar as he claims that a correct interpretation of one's speech *must be possible in principle* and *must remain publicly accessible*, he insinuates that a kind of Cartesian Vision has infiltrated Quine's view.

Davidson concludes that what has been presented by conceptual relativism as a

new discovery, namely that truth is dependent upon the conceptual scheme, "has not been shown to be anything more than the pedestrian and familiar fact that the *truth of a sentence is relative to* (amongst other things) *the language* to which it belongs" (*my emphasis*). We may generalize his conclusion saying that Kuhn's scientific practitioners divided by paradigms, as well as natives and Winchian social scientists or Quinean lexicographers "instead of living in different worlds... may, like those who need Webster's dictionary, be only words apart" ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 189). Therefore, from the vantage point of a "representation-free conception of interpretation" Davidson forces the conclusion that the relativist gallery of world-pictures, differently systematized and structured by conceptual frames imposed upon them, is unintelligible. To make sense of the notion of *difference* or *sameness*, his radical interpreter must step into the only picture everyone can afford - that is, the *world* (with small *w*) and this is *as objective as can be*. Of course, this is not the ultimate *R*eality or the Absolute *T*ruth, the great Landscape contemplated by Descartes's God. The consolation is that this is all we can get. The radical interpreter's *own* language is the only home-language. As Putnam observed, it is "*one* language in which he gives the truth conditions for *every* sentence in *every* language he claims to be able to understand" ("Truth and Convention", in *Relativism, Interpretation and Confrontation*, 1989, p. 180).[44]

4.24) THE VALUE AND LIMITS OF DAVIDSONIAN CHARITY

At this point, I must conclude this discussion by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the Davidsonian principle of charity. It was my strategy to present his way of understanding other people as a bridge resting on two main foundations which are supported by the ground provided by the principle of charity: the first foundation is

represented by a theory of truth and the second by a theory of belief and meaning. On this basis, Davidson finds support for the thesis of a partial, rather than the total failure of translation. Hence, on the one hand, Davidson insists that if we want to understand others we must interpret people so as to find them right in most matters and take most of their beliefs to be *correct*. Although, admittedly, speakers may be at times mistaken (in fact, logically, *p* is *true* only if *p* can be *true or false*), they hold true sentences most of the time and the inferences they draw must be mainly the right or normatively appropriate ones ("Thought and Talk", p. 168). The general policy "to choose truth conditions that do as well as possible in making speakers hold sentences true when (according to the theory and the theory builder's view of the facts) those sentences are true." ("Belief and the Basis of Meaning", p. 152) Davidson describes truth as relative to a language, and yet this is all objectivity we can reasonably hope for. Attributions of beliefs are intersubjectively verifiable as public interpretations of the same kind of evidence available. The social theory of interpretation is rendered possible by intersubjectively weaving a plurality of private belief structures into a social factory of belief-network which is built "to take up the slack between sentences held true by individuals and sentences true (or false) by public standards" ("Belief and the Basis of Meaning", p.153). In conclusion, charity is not an option, but a condition to have a workable theory and to construe a partial translation bridge for interlinguistic communication ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 197).

On the other hand, the understanding of behavioral attitudes requires that we interpret people's beliefs as being preponderantly rational ("Thought and Talk", p. 159) as a preconditions for assigning a reasonable "intentional content" to one's utterances and to

the mental states they presumably express. From this perspective, charity (molded by the idea of rationality) is aimed at solving the problem of the interdependence of belief and meaning. It holds beliefs constant as far as possible and explains the coherence of a pattern of beliefs by requiring that the action to be explained must be considered reasonable in the light of the assigned desires or beliefs which also must cohere with each other.[45] The beliefs and desires that explain an action must be such that anyone who shares that belief and desire will have reason to act in that way rather than in another ("Radical Interpretation", p 137, "Thought and Talk", p. 159).

Davidson suggests repeatedly that successful understanding depends upon the appropriate use of the principle of charity. This is, after all, an exercise that one cannot avoid if one is to understand a speaker of an alien language. It consists first, in reading "some of the norms of the interpreter into the actions and speech of those he interprets" (Reply to Fodor and Lepore, p. 80), and second, in supposing that on the basis of coherence or holistic adequacy of beliefs most of the held beliefs must be generally true.

However, Davidson is fully aware that "no simple theory can put a speaker and interpreter in perfect agreement, and so a workable theory must from time to time assume error on the part of one or the other" ("Thought and Talk", p 169). In order to understand native utterances, the radical interpreter has to presume each of them to be true. Here arises the need for charity, which directs revision of each succeeding sentence toward maximizing agreement in conversation with the informant. This requires an ethnographer, for instance, to justify the native speakers' holding true beliefs most of the time. But, provided that we are willing to continue making adjustments of the interpretive theory, the question Davidson must face is this: if we are bound by the

methodological constraint to maximize agreement, at what point does this imply the need

to maximize the rationality attributed to other? The problem of deciding what establishes

the limit for charitable understanding, that is, when to attribute error or irrationality and

beyond what point is it fair to cease doing that, becomes a dramatically important one.

Undeniably, it would be implausible to carry charity all the way, up to the complete

elimination of attribution of error or irrationality. The foregoing considerations suggest

the necessity of setting some *reasonable* limits to the ascription of *reasonableness"*.

Otherwise, whenever we observe mistakes in the speech of our informant we take them as

inadequacies of our own interpretation and we will be ready, in frustration and

humiliation, to make corrections and refinement without limit in our interpretive scheme.

As Henderson also claims "any one set of attributions of inconsistency and rationality

can be dispensed with by making sufficiently special adjustments in the interpretive

scheme that lead to the attribution (*Interpretation and Explanation*, p 35). Therefore,

after all, we must acknowledge the risk of idealizing our subjects by ascribing to them a

perfect rationality. It has been noticed that on Davidson's view, the interpreter who aims

to understand why an agent chose to act in a specific way must suppose that the agent is a

reasonable person and this may involve an artificial and inaccurate rationalization of

thoughts and beliefs attributed to him. Root and other commentators claim a twin

justification for doing so. Interpretation is guided by the norms and principles of a

charitable rationality and minds must be seen as rational for the most part, "because *we*

cannot but understand them so" ("Davidson and the Social Sciences" in *Truth and*

Interpretation, 1986, pp. 227-8). The idea of an intrinsic rationality of the mind would

push Davidson to a position stronger than he actually defends when he responds to his

critics, and closer to neo-rationalist perspective on charity as *transcendental argument*.
As we shall see next, Martin Hollis subscribes to such an assumption in terms of
substantive rationality, which is admittedly a replica of the Cartesian autonomous reason.
In consequence, he builds up a cross-culturally bridging understanding in terms of
rational bridgeheads that guide the interpretation into the maze of native language and
anchors the translation. However, when Davidson turns to this issue, he explicitly
precludes the interpretation of the principle of charity as having a transcendental status (a
view imputed to him by Fodor and Lepore in "Is Radical Interpretation Possible?"). He
contends that he never claimed "that radical interpretability is a condition of
interpretability" or "that every language is radically interpretable". He argued only that
radical interpretation *is possible*, not that it *must be possible.* This implies that a radical
interpreter is in the "epistemic position" that merely "arguably provides the sufficient
evidence for interpretation" and therefore does not exhaust the evidence available (Reply
to J. Fodor and E. Lepore, pp. 77-8). Therefore, the prerequisite of Davidsonian charity
can be seen as a transcendental constraint upon understanding others only if it is unfairly
pushed toward neo-rationalist perspective, a step he is reluctant to make.

And yet, Davidson faces a more serious objection. Given the central position held
by the principle of charity in Davidson's methodology of interpretation, it requires a more
clear articulation. Otherwise, its meaning remains too ambiguous to justify its ambition
to reconstruct the rationality of speakers. For now, let us just notice that Davidson still
owes a conceptual reconciliation of *charity* (most beliefs are not mistaken, but true) and a
formal condition of a theory (Tarski's *T-convention*). Until he provides the "missing link"
between the two footholds of his methodology of interpretation, the idea of a charitable

rationality underlying his anti-relativist program, remains just a desirable conceptual alternative to a Cartesian neutral ground of Reason or to a metaphysical "*common coordinate system*".

These problems encountered by Davidson's view of charity with its two main facets, interpretation and holding truth regarding beliefs, justifies skepticism regarding the promise of charity for bridging between different cultures. A thinker of Humean persuasion would surely urge Davidson to show why it is not more likely to believe that we are allegedly mistaken most of the time. On this view, the question is what warrants the arguable claim that "holding true sentences" is inherent to the nature of the mind? Moreover, on what basis could one assume that other people are more or less remote replicas of one's own pattern of thought? The point is that when we try to understand foreign utterances and actions we should not impose constraints which are simply rooted in our own biases and prejudices. And charity is no exception, unless it is justified by a *transcendental argument*, a step Davidson is not ready to accept. If he would go this far, he would still need to provide the argument. Insofar as there is no binding reason (as Descartes's divine warrant against the evil genius) to exclude, for instance, the assumption that beliefs are massively mistaken, instead of being true, the skeptic must be taken seriously. Since we cannot rely on God's benevolence, we have turn to ourselves and make our attempts at understanding as believable as we can. And if we are to be trusted as genuinely looking for truth, the moral is that all hypotheses *must be open in principle* to discussion.

In sum, the limits of the principle of charity point to the need for a kind of philosophical commitment that Quine and Davidson are not willing to make. A stronger

version of charity might be particularly inviting at this juncture; nevertheless, this does not eliminate the difficulty since it lacks the appropriate conceptual support needed for its defense. As we shall see in the next chapter, a move in this direction is made by Martin Hollis who expressly aims to restore the prerogatives of the Cartesian Reason and provide a "mental universal language" by using his transcultural concept of "bridgehead". His universalist ground of rational beliefs anchors the possibility of interpretation of native language and offers guidance through unknown cultural landscapes.

Chapter 5)   *MARTIN HOLLIS:*

THE RATIONAL *BRIDGEHEADS* OF UNDERSTANDING

Davidson's principle of charity is stronger than Quine's, but it remains an empirical condition for understanding others. To overcome this weak aspect of charity one might step back to Descartes. This chapter will take this direction by discussing Martin Hollis's strong claim regarding the substantive notion of reason. First I will make a brief exposition of his treatment of possibility of understanding across cultures (including some anthropological references). Second, I will assess the strength of his position that makes a transcendental turn and I will make clear the corresponding implications for the argument of this dissertation. In particular, it will become obvious, I hope, why we need to search further in the pursuit of our goal, why it make sense to turn to Habermas. In the last section I will show where I stand in the argument by saying what I conclude from the earlier chapters and what I hope to get from Habermas.

5.1) REASON AND UNIVERSAL UNDERSTANDING

My goal here is to present Hollis's substantive concept of rationality relative to some innate intellectual faculties universally shared by humans and scrutinize how he justifies his unusually strong concept of understanding. His explicit aim is the restoration of autonomous and self-sustaining Reason in a traditional fashion, which calls to mind Descartes's attempt to go beyond "custom and example". In the same manner, Hollis argues that "cultural imagery" is not enough to provide knowledge and, in consequence, he urges the abandonment of the relativist commitments lately developed in the sociology of knowledge. In particular, he targets the so called "*strong programmes*", which are intended to deprive the Cartesian Reason of its traditional prerogatives as the

"portmanteau for the rules of proof, which aid the mind in securing *a priori* knowledge, and for the canons of empirical evidence, used in judging the truth and beliefs against the facts of the independent world" (Social Destruction of Reality, in *Rationality and Relativism*", 1982, p. 68). Winch's relativism of understanding is a possible target of Hollis's accusation of being a "lethal dry rot" allegedly resulting in "the social destruction of reality" (see Social Destruction of Reality").

Hollis wants to give an account of the mental life of social actors and to understand their actions in a way which turns on the concept of rationality. In this respect he prefers to support a stronger position regarding understanding than Davidson's view of interpretation centered on the notion of charity. We remember that Davidson assumes that the interpreter who aims to understand an agent must apply the constraint of charity by rationalizing the thoughts and beliefs attributed to an agent and by treating his action as reasonable in order to explain why he chose to act as he did. By contrast, Hollis's idea of human understanding recalls a Kantian conception of the mind, and may be illustrated by a metaphor suggested by Kuhn in a different context ("Social Destruction of Reality", p. 112). People may wear different spectacles at different times and places just as cultures may vary in their ways of categorizing experience, but we must first have eyes without which we could never see; that is simply to say that human reason is necessary and universal. Thus, Hollis is close to Root and other thinkers who claim that the norms and principles of interpretation in general are norms of rationality. On this view, minds must be seen as rational for the most part, "Because **we cannot but understand them so**" ("Davidson and the Social Sciences", in *Truth and Interpretations*, 1986, p. 227-228). In similar way, Hollis contends that all understanding is based upon "rationality

assumptions" about some set of beliefs universally shared by all people irrespective to their peculiar cultural or linguistic framework. Hence he uses a strong notion of reason which is transculturally valid and described as an integral part of the notion of a "bridgehead", which refers to a set of rational beliefs which are universal among mankind and can be specified a priori. From this perspective, charity appears as a sort of transcendental argument that suggests what Michael Root calls the "principle of humanity". This implies that if understanding is to be possible, there has to be (and Hollis uses Strawson's phrase) "a massive central core of human thinking which has no history". Hence he postulates that there must be culture free "bridgeheads", which are "percepts and concepts shared by all who can understand each other, together with judgements which all subscribe to." ("Social Destruction of Reality", p 75).

Admittedly, Hollis supports the idea of transculturally valid judgement based upon a concept of reason inspired by Descartes. His goal, at variance with Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation, is to revive the modern idea of a universal language of the mind. Hollis finds the idea of intersubjectivity urged by Davidson for the success of radical interpretation as being too weak to sustain a valid process of cross-cultural understanding.[46] In this respect, he deems it necessary to continue the Cartesian ideal of Cartesian inspiration and quotes from Vico:

> There must be in the nature of human institutions a mental language common to all nations, which uniformly grasps the substance of things feasible in human social life and expresses it with as many diverse modifications as these same things may have diverse aspects ("Social Destruction of Reality", p. 86).

Hollis claims that the idea of bridgehead refers to universal rational beliefs that function as anchors in the development and refinement of the translation scheme and provide guidelines for the interpreter entering the "maze" of a native language. On these

premises, an anthropologist may suppose that he shares with his subject the same

"bridgeheads" and thus he can understand them in a way consistent with the requirement

of the principle of charity. He may be willing to regard the natives' sentences about the

surrounding environment as rational and true in the most part. Nonetheless, if the speaker

keeps quiet and refuses to make any statements "about the cat on the mat and the caw in

the corn which can be translated to yield truth, the anthropologist has no way into the

maze." ("Reason and Ritual", in *Rationality*, 1970, p 34). If there is no possible

conversation, charity would be of a little help to negotiate meanings or to make sense of a

linguistic behavior. Then the only way to learn what is happening in the mind of the

subjects would be for the field researcher to find introspectively those universally held

beliefs which can help him to set a translation scheme independent of dialog. Of, course,

Hollis admits that it would be an exaggeration to assume that all commonly held beliefs

can be a reasonable or relevant basis for translation. But those which do express the

holder's understanding of reality are "the enquirer's road into unknown territory" ("Social

Destruction of Reality", p. 76, also "Reason and Ritual", p. 222).

The anthropologist should focus his charitable treatment on the informant's

utterances, "whose situations of use" can be specified by determining some external

determinants of beliefs such as sense stimulations which prompt assent or dissent.

Further Hollis presupposes that on the basis of evidence provided in such simple

perceptual situations the anthropologist can expect that the informant is likely to hold

consistent beliefs. He says,

> Formally speaking, to know on evidence e that S believes p involves knowing
> that, on evidence e, it is more likely that S believes p than S believes anything
> inconsistent with p, and that e can be relied on. This requires fixed rules for
> judging between rival interpretations and, if e depends in turn on e', requires e' (or

whatever e' depends on) be secure too (Social Destruction of Reality, p. 73).

Therefore understanding native beliefs is made possible by the "fixed rules" of deductive rationality which are expressed by bridgeheads in combination with a reliable perceptual evidence described by observational sentences. The two aspects are mentioned by Hollis in a way which would vindicate Quine's idea of translation as referring to the empirical basis of sensory impingements and the cross-cultural validity of logic. In this respect, Hollis assumes that the judgement of likelihood rests, first, upon empirical evidence consisting in the available bundles of "stimulus meanings", which must be reliable and common for both the anthropologist and the natives. It rests also upon the norms of rationality which are equally binding for all human minds. Hence the anthropologist judging the probability of rival hypotheses may logically infer the conclusion they ought to believe *p* and to reject *non-p*.

Consequently, the anthropologist must begin constructing a translation scheme by focusing on the relation between the world and interpretations of particular utterances in the source-language which are more reasonable in the light of his own experience. For Hollis, charity makes the working of one's mind generalizable to others. He states this in the so called *reflexivity thesis* according to which one can develop a sense of the thoughts of others by introspecting his own mental structures and contents. This thesis implicitly refers to underlying universals such as the rational principles which guide the belief formation of natives because they are basically similar to those that guide the ethnographer. The common codification of thought guarantees that the social scientist will be able to identify the norms of rationality shared by his informant, just because they are the same as his. Henceforth, he should be able to make interpretations of the native's

overt behavior in a way which would prevent the likelihood of conflict with later interpretations. According to Hollis, "this set consists of what a rational man cannot fail to believe in simple perceptual situation, organized by rules of coherent judgement, which a rational man cannot fail to subscribe to" ("Social Destruction of Reality", p. 74). Therefore interpretation is guided by *rationality assumptions* which rest on a bridgehead and can be eventually modified or refined if their change would not violate or "sabotage" the bridgehead.

In the light of Hollis's strong claims about the rational nature of humanity, Davidson appears needlessly cautious and too modest. Davidson admits there are cases when the understanding between speakers of different languages breaks down, that is, especially when one language contains "simple predicates" whose extensions are matched by "non-simple predicates" or by "no-predicates" at all in other languages. However, he admits that a partial translation is possible and this brings about a common ontology for the both languages provided that we have a previous recognition of the criteria of identity and individuation needed to identify objects and their relations of similarity and difference ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 192). In consequence, given a common basis for linguistic comparability, we are able to map sentences from different languages. In addition, we can realize how systems of beliefs contrast with each other or are similar, and to what extent meanings of different utterances correspond in the process of cross-linguistic communication.

According to Hollis's neo-rationalist perspective, the notion of bridgehead provides the culture-free framework for a translation scheme. He says, "[t]he force of calling a set of utterances a bridgehead is that it serves to define the standard meaning of

native terms and so to make it possible to understand utterances used in more ambiguous situations" ("The Limits of Irrationality", in *Rationality*, 1970, p. 215). Therefore, an anthropologist must discern the relations among everyday beliefs including those that determine if the natives share and honor our notion of inferential validity (deduction and induction), logical consistency, coherence, and the broader notion of "having a good reason for a belief".

There seem to be two distinct concerns here: on the one side, scientists are hold accountable to the norms of rationality which guide the research activity of interpreting another culture; on the other side, there are local standards of rationality that are immersed in the different ways of life being interpreted and consist in the practical guidelines by which people live in their cultural setting. The first is a problem of social science, the latter is primarily a matter of a style of living. In this respect, Hollis (also Steven Lukes) agrees with Root who maintains that minds are intrinsically rational and that the criteria of rationality must be universal in order to yield understanding: "The objects that an interpretive theory describes are objects that are held accountable to the very norms to which the theory's descriptions are held accountable" ("Davidson and Social Science", p. 281). If this is true, then how could we explain the strange case of deductive irrationality revealed by Evans Pritchard's discovery of the Zande belief in witchcraft? We remember that Winch used this example to prove the contextual character of irrationality and to illustrate the methodological mistake of applying the rules of our logic to natives who persist in disregarding these rules. The situation is as follows. The Azande were convinced that all witches carried in their bellies a small blackish substance. If someone had been accused of witchcraft and subsequently killed, the family

of the victim could perform an autopsy to determine whether the justice has been served properly. Had a blackish substance been discovered in the intestines of the deceased during the autopsy, that meant that the man deserved to die. However if no "witchcraft substance" was found that was a proof that the man was unjustly executed but he and his family would be vindicated. Although the vindication was no consolation for him, it was nevertheless very important for his family because the Azande also held that the witchcraft substance was inherited from fathers to sons and from mothers to daughters. Evans Pritchard notices that the inheritance of witchcraft substance would determine that even a single positive result necessarily implicates the whole same-sex ancestral line. Or there were many autopsies proving that every Azande would have either on the father line or the mother-line one who was a witch. The logical conclusion is that all Azande are witches. But the Azande vehemently deny that even when Evans-Pritchard showed them the sense of the argument and made them understand that if they do not accept the obvious conclusion and yet maintain the inheritance of witchcraft, then they will be led to a contradiction (see *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*, pp. 21-24, 42-44).

The neo-rationalist would first check the translation, but if he discovers no mistakes in pairing the sentences of the two languages, then charity is of no help and he has no choice but to regard examples like the one described above as a case of genuine irrationality. In order to preclude the serious accusation of holding contradictory and thus false beliefs, he might have supposed in the early stages of his interpretive attempts that the natives share another kind of logic or patterns of belief-coherence previously unknown to us. However, the neo-rationalist *thesis of reflexivity* presupposes an identity between the criteria of rationality shared by anthropologist and the natives. In particular

Hollis's procedure (partly endorsed by Lukes) would presumably be to evaluate actors' beliefs on the a priori basis of "the bridgehead of true rational beliefs" to which should provide for universal agreement. Hence, a successful translation and interpretation of beliefs must presuppose "what a rational man" cannot fail to believe in simple perceptual situations, organized by "rules of coherent judgement" to which a "rational man" cannot fail to subscribe. He thinks that there are context-free "tests" for whether a belief is objectively rational and that there is a "minimum score" which all beliefs must attain and a "maximum score" which "good reasons" must meet. Consequently, subjective rational beliefs may not satisfy those criteria and irrational beliefs must fail. When the interpretation reaches the limit of intelligibility the anthropologist has to apply the label of irrationality.

Hollis is convinced that application of his version of the *principle of charity* should be enough to determine everyday life meanings used by natives in their ordinary language and so to make possible communication with them on the basis of a set of rough equivalences which supply a necessary common ground upon which all subsequent translation schemes depend.[47] On this view, we construct translations between different cultures by focusing our attention on the relations between the world and a particular set of reasonable utterances. The anthropologist should begin with the set of single assent/dissent sentences "whose situations of use" can be specified relative to some external "determinant" of beliefs like elementary pieces of speech behavior. But this is not the whole story. The understanding of the Azande's irrational resistance in accepting the obvious logical conclusion could bridge our culture and theirs only if we can tell if source-language speakers observe the rules of deductive validity and identify the reasons

they might have for insulating their contradictory belief in witchcraft.

In conclusion, Hollis recommends that a field anthropologist work toward understanding why alien people act and think as they do by following two kinds of determinations of their behavior. One is external, consisting of a material determination of beliefs like evidence or "the world"; the other is internal and consists in logical demands regarding the relations among beliefs like coherence and consistency. In this respect, the epistemic situation of the actual interpreter is described in terms of the likelihood of accepting correct beliefs that are the bridgeheads of rationality. Thus, to know on the evidence e that the subject *S truly* believes the proposition *p*, "involves knowing that, on evidence *e*, it is more likely that *S* believes *p* than *S* believes anything inconsistent with *p*, and that *e* can be relied on" ("Social Destruction of Reality", p 73). Henceforth, understanding people from an alien culture *must be possible* on the basis of what a *rational person* cannot fail to believe in a simple perceptual situation, organized by the universal rules of coherent judgement, which one cannot disregard and still count as rational. We have noted that Hollis consider that *bridgeheads* are just postulated like axioms invested with a kind of intrinsic credibility. They must be taken for granted and thereof are not a matter to be discovered.

In the next section will test if Hollis's transcendentalist convictions hold in the light of criticism which tries to reveal some weaknesses of his strong notion of "bridgehead".

5.2) CONCLUDING REMARKS: IS REASON A UNIVERSAL BRIDGEHEAD?

Hollis's claim that reason is a universal bridgehead shared by all cultures has been subjected to scrutiny by friends and foes alike. Sympathetic critics like Steven Lukes

accept the substantive foundations of rationality with minor modifications. Lukes shares with Hollis this characterization of the bridgehead, but unlike Hollis, he uses the term in a more empirical way and distinguishes between two different senses of rationality. The one is universal and transcultural, and is minimally defined as having criteria of truth (as correspondence with reality) and logic, which are simply criteria of rationality. The other is context dependent and varies from culture to culture. So, unlike Hollis, Lukes thinks that only the idea that there must be a common core of agreement is *a priori*, but the question of the contents of the bridgehead is an empirical one. This is because the issue of the contents of the bridgehead can be reduced to the problem of how the principle of charity is to be weighted, which is an empirical matter. This means that "assumptions" regarding the agreement are subject to endless adjustments in furthering the charitable process of understanding. Lukes insists that what makes better sense cannot be settled a priori. Instead the empirical basis for agreements on a certain sort of sentence playing the role of the bridgehead is guided by the selection of the translation results that are pragmatically tested for their success in yielding meaningful interpretations. According to him,

> What we assume to be in the common core will be subject to endless correction by the consequences of making such assumptions: evidence for any given assumption comes from whether the translations that result make better sense of what hey say and do than translations flowing from alternative assumptions ("Relativism in Its Place", in *Rationality and Relativism*, 1892, p. 273).

Other critics, like Newton Smith, are more critical of Hollis's argument and reject most of his transcendental enterprise. They argue that the presuppositions of basic perceptual beliefs (low-level) and the logical grounding of communication is not an *a priori "bridgehead"* but an empirical hypothesis, for which the predictions of our

translation scheme give evidence. Therefore there is no reason to elevate reasonable *a posteriori* conjectures into *a priori* presuppositions (see Newton Smith, "Relativism and the Possibility of Interpretation", in *Rationality and Relativism*, 1982).

Nevertheless, Hollis contends that the "bridgehead of true and rational beliefs" is rather "fixed" than "floating". That means that there are some specific inferential principles and stimulus-belief links that must be presupposed by interpreter in the effort of translating. These are not conjectural, according to Hollis, but "universal among mankind", or at least among that portion of mankind with whom we can understand, interpret and communicate after all.

In sum, Martin Hollis expressly aims to restore the prerogatives of the Cartesian Reason and provide a "*mental universal language*" by using his transcultural concept of "*bridgehead*". He claims that there must be rational and true beliefs which every rational mind must accept and which set the a priori limit to relativism. In consequence, the anthropologist's paradox and the Munchausen trilemma, which the Winchian researcher has to face, needs not arise. It would look as strange and inappropriate as an upheaval in paradise.

Nonetheless, I am inclined to think that if Hollis's view provides for a neo-rationalist version of charity, the stronger his concept of rational "bridgehead" in comparison with the empirical pre-requisites of Davidson's position, the more vulnerable to criticism it becomes. Hollis must prove the reality of *a priori* universals as conceptual preconditions of any possible interpretation in the process of cross-cultural communication. In fact, anthropology and sociology have found such "fixed" transcendental universals irrelevant for cultural practices. It has already been said (by

Winch and Harman, among others) that the laws of logic offer no guidance for how to go about revising our beliefs.

Hollis's positive conception of reason needs further conceptual support. He cannot avoid explaining why his claim is preferable to the skeptical denial of any transcendental constraints upon interpretation. To be persuasive, he must be clear about what argument can be made in his support. One might refer to Chomsky's idea of "universal linguistic ability" which has inspired Habermas's concept of "communicative competence". But for such a conception, we need to look beyond Hollis and to pursue the idea of a discursive nature of rationality, which is strikingly different from Hollis's substantive notion of reason. In order to overcome the objections to Hollis's view, we may need to look for a kind of dialogical and procedural rationality which underlies cross-cultural understanding by drawing from Habermas' theory of communicative action. Before passing to the exposition of the relevant features of Habermas's thought and to assess its contribution to the problem at stake, let me make few a concluding remarks which will show where we stand in the argument.

Hollis tries to revive the Cartesian tradition which emphasizes the transcendence of reason at the expense of obscuring the particularities of cultures. According to the diagnosis made by Wittgenstein, this type of philosophy is "sick at its core" and needs a therapeutic treatment since it disrupts language games that function in ordinary language and violates the common sense that seems to work well enough in everyday life. He hopes that the self-healing of philosophy would come from the direction he indicates, that is, by observing the standards and the rules which govern the practice and belief-formation within forms of life. And yet, were this cure to prove inadequate, he was ready

to remove completely the whole body of thinking affected by conceptual distortion through a radical "surgical" procedure. Although Wittgenstein's farewell to traditional philosophy is particularly persuasive within the post-analytical tradition, there is a subtle problem with his therapy, which is limited to the works of language: whereas he contemplates "how the language destroys itself", as Putnam ironically observes, he leaves the world "*as it is*".

From Hollis's perspective, Wittgenstein ignores judgements and standards of rationality, which depend, on "a massive central core of human thinking which has no history" (in Strawson's terms, quoted by Hollis). In consequence, he may contend that Wittgenstein makes relativism inevitable and this leads to the "social destruction of reality".

One may add that what has been forgotten in the surgical removal of rationality was the fact that the issue of rationality addresses the deep philosophical concerns regarding a possible bridge of mutual understanding and may restore hopes for our assuming moral responsibility for the world in which we live. The alternative to dialogue is the appeal to force. Therefore we have no other reasonable choice but to reconstruct the meaning of rationality in a way that is sufficient to provide the conditions for the possibility of dialogue and mutual understanding. Rationality must neither be an *a priori* imperative as philosophers like Hollis believe, nor bound to the cynical silence of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, but a rule of reaching *agreement*.

We shall see in the next chapter that Habermas provides support for the rationalist argument regarding the *self-refutation* of relativism not from an abstract "subject-centered-reason", but from a more subtle transcendentalist hermeneutics. His interpretive

and historical methodology goes beyond the untranslability of languages or incommensurability of ways of life and shows that cross-cultural understanding and self-reflexive critiques are both possible and conceptually illuminating. In this respect, Habermas's theory of communicative action goes far in the direction of initiating a way out of relativism by providing a *weak transcendental* communicative rationality situated at the cross-roads between the linguistic paradigm of the analytic tradition and continental hermeneutics.

Chapter 6) *JURGEN HABERMAS:*

COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

We have seen that Descartes tried unsuccessfully to secure a basis for universal understanding between all rational beings against skeptical doubt by his appeal to a self-sustaining and sufficient Reason. The Cartesian project inspired Vico's hope to find a kind of "mental language", which is common to all individuals across cultures and "uniformly grasps the substance of things feasible in human social life" (see Hollis, "Social Destruction of Reality", p. 86). Our discussion has shown that the search for a rationality that underlies understanding is much more complex than Descartes and his followers envisaged in their attempt to transcend the peculiar worlds of custom and example. Post-analytical thinkers like the later Wittgenstein and Winch have shown that interpretation of people's behavior is relative to the use of language in the contexts of different ways of living. Moreover, Quine's arguments for linguistic idiosyncrasy and inscrutability of reference provide for the indeterminacy of translation. These ideas have undercut the Cartesian ambition to abstract rational understanding from cultural imagery, though we have seen that they are unavoidably led to a linguistic and cultural relativism. Davidson suggests that such views rely on the faulty idea of conceptual schemes, which appear to him unintelligible and self-refuting. He attempts to rescue the concept of understanding from the relativist wreckage by his appeal to the *principle of charity*, which he conceives in terms of a theory of truth combined with a methodology of interpretation of beliefs and desires.

Habermas is aware that his concept of communicative rationality must avoid

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extreme dangers: on the one side there is the "Scylla" of metaphysical projections of a rationality that brings about a universal basis of understanding; on the other side, there is the "Charybdis" of relativism and deconstructionism which stresses the incommensurability of linguistic discourses and the idiosyncrasy of forms of life. His account of understanding, with its pragmatics of language shares a common point of departure with the post-analytical treatment of meaning. His analysis treats speech acts (or utterances) as the smallest units of language (in contrast to a semantics focused on the properties of isolated sentences).[48] But there is an important contrast between Habermas's theoretical goals and the goals of the analytic philosophers. While an empirical pragmatics is interested in description and analysis of specific elements of language, Habermas aspires to a "universal" or "formal" pragmatics that connects a line of questioning from Kantian universalism with a fallibilistic perspective drawing from *a posteriori* social and cognitive sciences. In this respect, his view can be defined as a *quasi-transcendental* reconstruction of a universal communicative competence in terms of pragmatic analysis of the pre-theoretical intuitions and implicit knowledge proper to language use. Habermas's theory of universal pragmatics contributes to a sociological theory of communicative action oriented toward understanding.

Unlike the Wittgensteinian tradition, which leaves the world unchanged, Habermas does not limit himself to a descriptive reflection about language. Although he shares the contemporary interest in linguistic analysis, he is not merely concerned with "how language destroys itself", to use Putnam's phrase. Instead, he offers an unusually broad theoretical perspective on "how parts of our culture hang together", on "what's wrong with our culture and what might be done to make it better" (Putnam, "Between the

New Left and Judaism", *interview with G. Borradori* in *The American Philosopher*, 1994, p. 61). Insofar as Habermas looks for a linguistic "underpinning" of his critical theory of social rationalization, he proposes to go beyond *the world as it is*. He builds up a more positive and promising alternative based on the idea of a communicative rationality that explores the conditions for reaching rational consensus. His theory raises the issue of the rationalization of society in connection with the problem of moral responsibility for the "great liabilities" of our time, such as hunger, poverty and war. In the context of the pluralization of forms of life and individualization of lifestyles which increase the threat of deepening social conflicts, Habermas's conceptual project addresses the issue of toleration and communicative mediation between different societies by referring to the bridging force of rationally achieved agreement. He suggests that rationality which guides understanding across cultures and historical times should not be associated with the *monological* character of repression, which eliminates the freedom of opinion. The unity of a reason should be rather treated as the source of agreement, which bears upon the diversity of its voices. He says, "[t]he more abstract the agreement becomes, the more diverse the disagreements with which we can *nonviolently* live" (*Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 1992, p. 140).

In this chapter I will turn to Habermas in hopes of finding a non-metaphysical and non-relativist solution to the issue at stake, and I will pursue my theoretical goals by following his path between the rationalist unshakable foundations and the "slippery slope" of relativism. While I will advance the argument by tracing the general nature of Habermas's project and philosophical position, I will revisit the background of contemporary debates on the notion of reason which sets the conceptual framework

relevant for the development of his perspective. In section 6.1, I will sketch his main philosophical themes in contrast with the positions presented so far, and provide an overview of the argument. First, in 6.11, I will explore why Habermas's concept of communicative rationality is so appealing and how it contributes to the aims of my dissertation. These preliminary considerations will prepare the ground for advancing the argument in subsection 6.12. There I will scrutinize Habermas's innovation of a procedural concept of rationality which maintains a weak transcendental aspect, and explain in what sense agreement is universally possible through communicative action. We will notice that he makes the "linguistic turn" from the traditional monological perspective on reason as emphasized by the Cartesian subject to a *dialogical* concept of rationality based on the concept of communicative competence and tied to universal and unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation.

In section 6.2, the question is this: can a conception of communicative rationality provide for the universal possibility of cross-cultural understanding and yet remain sensitive to cultural pluralism? In considering this question, I shall look through the "spectacles" of Habermas's universal pragmatics. We will examine the universal and unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation, which still remain empirical in Habermas's sense because they must be checked against different cultures. Giving reasons makes possible the justification of any claim to validity which is to be redeemed and vindicated in speech acts. Having reconstructed the relevant features of Habermas's concept of communicative competence I will examine in section 6.3 his theory of discourse ethics, which is deduced from the analysis of the conceptual foundations of the universal pragmatics. The discourse ethics is described as a cognitivist claim about the

possibility of reaching consensus about rightness of moral norms. In section 6.4, I will assess the context-transcendent force of Habermas concept of communicative rationality and I will weigh different possible interpretations of his notion of "ideal speech situation". By doing so I will look closer at the merits and the strengths of his theoretical contribution that aims to secure the conditions of possibility of cross-cultural understanding on the counterfactual basis of idealizing presuppositions of speech.

6.1) COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY: AN OVERVIEW

In the what follows, my aim is to suggest in what sense Habermas addresses the issue of this dissertation and describe the critical thrust of his concept of communicative rationality. Before a detailed conceptual exposition, I will provide an overview of the type of philosophical reflection we are offered.

6.11) PRELIMINARY REMARKS

To avoid the pitfalls of idealism and the perils of relativism, Habermas offers a concept of communicative rationality that is *postmetaphysical* and *nondefeatist*. First, it is *postmetaphysical* insofar as he gives up the metaphysical projection of reason of traditional philosophy, and pursues a procedural notion of rationality which is defined in terms of claims to validity redeemed and vindicated in speech acts. This notion is derived from intersubjective practices of everyday communication in changing historical and cultural contexts and refers to a kind of knowledge which must be understood fallibilistically (in contrast with immutable foundations) as reconstructed by the empirical science of language.

Second, Habermas's conception is *nondefeatist* insofar as it contrasts with all kinds of relativism (including versions advocated by Wittgenstein, Winch and Quine) that

would undermine the basis of a critical theory of society (see M. Cooke, *Language and Reason*, 1996, p. 43). We shall see that his notion of understanding based on the concept of communicative rationality avoids falling prey to cultural or linguistic relativism by asserting a context-transcendent notion of validity.

Habermas is a genuine dialectician who constructs his theory in a spirit of rejecting what is no longer defensible in the tradition, and preserving what he still deems valid though yet one-sided. In his vision of how understanding between people is possible, Habermas restores the complexity of the issue by inquiring how social theory, epistemology and theory of language all fit together in a conception of rationality conceived in terms of communicative action oriented toward reaching agreement. He moves toward a comprehensive synthesis that attempts to provide for the universal conditions of understanding. On the one hand, his notion of communicative rationality invokes a notion of reason which, though historically situated, appears in everyday linguistic practice and is based on strong "counterfactual idealizations" that are implicit in the general presuppositions of communication in all societies. The reconstruction of these presuppositions, which are the "universal conditions of possible understanding", is the goal of an ambitious program called "universal pragmatics". Habermas's contention that his pragmatic inquiries into linguistic universals which hold for all languages and makes understanding possible bears on the problem of this dissertation. Communicative rationality is not limited to the certain patterns of verbal behavior displayed by speakers within particular societies, but refers to communicative practices across cultures. The context-transcendent power of rationality draws upon a concept of the "ideal speech situation", which establishes the normative counterfactual preconditions of argumentation

and the justification of norms. In some interpretations, the idealizing presuppositions posit implausible normative burden on speakers and their communities and may imply a utopian projection of the lifeworld. However, beyond some inherent ambiguities of Habermas's project, as we shall see in section 6.4, such objections are often rooted in a descriptivist misinterpretation of his ideas. My use of Habermas is based on the belief that he goes a farther than others in finding an appropriate answer to the problem of rational ground of communication across cultural and historical contexts. In this respect, he offers promising means for recovering the grounds of rational dialogue while avoiding the poles of skepticism and idealist transcendentalism, and sets the premises for a critical analysis of the social pathologies of modernity.

This is the background against which Habermas pursues his empirical reconstruction of the universal conditions of speech. His research program exploits the combined resources of formal semantics and the pragmatic theory of language to locate the universal and necessary presuppositions of communicative action oriented toward understanding. Since Habermas rules out any possibility of a transcendental deduction of his universalistic claims, he treats them as empirical hypotheses to be tested against speakers' intuitions. His ambitious program seeks to assess "the empirical usefulness of formal-pragmatic insights" in three areas of scientific research: (1) the explanation of pathological or disturbed patterns of communication which are traced down to violations of normal conditions set out by universal pragmatics; (2) the study of the anthropological evolution of sociocultural ways of life of "socioculturally sociated individuals" that is expected to reveal the emerging structures of action either oriented to success or to understanding, and thereby confirms the universalistic claims of universal pragmatics; (3)

Piaget's developmental psychology and Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which are supposed to explain the acquisition of communicative competence and interactive abilities that are invariant across cultures. His goal is to mark out the premises for a general theory of socialization. Finally, on this conceptual basis, Habermas offers an outline of a theory of societal rationalization, which is linked to a well-developed tradition in social theory. He views this project as the conceptual reconstruction of modern society, which draws from the sociological approaches of Weber, Durkheim, Mead, and Parsons as well as from to historical materialism as reinterpreted by Marxists like Lukacs, Horkheimer and Adorno (see *Theory of Communicative Action 1*, [1981], 1984, pp. 139-41). In fact, Habermas constructs a theory of communicative action with the intention of providing a critical theory of modernity. His ambitious project is to comprehend social pathologies (such as loss of meaning, psychological disturbances and anomie) as paradoxical effects of the one-sided or selective development of rationalization processes in modern societies. In this respect, he constructs a concept of rationalization which stands close to the emancipatory ideal of the Enlightenment and follows his reception of Weber's theory of the differentiation of value-spheres. Though my main concern is not with the details or far range implications of Habermas's sociological view, I will make some reference to it so far as it is relevant to the concept of communicative rationality.

In sum, Habermas introduces his procedural concept of reason by considering a synthesis of a wide variety of arguments and perspectives from post-analytic philosophy to critical theory, and from Kant to reconstructive science. He conceives the unity of reason "in the plurality of its voices" and, by borrowing from Piaget the idea of a

decentered view of the world, he calls attention against fixation on any one conceptual scenario. The decentering of consciousness typical of modern times implies an open-minded, critical attitude, which enables the participant in communication to rationally assess and take up a worldview among many possible alternatives. Notwithstanding, some critics still charge Habermas with being "unmusical" on the theme of cultural difference (C. Calhoun paraphrases Max Weber's self-characterization as "unmusical" in the matter of religious beliefs; see "Introduction", *Critical Social Theory*, 1995, p. xvi). For this reason Habermas complains in a recent work that the pluralism implied by his conception is often not properly recognized (*Between Facts and Norms: Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, William Rehg's translation, 1996).

Habermas also acknowledges the relevance of the *language game* argument and accepts that *charity* is a good and useful principle, which can work to bridge different languages. In fact, it seems to me that if we weaken Habermas's idea of understanding, and if the orientation toward agreement regarding validity claims would be replaced with a somewhat more vague and less compelling recognition of speakers' rational capacity as accountable participants to communicative action, then he comes very close to the notion of charity. We saw that Wittgenstein, Quine and Davidson defend such an idea by assuming the rationality of speakers. In their view charity provides for the possibility of accounting for alien behavior and for the interpretation of other cultural practices. Though Habermas does not use the term *charity*, and instead gives the idea of rationality a stronger and more precise conceptualization in terms of validity claims, which are normative requirements inherent in any meaningful speech act (see *TCA 1*, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, pp. 102-41). Habermas considers such validity claims

which are universally raised in every speech act as necessary for communication and reaching agreement. They are tied to formal commonalties that provide the internal formal structure of argumentation and establish the counterfactual idealizations proper to the argumentative process. One's ability to utter a coherent and meaningful statement depends on the implementation of such rational demands, and the failure to do so raises doubts regarding one's normalcy of mind. However, in the spirit of reconstructive sciences, claims to validity of knowledge are not given once and for all in the manner of Cartesian unshakable foundations. Similarly, communicative rationality must be constructed fallibilistically as being vindicated in actual historical contexts, which are not stationary, but are subject to change. Thus, in contrast to Descartes, Habermas argues that rationality is not simply found in the criteria which guide the epistemic search for truth or the purposive action oriented toward success, but it mainly refers to "the disposition of speaking and acting subjects to acquire and use fallible knowledge" ("An Alternative Way Out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject-Centered Reason", in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, 1996, p 607-8). As a matter of fact, validity claims are raised within specific historical and cultural situations by living individuals whose personal identities and life styles are shaped by their own lifeworlds. In this respect, rationality is culture-bound and understanding is relative to the communicative practices dependent on forms of life. Notwithstanding, insofar as validity claims are tied to counterfactual idealizations which regulate all forms of argumentation, they transcend all given contexts. Habermas contends that we cannot make sense of other cultures unless we evaluate the universal dimensions of validity claims that are made by members of transient and specific forms of life. In addition, the

interpretation of meaning is actually made possible for all speaker-hearer interactions by the rational presuppositions which must hold in general for all contexts of language-use, even if Habermas argues that they must remain open to checking against particular linguistic intuitions scattered across the multiplicity of cultures. He suggestively portrays the transcendent power of validity claims as "thorn in the flesh of social reality" (*Postmetaphysical Thinking*, p. 47).

With this cross-cultural dimension of rationality, Habermas challenges relativism by arguing that we can make sense of the universality of understanding on the basis of the rational evaluation of validity claims that are made by all speakers in every utterance. His analysis of the structures of everyday communication reveals a communicative competence which makes possible the meaningful participation in communicative action oriented to reaching understanding and hence points to a potential for rationality that is implicit in the validity basis of everyday speech. This potential is referred to by Habermas as "*communicative rationality*" which sets out the general premises of reaching agreement and therefore is inherently tied to critical forms of argumentation. In the elementary case, a speaker and a hearer caught in the process of communication enter into a interpersonal relationship of mutual obligation: the first is obliged to support the claims with reasons, if challenged; the latter must accept or reject the claims if he has good reasons to do so. This is a rational rather than a moral obligation, since the failure to proceed in this way draws, in the first instance, the imputation of irrationality, not immorality (though the two may often overlap). Habermas assumes that people who make a meaningful use of language can engage, based on the best available arguments, in a rational dispute of the validity claims to truth, rightness and sincerity which are

redeemed and vindicated in their utterances. As a matter of fact, speech acts are generally

put in relation to three types of realities:

1) *"the"* *external world* describable from the "objectifying" point of view of a

nonparticipant or *the third person's* attitude;

2) *"our"* *social life-world* of intersubjective interactions which imply the

recognition of *the second person* as a direct participant into dialogue; and

3) *"my"* *own internal world* of private feelings and insights expressible by *the first*

person in confessions or subjective declarations.

The fully articulated theory of a *comprehensive* applicability of language to these extra-

linguistic orders would provide a unifying background for a meaningful dialogue of

different cultural discourses. In addition, as Thomas McCarthy points out, it can unify "a

variety of theoretical endeavors usually assigned to disparate and occasionally related

disciplines - from the theory of knowledge to the theory of social action" ("Translator's

Introduction", *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. xix). This unifying

dimension of Habermas's view on linguistic communication, which is not restricted to

cultural and disciplinary frameworks, justifies the present approach in this chapter.

Briefly put, the way he describes *the preconditions of a reflective engagement in speech*

bears directly upon the issue of this dissertation: the demands of rationality are not

culture-bound and must hold in all contexts wherein language is used to communicate.

Insofar as they point to the rational potential elicited by validity bases of any speech act,

and are universally compelling for all competent speakers who are able to reach a

reflective agreement (based on the better arguments), such conditions of communicative

rationality transcend the borders of cultures and provide an implicit ground for coming

to an understanding between people from different lifeworlds.

The points I made above will became clearer and more obvious as they will be further developed in the sections that follow. After these preliminary remarks, I will turn to some arguments laid out by earlier discussions and in this context I will specify in what sense Habermas's idea of understanding requires a transcendental dimension of rationality.

6.12) UNDERSTANDING AND THE NEED FOR A TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENT

This subsection aims to present the strategy Habermas follows in contrast with different perspectives analyzed so far as my argument has progressed. Although my discussion needs to make a step back to reveal in a broader picture some challenging problems with understanding across linguistic and cultural contexts, it is not digressive. References to other thinkers will be avoided to the extent they do not serve the main purpose of helping to see what Habermas is doing and why. Thus my goal here is twofold: *a)* to clarify where we are left after the previous discussion of the principle of charity and to review the main points of my argument in an order which is insightful for the exposition of Habermas's relation to Kant, and b) to explain why and in what sense a transcendental grounding of understanding might have been so appealing to Habermas in establishing the rational potential of validity claims and, inherently, of argumentative processes intricately related to them.

a) Previous chapters have shown that Wittgenstein's plea for the abandonment of the substantive notion of rationality makes the task assumed by Habermas's theory of communicative action particularly difficult. The idea of understanding has been haunted

ever since by the specter of behaviorist criteria of meaning and by doubts about the

possibility of linguistic interpretation. In the new language game where *Philosophical*

Investigation leaves philosophy to play a very modest and context-relative role, there is

no place, nor need for a transcendental argument. In a world emptied of gods who could

kindly back up our epistemic efforts, either by endowing us with all necessary

prerogatives to reach the truth or endlessly intervening to bring us on the right track in the

pursuit of knowledge, we are left alone to sort out the good hypotheses among many

possible alternatives. In *On Certainty*, the assumption that we cannot talk about certainty

since it is difficult even to recognize the extent of the groundlessness of our beliefs

suggests that the time of great metaphysical worldviews is over. Although, we may agree

with Hegel that "Minerva's owl flies at dusk", the twilight of autonomous Reason which

secured the unshakable ground of our lives is sometimes seen as a tragedy of the human

condition associated with *Sisyphus*'s relentless fatality (Camus), other times with an

heroic responsibility for avoiding roads leading nowhere (or dead ends, that is,

Heidegger's "*Holzwege*") and making life meaningful. In the transition from such

existential lamentation to the issue of the epistemological challenge of interpreting an

alien linguistic behavior without *a priori* constraints, as Quine would presumably

endorse, I think that the situation is thus: Were we to understand an informant's

utterances, we should observe his overt behavior and bring to bear everything we

incidentally know about him or his form of life. If one happens to notice some conditions

present in the world which typically produce true or false beliefs about certain matters,

then we can interpret their utterances concerning those matters accordingly. To be

accurate, an interpreter cannot consistently impose the constraint that people are holding

mostly correct beliefs (as Davidson pretends) or, that they are typically wrong about certain matters (because of some conditions in the world that mislead them such as Descartes's *evil genius*). Therefore, if we are to get the best understanding of what others say, this would be possible in the light of our total knowledge about their psychology, their culture including language, and their natural habitat. There might be a wide range of knowledge about people which would be useful for an interpreter. He may explore their private interests or wishful thinking and the customary conditions of success which guide their habitual instrumental action; or he may investigate, say, what conditions may constantly produce optical illusions or delusions in people. One may consider psychoanalytic interpretations of compulsions and frustrations in terms of behavioral manifestations of repressed unconscious drives and desires or scrutinize the effects of psychological fixation on some particular world-views either rooted in scientific representations of reality or in religious dogmas. Using all these explanatory accounts, the best understanding should not preclude *in principle* the possibility that people may be massively mistaken, as well as that they could hold true sentences most of the time.

Fair enough, a skeptic may reply. However the problem seems to be postponed rather than resolved. First, following the exercise of doubt, we find ourselves in a paradoxical situation. While assuming that all hypotheses must remain open in principle, there is at least one exception to this rule which imposes contingent boundary conditions upon knowledge - that is, the necessarily *closed* pre-condition "*that all hypotheses must remain open in principle*". Second, since there is no translation scheme that preserves meaning across languages, the question becomes what warrants the uniform applicability of the conceptual network of empirical psychology. For instance what provides for the

consistency of behaviorist language or of Freud's distinct psychoanalytical vocabulary to different people with different verbal behaviors and coming from contrasting worlds or walks of life. On this line of the argument we have seen that it is not quite clear what can preserve the validity of Quine's thesis of indeterminacy (if it is reflexively applied to itself). Its meaningfulness beyond the borders of the language to which it is so intricately related can be questioned, unless understanding of others may come to rest on a kind of transcendental argument that sets up a universal and necessary common ground (*a fortiori* and *consistent*), whatever that might be.[49]

We have seen that this step is precluded in Davidson's argument, but assumed by Hollis in the form of a universal bridgehead. Unlike Davidson, Habermas is willing to take up the issue of understanding in a way that requires a transcendental dimension of rationality. But he also dissociates himself from a substantive notion of reason (which revives Cartesian connotations) as proposed by Hollis. Habermas is interested in the general conditions which make possible linguistic exchange in the communication between different participants to dialogue. This involves an appeal to the general and unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation implicitly given in the use of language. On this view, it is reasonable to accept that all hypotheses must receive appropriate recognition and be openly assessed on the basis of reason. However, we may observe that one can neither understand different interpretations about what's happening in the field of research nor be able to argue for and against different theoretical hypotheses unless one accepts the basic rules of the game that make critical debate possible. And this is precisely when rationality comes into play in the context of either scientific or political disputes to make possible agreement, or eventual disagreement, between participants to

discussion challenging each other with critical arguments. In its simplest terms, the concept of communicative action introduced by Habermas refers to a form of intersubjective interaction in which a speaker's utterance raises validity claims and a hearer takes a *"yes" or "no"* attitude toward them. With every speech act the speaker takes on an obligation to support with reasons his claims whenever these are called into question, and the hearer takes on a similar obligation to justify his response. Communicative action is thus conceptually tied to argumentation.

In the light of previous discussions, two major problems arise. First, a Winchian (or a Wittgensteinian) may argue that the process of argumentation based on *"yes" or "no"* positions is extremely rudimentary and irrelevant for everyday communication. If we consider more complex dialogical interactions, then we may suspect that people may have different opinions about what is an argument and which reasons should have a prevailing force. In fact, for a Winchian, what counts as good reason is determined by cultural tradition and normative consensus within a form of life. In contrast, Habermas suggests a distinction between traditional cultures fostering inflexible personal identities and centered on dogmatic worldviews, and cultures which can distance themselves from themselves by taking up a self-critical attitude. The first are comparable with linguistically enclosed forms of life from a Winch-Wittgenstein interpretation; the latter is connected by Habermas with a reflective relation to the world of "modern" societies in which a "decentration" of consciousness is taking place. In consequence, it becomes possible to see different dimensions of validity and to question conventions, rules and individual identities transmitted by tradition (see *Postmetaphysical Thinkers*, p. 138, *TCA 1*, p 66-8). However, as M. Cooke observes, Habermas does not take adequate notice of

this issue, which can be associated to the distinction between *conventional* and

postconventional forms of argumentation (*Language and Reason*, p. 13). In this respect,

Habermas focuses more on postconventional communicative action in which

argumentation is critical and open-ended: no validity claim is exempt in principle form

critical discussion, and all hypotheses may be subjected to debate.

A second problem may be revealed from the angle of a possible Quinean objection to

Habermas's idea of understanding, and this leads us to the core of his conception of

rationality. One may reply that argumentation is not possible when a breakdown of

communication occurs. As shown in the *Rabbit-Gavagai* example, two people speaking

different languages inherently point out different things and hence, in a way they do not

live in the same world. Nonetheless, the relativist implications of the thesis of

indeterminacy of translation do not hold for Habermas. He assumes that all languages

have a rational potential which offers "the possibility to distinguish between what is true

and what we hold to be true" (*Postmetaphysical Thinkers*, p. 138). He contends that all

forms of argumentation, no matter the context or complexity, are based on a set of

"idealizing suppositions" which are universally rooted in the very structure of action

oriented toward understanding.[50] He considers that the formal pragmatic analysis of

everyday communication processes demonstrates that the validity claims redeemable and

vindicated in any speech act make reference to a number of unavoidable "strong

idealizations". Among them is "the supposition that all participants in dialogue use the

same linguistic expressions with identical meanings" (*Postmetaphysical Thinkers*, p. 47,

see also *Between Facts and Norms*). So far as the comprehensibility of one's language is

concerned, in a conversation the partners are supposed to use the same meanings, and

exchange semantically equivalent expressions. But this necessary condition of understanding has a counterfactual character in Habermas's view. In the earlier works, (including *Theory of Communicative Action*), Habermas used the term "*ideal speech situation*" to refer to the hypothetical situation in which counterfactual idealizations would be satisfied. More recently, he regrets using such an expression which is "too concretist" and vulnerable to "essentialist" misinterpretations (in an interview with *New Left Review*, 229, and in *Between Facts and Norms*, 1996, see also Cooke, *Language and Reason*, pp. 31, 172-3). Since I will discuss in section 6.4 the critical thrust of this concept, I will not dwell now on this issue. My point here is that Habermas, in contrast with Quine, assumes that we cannot engage ourselves in dialogue with other people if we do not assume that we exchange identical meanings. Such an assumption may appear unwarranted to a Quinean who would be inclined to treat this as a problem of discovery in given instances of communication, rather than a normative case of some ideally "exacting conditions", which must be taken only as coming close to being satisfied, but are never found as such in actual speech. Habermas contends that we *must* presuppose that certain idealizing presuppositions are to be at least approximately satisfied if we are to regard ourselves as participating in argumentation. At least this may insure that the possible debate of theoretical hypotheses. However, it seems to me that the idealizing presupposition of the consistency of meaning, which is not fully met by actual speakers, is compatible with Quine's principle of charity which requires one to treat peoples as basically rational and try to makes sense of their verbal behavior.

And yet, the question remains whether theoretical controversy is a fair critical discussion based on arguments or a meaningless noise between partners deaf to each

other's reasons and an irrational display of violence, in which force and authority will have last word. In this respect, Habermas frequently mentions another strong idealization which is related to the comment I made above to the first objection: that nothing except the force of the *better argument* will prevail, that no relevant argument is suppressed or *a priori* eliminated and no participant is silenced or excluded from the process.

In conclusion, in contrast to Wittgensteinian, Winchian or Quinean relativism, Habermas argues that validity is not reducible to the values dependent on the context of a form of life and therefore understanding goes beyond the unquestioned and provincial agreement of a specific and dogmatic conventional culture. Moreover, in accordance with the precepts of critical theory, the universal standards that permit the critical assessment of actual judgements, norms and definitions hold within different societies. Habermas assumes that idealizing suppositions of argumentation make possible the critique of false, unjust and dishonest communicative practices. This counterfactual aspect is tied to the context-transcendent dimension of rationality.

In sum, the above analysis places Habermas's claims in the context of the considerations which concluded the argument in the previous chapter. Davidson cautiously hesitates to accept charity as a transcendental principle. For him, charity, which supplies the constraints on the structure of the pattern of beliefs, values and language, together with the evidence assumed available, it is enough to tell how radical interpretation is possible. Hence, no understanding of foreign utterances is possible if many sentences held true by speakers are not so, but in fact false, or if we would actually have no idea how their truth-value is to be understood. This claim for charity can be formally reconstructed as follows: *(1)* language is radically interpretable if and only if our

beliefs are mostly true; *(2)* an empirical argument can prove that languages are actually interpreted by children who first learn a language and by field linguists and ethnographers (like Evans-Pritchard or Frazer who succeed in translating native speech), and therefore natural languages are radically interpretable. In conclusion, *(3)* our beliefs are mostly true. Nevertheless, when facing Fodor's and Lepore's interpretation of his idea of charity as an "*argument of form T*" (transcendental), as the one emphasized above, Davidson dissociates himself from their position and argues that he never upheld that "radical interpretability is a condition of interpretability". He says, "I never endorsed any argument of form T" (Fodor and Lepore: "Is Radical Interpretation Possible?", p 57-58; Davidson: Reply to Fodor and Lepore, p. 77).

It is true that Hollis moves to a very strong position when he defends a substantive notion of reason providing for the universality and necessity of any possible understanding in the terms of the *a priori* basis of "the bridgehead of true rational beliefs". However, this seems to me a step backwards since such a strong claim becomes less defensible and more vulnerable to criticism than Davidson's moderate view.

Habermas's alternative is somewhere between Davidson's charity and Hollis's attempt at the restoration of the autonomy of reason. Habermas accepts a weak transcendental concept of rationality in terms of validity claims which set the universal and necessary conditions of any possible speech act, and which are tied to the "concept of pragmatic, yet unavoidable and idealizing presupposition of action oriented toward reaching understanding" (Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, p. 143). On these premises he may agree that claims to validity raised either by an utterance or a reflective and specialized discourse cease to be meaningful outside of the necessary and

counterfactual conditions of the argumentative process. Therefore, on the one hand, Habermas rejects Hollis's substantive notion of reason by adopting a wholly procedural perspective. On the other hand, although his concept of communicative rationality is less strong than Hollis's bridgehead, it exceeds the empirical limits cautiously imposed by Davidson to his principle of charity and pays no attention to his argument against the possibility of a translinguistic "criterion of languagehood".

Habermas declares in the "Preface" of *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 1*, that his concern was to develop a concept of "communicative rationality" that is no longer tied to and limited by the individualist-subjective or cognitive-instrumental "abridgements" of reason from modern philosophy and social theory. On his view rationality is inherently discursive and refers to communicative competence. This consists of the interactive linguistic capabilities that underlie understanding by the inescapable reference to validity claims redeemable and vindicated in speech acts and to modes of their justification. On these premises he intends to construct a two-level concept of society that interrelates the lifeworld and system paradigms. Finally, the theory of social action is designed to make possible the pursuit of a complex goal which is intertwined with the first two complex topics described above. This is to elaborate a critical theory of modernity "that explains the type of social pathologies that are today becoming increasingly visible" (*TCA 1*, p XL). In this respect, Habermas suggests a vision which is rooted in the emancipatory project of the Enlightenment.

The background of Habermas's reconstructive interests ranging from the formal pragmatics, and cognitive universalism of developmental sciences of morality and psychology, to the social theory of rationalization is too broad to be discussed here. I will

try to approach his complex perspective within the constraints of the issue at stake.

Above all, I will make good on his concept of communicative competence as a universal core which is invariant across cultures and consists in basic capabilities and fundamental rules that all speakers acquire in learning to master a language. This basic insight bears upon the nature of rationality that becomes in his interpretation inherently discursive and, hence, linguistic and social, and provides the general and unavoidable presuppositions of any possible processes of understanding between people caught in dialog or conversation. In this respect, we shall see next that Habermas still works in a Kantian framework.

B) Habermas seeks to preserve the viable legacy of transcendental philosophy, which identifies the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of experience. As long as the universality and necessity of conditions of understanding still hold, we may conclude that universal pragmatics accepts the transcendental aim of tracing the conceptual structure of reason recurring in all communicative actions. However, from Habermas's perspective, the claim of transcendental deduction (that offers grounds for the validity in other theoretical domains of the pursuit of knowledge and truth) has been given up. He specifies, "in place of a priori demonstration, we have transcendental investigation of the conditions for argumentatively redeeming validity claims that are at least implicitly related to discursive vindication" (*Communication and the Evolution of Society*, [1976], 1979, p 23). But insofar as Habermas's approach is essentially linguistic and his theory of language and action has no thematic equivalent in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, his recourse to the Kantian philosophy is inherently limited. Hence the relevance of the transcendental model of justification of universal and necessary conditions of knowledge must be cautiously taken *with a grain of salt*. Insofar as Habermas gives up the ideal of

deducing the pure structuring forms of understanding that make experience possible from the "unity of self-consciousness", it makes sense to consider that he appeals only to a *weaker version of the transcendental argument.*[51] Whereas he seeks to provide the unavoidable and universal conditions of possible understanding through linguistic communication, he pays close attention to critical receptions of the Kantian a priorist strategy from the angle of analytical philosophy and critical rationalism.

According to Strawson's minimalist interpretation, made on the premises of analytic philosophy, the strong claim to the *a priori* deductive proof of objective validity of our concepts of "objects of possible experience" is no longer defensible. Instead, the transcendental is applicable to the extent that competent knowing subjects judge which experiences may be called coherent and can be subjected to the universal and necessary system of categories that implicitly organizes every coherent experience. Although Habermas retained from Strawson the idea that a reconstruction of the conceptual network has the empirical character of a hypothetical proposal which is not justified *a priori* but must be confirmed by a testing procedure, he does not further accept the skeptical reduction to the binding limits of a logical-semantic analysis (*Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. 22, "Philosophy as Stand-In Interpreter", in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, [1983], 1990, 1991, p. 6).

Second, the critical-rationalist attitude toward Kant is expressed by Karl Popper. He hopes that by replacing the notion of justification with critical testing he could avoid the three horns of the "Munchausen Trilemma" (logical circularity, infinite regress, and recourse to absolute certitude). And yet he did not break completely with transcendentalism. As Habermas believes that Popper's irrefutable rules of

methodological criticism and especially the place held by *modus tollens* in the progress of knowledge allow something from the Kantian mode of reasoning "to sneak into its inner precincts through the back door" ("Philosophy as Stand-In Interpreter", p. 7).

We may observe that Habermas's critique of Popperian falsificationism applies as well to himself. He agrees that Kant's philosophy fails to ground the pure concept of understanding "for he merely culled them on the table of forms of judgement, unaware of their historical specificity" ("Philosophy as Stand-In Interpreter", p. 4). Thus, he clearly distances himself from the Kantian idea of "transcendental subject" that accomplishes the epistemic synthesis by the cognitive categories of the intellect, which are prior to experience. And yet, Habermas does not renounce the universal-pragmatic analysis of the constitution of experience and of the successful application of our concepts of objects of possible experience under "contingent boundary conditions". His point is that in all empirical situations when a linguistic exchange occurs, a speaker is engaged in a performative interaction with a hearer who tries to understand what is being said and is usually forced into "*yes and no*" positions. Agreement can be reached as a result of arguments which can be brought to provide grounds or reasons for the points being made in the utterance. Habermas stresses that the premises for coming to a rationally motivated understanding are inherently general and cannot be avoided by any participant in communicative action. Therefore, the validity we claim for our view expressed in our utterances proves the existence of an element of binding unconditionality in the structure of communicative rationality which transcends de facto compliance with habitual practices of a tradition as it precludes the appeal to obedience toward custom or brute force.

The difference between Habermas's reconstruction of the universal and unavoidable conditions of mutual understanding and the Kantian project of transcendental categories consists, first, in their status and in what they are supposed to ground, and, second, in their strategy. I will try next to make more explicit these two aspects in a way that elicits Habermas's relation to the Kantian framework.

First, while Kant strives to establish the universal, necessary, and *a priori* conditions for understanding, Habermas is content with a **weak transcendental** that refers to the rational potential of validity claims, redeemable and vindicated in any speech act which is tied to the idealizing presuppositions of argumentation. On the one side, these validity claims are counterfactual and hence context-transcendent, on the other side, Habermas presents them as a mere fallible hypotheses, subject to empirical confirmation or falsification. This means that the possibility of raising claims to validity made by speakers in their speech acts are not based on given unchangeable structures of the Kantian intellect. In the universal pragmatic view proposed by Habermas, the one reliable way in which beliefs can be judged valid is to base them on an agreement that is to be reached by rational argumentation. Therefore, in contrast with Kantian transcendental knowledge, validity of an utterance rests on "shaky foundations" insofar as it can be heavily disputed and may be called into question all the time.

Second, the difference between Kant and Habermas is even more obvious if we contrast their strategies. Kant believed that philosophy is the privileged discipline which is able to describe the necessary and universal foundations of knowledge and he ascribed to it the roles of "usher" (*Platzanweiser*) and "supreme judge" (*oberster Richter*) of cultures. Habermas thinks that philosophy is not able to carry the task of theoretical

reconstruction and promotes instead the reconstructive sciences (such as Piaget's genetic psychology, Kohlberg's theory of moral development and Chomsky's linguistic theory) in the construction of his critical social theory. Although we live in an age when the process of cultural differentiation seems to create the demand for experts and to marginalize the need for generalists and humanists, Habermas is not ready to assume (like Rorty) that the bell tolls for philosophy. As Habermas puts it, if philosophy has to surrender its inspecting role as an arbiter of culture, it still "can and ought to retain its claim to reason, provided it is content to play the more modest roles of stand-in (*Platzhalter*) and interpreter" ("Philosophy as Stand-In Interpreter", p. 4). On the one hand, it sets an interplay between the cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive regional dimensions reason which has split as a consequence of the process of the division of labor. On the other hand, it guides the process of giving grounds for the validity claims we raise in ("Philosophy as Stand-In Interpreter", pp. 19-20). In this respect, philosophy still plays a role as "guardian of rationality" which can act as a "place-holder" or "mediator" between special spheres of cultures which resulted in the process of societal modernization.

However, Habermas argues that philosophy must give up its traditional pride and humbly follow the empirical results yielded by the reconstructive sciences. The general structures and universal conditions are hypotheses which must be subjected to usual methods of testing. This implies that reconstructions of universal presuppositions implicit in everyday communicative processes have a hypothetical status and hence must be checked against speaker's intuitions and across a wide range of the sociological spectrum. Nevertheless, Habermas's pragmatic investigations still preserve a *weak*

transcendental character. Insofar as they reveal the general and unavoidable presuppositions which make understanding possible via reaching agreement, and in a more modest sense, they are comparable with what the Kantian transcendental deduction of knowledge has done for cognitive processes. But his argument breaks with *a priorism* and becomes the subject of a hypothetical, fallible and empirical inquiry, which must observe the procedure of acceptance or rejection of hypotheses according to the eventual success or failure in scientific testing. Habermas thinks that the demarcation between *a priori* and *a posteriori* foundations of knowledge is not as sharp as Kant believes and should be blurred. He arrives at the general and unavoidable presuppositions of communicative action by abstracting and reconstructing in the empirical fields of research that elucidate the learning and the acquisition of mental intuitions or rules of pre-theoretical knowledge. Habermas's scientific references are typified by Chomsky's linguistic theory of generative grammar centered on the notion of universal linguistic competence, Piaget's theory of genetic epistemology which studies the formation of psychological structures and Kohlberg's algorithm of moral development through six stages of evolution. Nonetheless, the rational reconstructions advanced by these reconstructive sciences that can ground the claim to objectivity must yet be distinguished from the empirical-analytical disciplines that study a symbolical structured reality and are directed toward making explicit the universal human competence of speaking and understanding. According to Habermas, the competence of speakers is insured by the ability to master a kind of *depth grammar intuitions,* which allow them not only to make intelligible well-formed propositions, but to relate their utterances to the extra-linguistic worlds of facts, social interactions and inner self by vindicating the validity claims of

truth, rightness and truthfulness. Nevertheless, the linguist engaged in the inquiry of such intuitions should naturally treat them as hypotheses in the manner of nomological sciences and procure a knowledge *a posteriori* through research undertaken with actual speakers.

In conclusion, for Habermas the scientific procedure of empirical validation is not at all incompatible with the aim of laying the transcendental ground of the universal and unavoidable conditions of communication. In fact, the reconstructive or redemptive interest of his theory of universal pragmatics is precisely built upon the context-transcendent force of communicative rationality that makes understanding possible on the basis of validity claims thematized in every speech act and linked to idealizing presuppositions of argumentative processes.

Apart from skepticism about Habermas's treatment of the Kantian heritage, the question that frequently arises is whether Habermas's appeal to a transcendental argument makes him liable to the accusations of wishful thinking or false universalism, thus recalling the objections Hegel once made against Kant (terrorism of pure conviction, impotence of mere "ought", excessive formalism and abstract universalism). In particular, his attempt to redeem the philosophical project of modernity by restoring the integrity of the "multiple voices" of reason will bring his view in the target of a fierce postmodernist attack. At the one side, thinkers who argue that philosophy outlived its usefulness as "a privileged truth-telling discourse" (Rorty), or as a kind of "grand-narrative" (Lyotard), criticize Habermas's program as overambitious and dispute his assumption that philosophy still plays a role as a stand-in interpreter and in this respect is a guardian of rationality. But such imputations made by postmodernist and feminist

critics are not my main concern. My goal here is to sketch how Habermas tries to delimit himself from the traditional idea of understanding which is tied up to what Habermas justifiably calls "subject-centered reason". This is a kind of rationality that is measured by an isolated subject whose mental contents are reflected in representational and propositional attitudes. Such a conception that treats knowledge solely from the objectifying attitude of the third person sets out the premises of the philosophy of consciousness as represented by Descartes and Kant. In contrast, Habermas makes a "*linguistic turn*" leaving behind the traditional conceptions of reason. On his view, rationality mainly refers to "the disposition of speaking and acting subjects to acquire and use fallible knowledge" and its criteria are not simply found in standards of truth and success but in the rational potential of language. ("An Alternative Way Out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject-Centered Reason", in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, 1996, p 607-8). To make sense of meaning and interpretation of the relationships of knowing and purposively acting subjects with the state of affairs one has to consider the validity claims that are made by the participants in these forms of life and to evaluate their specific forms of argumentation. Henceforth, Habermas assumes that anyone performing a speech act is inherently engaged in a communicative action and raises the *universal validity claims* of *truth, rightness, sincerity* and *comprehensibility*, which are built in "the intersubjective structures of social reproduction" and set the universal and necessary conditions of any possible communication. Such claims are redeemed and vindicated in dialog and point to rational potential which warrants the process of mutual understanding. The paradigmatic case is represented by an utterance performed by a speaker who can support with reasons his

claim to validity when challenged and a hearer who have the elementary capacity to take

an affirmative or negative stance toward what the speaker says. Habermas says, "the goal

of coming to an understanding (*Verstandingung*) is to bring about an agreement

(*Einverstandis*) that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal

understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another"

(*Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. 3). Therefore communicative action is a

type of social interaction oriented toward reaching agreement on the rational basis of the

common recognition of the corresponding validity claims inherently implicit in every

speech act. Habermas suggests that in empirical and contingent situations of conflict and

disagreement we have to move to the linguistic level of the discourse and of the

unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation in order to warrant the validity claims that

have been responsible for the breakdown of communication. If there is a prevailing force

that should show us the paths between the horns of the dilemma of "gods and demons",

this is the force of the "*better argument*". Rationality should play the role of a practical

guide helping us to choose how we shall live and cut our way through the labyrinth of the

modern lifeworld.

In conclusion, Habermas hopes to build a concept of understanding on a *weak-transcendental* communicative rationality which is *postmetaphysical* in several

interconnected ways. It is *(a)* conceived procedurally, *(b)* construed fallibilistically and

situated historically, *(c)* nonsubjectivistic and abstracted from everyday practices of

communication and *(d)* multi-dimensional and pluralistic. It is also *nondefeatist* to the

extent it escapes the charge of being both arbitrary and relativistic by *(a)* the refusal to

make validity culture-dependent and *(b)* the assertion that the idealizing standards for the

critique of distorted communication have a context transcendent power.

On these theoretical premises, Habermas rejects Winch's claim that consensus and understanding beyond the limits of a form of life as shown by the relation between an investigator and his informants can be at best "occasional and fragile". In Habermas's view, understanding of the extreme cases of alien languages and unfamiliar cultures or epochs remote from us is not inevitably endangered as ethnographic research does not necessarily appear compromised in many risky circumstances. Habermas takes the insightful lesson of hermeneutics and draws his optimism from the analysis of the "interpretive competence of adult speakers from the perspective of how speaking and acting subjects make incomprehensible utterances of an alien environment comprehensible" (*TCA 1*, p. 130). On the one side, he accepts that the meaning of a symbolic text, either a literary work, painting or a framework of traditions, can be disclosed only by "the background of cognitive, moral, and expressive elements of the cultural store of knowledge from which the interpreter and his contemporaries constructed their interpretations" (*TCA 1*, p. 132). On the other side, his idea of understanding inhabitants of other lifeworlds or forms of life is not simply context-bound as relativists claim. For instance, an interpreter coming from a different historic time and cultural space than the author considered cannot identify the universal presuppositions of any linguistic performance without, at least implicitly, taking a position on the thematized validity claims of truth, rightness or truthfulness connected with the text. And this attitude towards claims to validity expressed in different cultural and historical *contexts* proves the existence of an element of unconditionality in the structure of communicative action, which is something else than a simple de facto acceptance of habitual practices of

a tradition. To be recognizable as rational, a justification cannot rely on appeals to custom or brute force. Therefore, the communicative rationality can be understood as *nondefeatist* to the extent it is "stubbornly critical" toward any non-reflective submission to authority and rests on "strong idealizations" which are implicitly built into everyday communication. Here lies the potentially context-transcendent power of validity claims.

In the broader perspective, the sociological intent of this ambitious program is to engage in an emancipatory critique of dishonest, unjust or untruthful communicative practices across forms of life. In order to be justifiably applied, this project of a critical social theory requires, of course, a clarification and legitimation of it normative foundations (see Richard Bernstein, "Introduction", in *Habermas and Modernity*, 1985, p. 17). However, since the main concern of this paper is with the thrust of communicative rationality, I will pay little attention to the sociological aspect.

Habermas's construal of the universals which makes possible hermeneutic interpretation in a way which transcends specific historical and cultural contexts is not a task for empirical-analytical or nomological sciences, but it is to be carried out by his theory of universal pragmatics. In order to make clear what this means, I will show how Habermas abandoned the premises of subject-centered reason from a declining philosophy of consciousness, and shifted to the paradigm of language, though not as a syntactic or semantic system, but as pragmatically used in performing speech acts. In this strategic move he draws the basic notion of "communicative competence" from Noam Chomsky's linguistic theory and from Jean Piaget's cognitive developmental psychology. I will further accompany Habermas on the reconstructive path of universal pragmatics and I will show to what extent it succeeds in overcoming the one-sidedness of formal

semantics and linguistics. In his opinion, these theories are too narrowly focused: the first on the search for the formal truth-conditions; the latter on the ability to produce grammatically well-formed sentences.

6.2) UNIVERSAL PRAGMATICS AND UNIVERSAL COMPETENCE

This section will present the main features of Habermas's theory of universal pragmatics inasmuch as it is relevant to the issue of cross-cultural understanding. We are interested in how he establishes a rational basis for reaching a universal agreement beyond the limitation rooted in the various and peculiar contexts of ways of living. As a matter of fact, his aim to build up a universal pragmatics of language is ultimately an attempt at explaining how human understanding is possible. Such far-reaching expectations of his project explain why he constantly emphasizes its importance and why its conceptual elaboration is spread all over his impressive works.

In his essay "What is Universal Pragmatics?" (in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, 1976; English version published in 1979), Habermas introduces a program which rests on the contention that not only phonetic, syntactic or semantic features of sentences, but also utterances which convey the pragmatic dimension of speech, admit of rational reconstruction of "communicative competence" in universal terms. The main goal of his theory is to establish the rational background of the general presuppositions of speech acts, as the elementary units of everyday communication which universally raise intersubjectively criticizable claims to validity. His pragmatic account of meaning is summarized in the thesis that to know what is said in an utterance is to comprehend the claim that it makes - that is, to know the conditions of its satisfaction and the conditions of its validation. In this respect, Habermas distinguishes between the

cognitive use of language, where the focus is on the propositional content expressed by constative speech acts, and the interactive use of language, where emphasis is on the speaker-hearer relationship established by regulative speech acts. The intersubjective relationship established by an utterance consists in a mutual "obligation" to take a stance toward the validity claim and support it with reason. Hence, there is an internal connection between language use and argumentation.

In what follows I will attempt to make clear how understanding and the rational potential of the unavoidable and universal conditions of language-use are linked. The intelligibility of speech is not merely dependent on or limited to the context of values evolved by a form of life, but it must be secured by the cross-cultural power of idealizations. It points to a shared communicative competence which makes possible the understanding between the participants in communicative action. In this respect, Habermas looks for a way out of relativism in a sense which seems to me very significant and promising.

In order to focus on the *kind* of language theory developed by Habermas, it is necessary to refer to the theories from which he borrows. The exposition will proceed by a dialectical contrast between Habermas and the thinkers who inspired his conceptual development and from whom he draws significant elements for his theory. Habermas's approach to language contrasts with the logical formalist treatment of propositions and with the too narrow character of traditional linguistics. In his view, formal semantics is one-sidedly obsessed by truth searching and Chomsky's grammatical theory focuses on "linguistic competence" at the expense of reductively interpreting utterances as an empirically limited outcome of this competence. Habermas criticizes formalism for

abstracting semantic and syntactic aspects from the performative dimension of language, and argues that communicative competence presupposes a universal core of linguistic competence as found in the early version of Chomsky's theory from *Syntactic Structure* (1957). Habermas's account aims at reconstructing the fundamental set of "rule consciousness common to all competent speakers", that enables potential adult speakers to master at least one language (L), that is, to understand and produce sentences that count as well formed in L and to distinguish them from ungrammatical sentences in L (*Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. 14).

Nevertheless, insofar as "linguistic competence" is conceived monologically, it cannot provide an adequate account of speakers engaged in communicative processes. According to Habermas, the competence of the ideal speaker is not limited to the grammatical capacity to handle a language, but also include the ability to establish and understand those modes of communication and pragmatic rules that relate the utterances to reality through which speech becomes possible. In being uttered, a grammatically well-formed sentence implies that it is comprehensible to all competent hearers who can master that language. But this is only one of the universal claims the can be fulfilled by a speech act that, in addition, is situated in connection with *(1)* external reality, the objective world of facts or states of affairs about which once make true or false statements; *(2)* normative reality, "*our*" intersubjectively lived and recognized social world of shared values and norms, roles and rules, in the face of which an act can fit or fail, and are either right or wrong, (legitimate or non-legitimate, justifiable or non-justifiable); and *(3)* internal reality of the speaker's "*own*" subjective world of intentional experiences that can be expressed sincerely or insincerely, truthfully or untruthfully.

Therefore, speakers' participation in language is essentially dialogical and based upon a communicative competence which endows them with basic qualifications of speech and of symbolic roles woven in the intersubjective tapestry of social interactions. Communicative competence is the ability of a speaker oriented to mutual understanding to redeem four kinds of universal validity claims. Habermas contends that the speaker places an utterance in relations to a three-fold reality and posits an implicit vindication of the claims *(1)* that what the speaker states is true, by choosing the proposition in such a way that either its truth-conditions or the existential presupposition of the propositional content hold (thus, the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker); *(2)* that the speaker is right or appropriate by performing a speech act in conformity with recognized normative background (thus, the hearer can agree with the speaker's shared value orientation); and *(3)* that the sepaker is sincere or truthful by expressing his intentions in an accurate, undeceptive or undistorted linguistic self-image (thus the hearer can trust the speaker) (*Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp. 28-9). But, above all, (4) the speaker who produces a grammatically well-formed sentence raises the claim of intelligibility "fulfilled immanently to language"

Briefly put, Habermas requires that the analysis of language be extended below Chomsky's idea of surface grammar, which was supposed to enable a speaker to make well-formed sentences. Chomsky treats phonetic, syntactic and semantic properties of sentences only as an empirical outcome of the "linguistic competence" and, consequently, the pragmatic aspects including an investigation of the conditions for embedding sentences in articulated speech acts was left to a theory of linguistic performance. Habermas disagrees with such a limitation and contends that the use of a sentence in a

situation of possible understanding must fulfill the general presuppositions of communication. Hence, the ability to produce utterances establishes the universal pragmatic features of concrete speech situations which should bridge with generative competencies of speaking and acting subjects.

Habermas is aware that in the light of formal semantics his conceptual distinction between linguistic analysis of sentences and pragmatic analysis of speech actions may appear inadequate or at least problematic. However, he claims that with the shift of the emphasis from reference to truth, the theory of meaning was established as a formal science centered on the relation between a sentence and the state of affairs, between language and the world. Therefore, he suggests that the "ontological turn", initiated by Frege and developed through the early Wittgenstein to Dummet and Davidson, disengages semantics "from the view that the representational function can be clarified on the model of names that designate objects" (*TCA 1*, p. 276, see also *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp. 29-32). In consequence, speakers and hearers understand the meaning of a sentence when they know under what conditions it is true, and, hence, they cannot dissociate the meaning of the sentence from its inherent linguistic relation to the truth-validity of the statement. Correspondingly, they understand the meaning of a word when it becomes clear what contribution the word makes to the truth conditions of the sentence that contains it. The limits of traditional semantics, which developed the representational model, prompted Frege to make the distinction between "the assertoric and interrogative force of assertions or questions and the structure of the propositional sentences employed in these utterances" (*TCA 1*, p. 277). This demarcation opened the door for the extension of the sentential semantics to the formal pragmatics, which

elaborated a theory of speech acts and analyzed the illocutionary force of language. Such performative aspects of speech have been explored by Habermas after the model provided by "ordinary language" philosophers, particularly, the later Wittgenstein, Austin and Searle. But these starting points for his conceptual programme are criticized because they do not generalize "radically enough and do not push through the level of accidental contexts to general and unavoidable presuppositions" (*Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. 8).

A closer look reveals to what extent Habermas is in debt to the premises which inspired his theoretical development. First, Habermas thinks that all considerations gravitating around the construction of formal pragmatics are dominated by the premise of the illocutionary force of speech acts, which can be distinguished from the propositional dimension of language. In this respect, he is sympathetic with the later Wittgenstein's examination of the ways expressions are actually used in everyday language games, though he criticizes Wittgenstein's pragmatic analysis of language for remaining too "particularistic" and for its incapacity to develop properly a complete theory of language games.

Second, the elements of a more general theory are found by Habermas in various writings on the theory of language, which take the notion of speech act as a basic unit. Thus, Austin distinguishes between illocutionary acts, through which the speaker performs an action and establishes the mode of a sentence (statement, promise, command, etc), and perlocutionary acts, through which the speaker produces an effect upon the hearer that he himself cannot foresee. On this view, every speech act is always performed by a speaker as an action with a communicative intent in such a way that the hearer may

understand and accept what the speaker says, and has an illocutionary and propositional component.

Habermas pays special attention to Austin's idea that a person uttering a sentence for reporting or describing an event is performing an action. Furthermore, Austin's distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts allows Habermas to draw his basic conceptual distinction between action oriented to reaching understanding and action oriented to success in a purposive-rational manner. The analysis of the illocutionary force of an utterance points to the validity basis of speech. He argues that "institutionally unbound speech acts owe their illocutionary force to a cluster of validity claims that speakers and hearers have to raise and recognize as justified if grammatical (and thus comprehensible) sentences are to be employed in such a way as to result in successful communication" (*Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. 65). A participant in communication is oriented toward reaching understanding only if in employing well-formed sentences he assesses the three other validity claims in an acceptable way: truth for propositional content, rightness for norms and values, and truthfulness for the intentions expressed. As we have already mentioned above, the three kinds of validity claims configure three distinct modes of using a language: cognitive for objectivated reality ("*the external world*"), interactive for the symbolically prestructured reality of interpersonal relations, cultural values, traditions, institutions, etc ("*our social world*"), and expressive for the internal world of the self (*my "particular inner world*"). Coming to an understanding is defined as the process of reaching agreement among speaking and acting subjects. In the process of communication, grammatical sentences are embedded in three relations to reality by way of validity claims, thereby assuming the corresponding

pragmatic functions of representing facts, establishing interpersonal relations, and expressing one's subjectivity (*TCA 1*, p. 286, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp. 3, 67).

Third, from Searle, Habermas borrows the idea that linguistically mediated interactions of reaching understanding involve the "literal meaning" which explicitly conveys the message communicated by an utterance, what is to be understood. The idea of a speaker's expressing personal intentions "precisely, explicitly and literally" derives from the underlying "principle of expressibility" used by Searle to insure a possibility "in principle for every speech act carried out or capable of being carried out to be specified by a complex sentence" (*Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. 39). In the end, although Habermas does not deny the "literal meaning", he weakens this thesis by emphasizing the implicit stock of knowledge embedded in culture which supplies the participants who enter into the process of reaching mutual understanding with unproblematic, common, background convictions that remains mostly tacit and are assumed to be guaranteed. For instance, Searle has shown that even in simple assertions (e.g. "The cat is on the mat.") and imperative sentences (e.g. "Give me a hamburger!") the truth conditions cannot be completely determined independently of the implicit contextual knowledge that the participants normally regard as trivial or obvious.

Habermas agrees with Searle that this background knowledge is implicit; it is holistically structured and does not stand at our disposition insofar as "we cannot make it conscious and place it in doubt as we please" (*TCA 1*, p. 336). He notes that Wittgenstein similarly points to common sense certainties which escape doubt and are "anchored in all my questions and answers, so anchored that I cannot touch them" (*TCA 1*, p. 336). In this

respect, Searle's literal meaning has to face this layer of "worldview" insights which are "deep-seated" in tacit knowledge and "do not pass the threshold of communicative utterances that can be valid or invalid" (*TCA 1*, p. 337). Naturally, one must be familiar with the taken for granted background, which is already there in every day life, if one is to be able to come to grips with the literal meaning of speech and to act communicatively - that is, to engage in a dialogue in meaningful and effective sense.

In relation to this stock of implicit knowledge, which provides patterns of interpretation linguistically organized and culturally transmitted, Habermas introduces the phenomenological concept of "lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*). Within this ever-present horizon of social action, which bears the hallmark of language and culture, agents interactively negotiate their discursive meanings in every-day conversation and share common beliefs, institutional structures, personality patterns and criteria for success. From this view, Descartes's solitary subject-centered reason, conceived independently of the lifeworld, is just an implausible metaphor. The subjectivist orientation of the Cartesian paradigm and in general the "monological" character of the philosophy of consciousness is again radically challenged by the thesis of historical and cultural variability of thought and action.[52] In Habermas's view, communicative action has two functions. First, by aiming at reaching understanding, it serves to perpetuate and renew the cultural framework of knowledge and traditions and to explain how children internalize through upbringing and social interaction the value orientation of their community and acquire general pre-theoretical, moral and epistemic intuitions which underlie the capacity for agency. Second, by coordinating actions, it provides for social integration as reflected in group solidarity and socialization and contributes to the formation of personal identities.

Habermas admits that cultural values reproduced and transmitted within the life-world do not transcend local boundaries. Hence they do not count as universal in the same way as moral norms. He argues that values are inherently located within the horizon of lifeworld of a specific group or culture and are more plausibly understood within a particular form of life. From this perspective, "the critique of value standards presupposes a shared pre-understanding among participants in the argument" that constitutes the background of the thematized validity claims (*TCA 1, p. 42*). This calls to mind Wittgenstein's idea of "worldview", which, being deep seated in tacit knowledge, remains not questionable and taken for granted by participants in the discursively mediated dispute.[53]

Habermas argues in *Theory of Communicative Action 1*, (part I, chapter 2: "Some Characteristics of the Mythical and the Modern Ways of Understanding the World") that the case for relativism is not conclusive. He thinks that even the critical discussion of values is not possible without hinging on the standards of rationality which provide the basis for argumentation. Through speech acts, the thematized universal validity claims are tested in dialogue by calling into question the comprehensibility of speech-meaning which must be carried by grammatically well-formed propositions, the truth of statements, the rightness of moral norms, and the sincerity of personal expression. Therefore, the particularity and concreteness of "forms of life" are contrasted with the trans-contextual and counterfactual conditions of an ideal speech situation. These are idealizing presuppositions which provide the rational demands to be satisfied to a sufficient degree of approximation in theoretical, practical, and expressive discourses corresponding to the three types of validity claims (of truth, rightness and truthfulness)

that infiltrate the threefold world spheres (the objective, intersubjective, private-subjective).

In sum, here are roughly the three main stages of Habermas's strategy for building the theory of universal pragmatics. They may appear distinct from one another in analysis, but in fact they are closely interrelated in the construction of the theory of communicative action:

1) A speech act in standard form with illocutionary and propositional components is regarded as a social action oriented toward reaching understanding and this is treated as different from a purposive-rational action oriented toward success or the efficient achievement of an end. The double character of a speech act reflects the level of inter-subjectivity upon which the speaker and the hearer must move in order to communicate, and the level of objects about which they come to an understanding. The simplest case occurs when a speaker and hearer are oriented to mutual understanding and have a capacity to take an affirmative or negative attitude toward a validity claim which has been called into question. Such claims thematized in communication have a cognitive character and can be checked. Habermas's thesis is that *"the speaker can illocutionarily influence the hearer and vice-versa, because speech-act-typical commitments are connected with cognitively testable validity claims* - that is, because the reciprocal bounds have rational basis" (*Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. 63).

The undisputed recognition of four types of validity claims, which every competent speaker must observe with every speech act, represents the background consensus of normally functioning language games. In Habermas's formulation,

> the goal of coming to an understanding is to bring about an agreement that
> terminates the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding,

shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another. Agreement
is based on recognition of the corresponding validity claims of
comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness and rightness (*Communication and
the Evolution of Society*, p. 3).

However, consensus can break down or be challenged by one of the participants to the

dialogue. Habermas stresses that acting communicatively *must* raise universal validity

claims that are vindicated or redeemed discursively. These claims are implicit in every

speech act which, in turn, can be contested under the three different aspects of validity.

The hearer could reject completely the utterance of the speaker

by either disputing the *truth* of the proposition asserted in it (or of the
existential presuppositions of its propositional content), or the *rightness* of
the speech act in view of the normative context of utterance (or the
legitimacy of the presupposed context itself), or the *truthfulness* of the
intention expressed by the speaker (that is, the agreement of what is meant
with what is stated) ("An Alternative Way Out of the Philosophy of the
Subject: Communicative versus Subject-Centered Reason", pp. 604-5).

2) The next stage which can be elicited from Habermas's writings refers to a

series of pragmatic or "dialogue-constitutive universals" that communicatively competent

speakers have at their disposal. These universals are intersubjective, "*a priori* linguistic

elements which enable the speaker, in the course of producing a speech act, to reproduce

the general structures of the speech situation" (John Thompson, "Universal Pragmatics"

in *Habermas - Critical Debates*, p. 122). This aspect bears upon the notion of

"communicative competence". First of all, the ability to participate in a conversation

depends on the speaker's ability to perform constative, regulative and expressive speech

acts, which correspond to the three kinds of validity claims, as we have shown already

above. The claims to objective truth are related to an objective world of facts or state of

affairs and are made form a third person perspective (an objectifying discourse of a non-

participant). The claims to normative rightness are corresponding to the intersubjective

or social world of interpersonal relations (which legitimate speech interactions). Finally, the claims to subjective sincerity or truthfulness are associated with the subjective world of private experiences. In this respect, Habermas contends that the performative ability presupposes that the speaker has a mastery of personal pronouns and their derivatives (*I*, *you*, etc.,), "deictic expressions" of space and time and demonstrative pronouns, and performative verbs and certain intentional expressions. The correct usage of such pragmatic universals in conversations defines speakers' communicative ability.

3) The third stage of Habermas's conceptual project asserts that there are idealizing presuppositions which point to an ideal speech situation which is a necessary counterfactual condition yielded by everyday communication processes. From this angle, if understanding breaks down, we can move to a level of discourse and argumentation where we seek to explicitly warrant the validity claim that has been responsible for the failure of communication and to distinguish between a genuine and a deceptive agreement. The ideal case occurs only when the force that prevails in rational deliberation is the force of the ***better argument*** alone. This means that justification process should be not hindered by external and internal constraints and implies a symmetrical distribution of chances to select and employ communicative, constative, representative and regulative speech-acts. These are the prerequisites of an ideal speech situation which describes in a counterfactual way an "ideal-type" for a rational use of language. Habermas maintains that participants in communicative action are, in the first place, oriented to reach agreement. This implies the possibility of a dialogue governed by sincerity, rightness and truth under conditions of an intersubjectively comprehensible language. However, he seems aware that such conditions are unlikely or improbably met

in many historical and cultural contexts, when judgment is coerced by force or strategic manipulation of others people as mere means. Habermas describes such linguistic modes which have lost their genuine communicative intent as "parasitical" on the use of language oriented toward understanding. For instance, speech is distorted when people are primarily driven by power and self-interest derived from an instrumental rationality and are engaged in strategic or purposive action, which is narrowly focussed on success and efficiency.

Though the major cognitivist thesis Habermas advances is that whenever validity claims are disputed and even may break off communication, they are unavoidable presupposition of argumentative action and are built in the general structure of any communicative action oriented toward reaching understanding. The point is that no dispute is beyond rational argumentation. Therefore, validity claims are redeemable in principle not only in constative propositions, but are also implicit in practical disputes (either moral or legal) as well as in controversies on aesthetic judgements. A rational consensus on objectifying representations, normative matters and expressive arts is to be attained under the conditions of an ideal speech situation.

It seems to me that the questions that could challenge this idea of rational argumentation driven only by the better argument are what is an argument, in the first place, and what makes an argument better or preferable to others? The fact of the matter is that what constitutes "the better argument" may be rationally arguable or at least negotiated in empirical situations. For such cases, if Habermas's conceptual project would be interpreted as having a descriptive and not just a normative character, one may contest the presupposition of a noncoercive and undistorted argumentation allegedly set

in every day pre-theoretical communicative action. It is debatable whether or not the aspect revealed above may bring Habermas's universal pragmatics to bear upon an implausible idealization of speakers comparable in some respects with the subject-centered-reason he wants to abandon for good. Admittedly, the counterfactual presupposition represents a kind of "ideal type" for what should be the case in perfectly rational situations with perfect rational agents but such conditions are never fully met when they are tested in discourse. Habermas clearly speaks of "discourse" when the counterfactual presuppositions of an ideal speech situation are satisfied to a sufficient degree of approximation and "the meaning of the problematic validity claim forces participants to suppose that a rationally motivated agreement can *in principle* be achieved" *(my emphasis, TCA 1*, p. 42). The idealizing prerequisite is embedded in the formula "*in principle*", which entails that this might be the case *only if* the argumentation process would be "long enough" and conducted "openly enough" (whatever these expression may suggest). Habermas is aware that the claim to universality does not consistently apply to moral values, which are candidates for interpretations made by those affected by them, and are used to describe and normatively regulate common interest (if occasions arise). However, the fact that they may receive intersubjective recognition does not imply that they will get general assent within a culture and hence, the arguments that justify standards of values does not satisfy the condition of discourse (see *TCA 1*, p. 20).

I will later return to this issue regarding different controversial readings of Habermas's concept of ideal speech and I will argue for what seems to me an interpretation consistent with Habermas's conception of discourse. But before that we must clarify the implications for the universal conditions of understanding of his program

of philosophical justifications of norms as provided by his theory of the discourse ethics.

6.3) DISCOURSE ETHICS AND THE UNIVERSAL CONDITION OF REACHING CONSENT

.   The aim of this section is to scrutinize Habermas's conception of discourse ethics insofar as the issue of moral consent points to a way of addressing the more general concern of how understanding can be cross-culturally possible. In this respect, I will emphasize in what sense the idea of rationality has to do with the question regarding the possibility of reaching a universally motivated consensus as carried through Habermas's theory of discourse by developing the argument in three inter-related steps. *(A)* I will begin with a presentation of the idea of discourse in general, then I will focus on the theory of discourse ethics in connection with what makes norms applicable. *(B)* Next, I will show how Habermas differs from Kant in matters of moral justification by comparing their arguments in a dialogical manner. *(C)* Finally, I will explore the postconventional status of the discourse in conditions of a growing gap between the traditional forms of life and the critical reflective modes of argumentation. I will contrast Winch's view on cultures with Habermas's account of traditions and I will then describe the three split moments of reason and their implications upon the discourse in the process of cultural differentiation in modern times. This theme leads us to Habermas's attempt to redeem the project of modernity.

I will proceed now on the three lines of discussion mentioned above.

(A) The theory of the redemption of truth claims and normative rightness claims belongs to Habermas's conception of discourse, which is analytically distinct from though theoretically related to the theory of universal pragmatics described above. The same

methodology of reconstruction operates in both, but the discourse ethics is more narrowly focused than a communication theory on the validity claims of rightness and the possibility of reaching consensus in normative matters. The medium that can test hypothetically the recognizability or justifiability of a norm is called by Habermas *practical discourse* or *discourse ethics*, that is defined as "the form of argumentation in which claims to normative rightness are made thematic" but which open the possibility to achieve a grounded consensus between all those affected by the norm under debate (*TCA 1*, p. 19). Although Habermas maintains that universal validity claims are thematized in general by the action of reaching understanding, he distinguishes between "naive" and "reflective" forms of thematization of validity claims. This delimitation is matched by the differentiation between everyday communicative practices and specialized forms of argumentation developed in "expert cultures". The term *discourse*, which applies to the reflective forms of communication, is typical for the latter. Whether theoretical or practical, discourses are ideal forms of argumentation, which should be understood as "islands in the sea of practice", improbable because of their idealizing character and yet possible since they are elicited by everyday appeal to validity claims (see "Discourse Ethics", in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 1991, p. 106, see also "Questions and Counterquestion", in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed: R. Bernstein, 1985). This means that the formal and counterfactual basis of speech acts, which Habermas abstractly elaborates in his universal pragmatics, becomes part of the idea of *"discourse"*. Considering the propositional content of constative utterances, the rational agreement between speakers redeeming the claims to truth points to a consensualist theory of truth (which remains controversial as we shall notice later). Considering the practical claims

to normative rightness and appropriateness, Habermas faces the Kantian question of what makes norms applicable. His reply is provided by the discourse ethics which attempts to specify the conceptual basis for normative consent to be reached by all those affected by the norms under debate. He says,

> in practical discourse we thematize one of the validity claims that underlie speech as its *validity basis*. In action oriented to reaching understanding validity claims are "always already" implicitly raised. These universal claims (to comprehensibility of the symbolic expressions, the truth of the propositional content, the truthfulness of the intentional expressions, and the rightness of he speech act with respect to existing norms, and values) are set in the general structures of possible communication (*Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. 97).

Whenever and wherever there is to be a consensual communicative action, a "gentle but obstinate, a never silent although seldom redeemed claim to reason" can be located in these validity claims (see idem). For instance, in cases of conflict regarding what is right to do, consensus can be reached between rational persons who can justify all their actions with reference to existing normative contexts. The only concern is to judge the dispute from a moral point of view and to judge it in a consensual manner. Norms under debate which are acceptable to all people who are affected by their consequences deserve general recognition.

Whereas cognitive interpretations, moral expectations and evaluations are overlapping in everyday communication, Habermas's discourse ethics is relevant for a broader theory of communication which is built on the supposition of rational understanding. Provided that in conversation an agreement or disagreement must be based on reasons, then assessment of the grounds of validity claims is not a function of force, habit or custom (as the relativist yields to the skeptic), but a rationality problem. Therefore, when dealing with the social practices of justification, discourse ethics may

overcome the relativist troubles rooted in the scientific descriptivism of Winchian social science, and could accomplish the philosophical role of "guardian of rationality" for normative contexts of justification of norms. In some conditions, conflicts in the regulative field of social interactions may be a sign of a disruption of normative consensus. In such cases a new consensual balance can be reached by the intersubjective recognition either by the restoration of the old validity claim that became controversial or by assuring a new validity claim. Habermas contends that agreement of individuals regarding a norm that equally affects them expresses their "common will" ("Discourse Ethics", p. 67). Metaphorically put, that means that if we may see a pluralistic world, at least we all look through the same window of a generalizable interest. And for this reason his ethic may suggest a way out of the Hellenistic fragmentation of reason and the cynicism of our times.

We have seen that Habermas distinguishes three different world relations and validity claims that differentiate rationality in three values spheres. For instance, the world of objects refers to objective relations described in factual judgements where seeking for truth reveals a cognitive-instrumental dimension of rationality; the social world formed by social interactions (which raise the "other mind" issue), assesses the validity of values of actions in terms of normative rightness, based upon a moral-practical rationality; the self's world incorporates subjective relations and psychological experiences defined by aesthetic-expressive rationality.

A possible question is how can a new balance between the divided moments of reason (cognitive-instrumental and moral-practical) be reestablished in lifeworld communication at the discourse level? The fragmentation of reason raises the complex

problem of mediation between separated value spheres. In this respect, Habermas's answer makes reference to his recurrent theme of the three world relations correlated with the three dimensions of rationality and their corresponding types of speech acts (constative, regulative, expressive). His position is that an understanding is rendered possible where cognitive interpretations, moral expectations and evaluation overlap in everyday communication. Validity claims are set in the structure of any possible conversation between a speaker and a hearer who have the elementary capacity to redeem and vindicate such claims in speech acts and to challenge them by take an affirmative or negative stance toward them. The eventual agreement brings about "the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another" (*Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. 3). Therefore, Habermas suggests that in empirical and contingent lifeworld situations of conflict and disagreement, we have to move to the linguistic level of the discourse and of the unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation in order to warrant the validity claims that have been responsible for the breakdown of communication. If there is a prevailing force that should show us the paths between the horns of the dilemma of "gods and demons", that is the force of the "better argument".

By stressing the dialogical character of communicative rationality, Habermas escapes the monological perspective of the philosophy of consciousness typified by subject-centered reason. Action oriented to communication is treated as a kind of social interaction designed for reaching agreement on the rational basis of the common recognition of the corresponding validity claims inherently implicit in every speech act. Hence it is treated distinctly from the purposive action centered on "success" or the

"efficiency" in the achievement of ends. Rationality should play the role of a practical guide helping us to choose how shall we live and to cut our way through the labyrinth of the modern lifeworld. In this respect, Habermas considers there still is a job to do for philosophy as a guardian of rationality which should act as a mediator between specialized domains. This role is more necessary now when we have forgotten the insight of the totality of culture as shown by the conceptions of Kant and Hegel. The modernization of society led to the fragmentation of three distinct dimensions of rationality: the positive science, the post-traditional ethics, and the autonomous art and institutionalized art criticism. Although many claim that these segmented areas can manage without recourse to philosophical justification, Habermas believes that the very existence of the gaps posed by cultural differentiation poses problems of mediation between separated value spheres. In relation to this aspect there arise two kinds of questions. One the one hand, the question is about the possibility of a balance between separated moments of reason in the horizon of the impoverished traditions of the lifeworld. The challenge is how can we rejoin, without altering their regional rationality, the isolated the scientific moral and aesthetic discourses resulting from the ever-deepening division of labor. In other terms, this problem refers to the inter-relationships between the three fields of expert cultures typifying esoteric and abstract forms of thought which speak intricately about the process of everyday communication. In this respect, Habermas assumes that instead of playing the presumptuous role of an arbiter of cultures, philosophy can be a translator standing in and mediating between the everyday world and the autonomous sectors of cultural modernity.

In the context of Habermas's ambitious attempt to redeem the project of

modernity, discourse ethics is meant to offer a weak transcendental program of justification of norms that can be formulated in terms of universal pragmatic analysis of communicative action in which those involved are oriented to validity claims. In this respect, Habermas defends a cognitivist approach to ethics against the skeptical tactics of metaethics and aims at laying the universal ground for answering the question "in what sense and in what way moral commands and norms can be justified" ("Discourse Ethics", p. 57). In consequence, a useful question to consider in the construction of discourse ethics is to what extent Habermas's project of a general theory of the justification of norms begins from and differentiates itself from the Kantian *a priori* reconstruction of practical reason. To answer, I will outline a comparison between Habermas and Kant.

(B) Both Kant and Habermas ask what makes moral law applicable to real people living in historical and concrete worlds. The first responds in terms of the categorical imperative and appeals to transcendental justification. The latter maintains that the discourse ethics rests on two basic assumptions: "(a) that the normative claims to validity have cognitive meaning and can be treated *like* claims to truth and (b) that justification of norms and commands requires that a real discourse be carried out and thus cannot occur in a strictly monological form, i.e., in the form of a hypothetical process of argumentation occurring in the individual mind" ("Discourse Ethics", p. 68). So, he preserves some transcendental character of moral norms, but in a weaker version which surrenders the *a priori* justification of Kantian moral laws and, instead, grounds them in linguistic communication. Discursive contexts presuppose certain inescapable presuppositions o arguments which make possible the derivability of moral rules. Habermas suggests that arguments are called transcendental if they deal with competence which make possible

the engendering of discourses. Thus, the difference between Kant and Habermas can be sketched as follows: On the one hand, Kant limited morality to the subclass of justifiable normative judgements and to the problems of right or just actions that can be settled on the basis of rationally motivated agreement. His notion of practical reason is deontological, cognitivist, formalist and universalist and serves to justify actions in terms of valid norms and to justify the validity of norms in terms of *a priori* principles worthy of recognition. On the other hand, although Habermas holds that normative rightness must be regarded as a claim to validity that is analogous to a truth claim and hence meets Kantian claims half-way, he replaces the categorical imperative with moral argumentation within discourse ethics. On his view, validity is based upon the achievement of agreement in the process of communicative action.

Nevertheless, since Habermas still accepts the *principle of universalization* as a rule of argumentation his discourse ethics shares with Kantian practical reason the universalist feature. However Habermas does not refer to an *a priori* structure. One who participates in argumentation is implicitly committed to pragmatic presuppositions that have normative content (otherwise, as we showed above, one is led to performative contradictions). The moral principles can be derived from the content of these presuppositions whose validity is beyond the context of their concrete applicability. However, the discourse ethics tries to overcome much too narrow limitation to theory of duty and responsibility and prefers a move to the side of moral tradition merely concerned with the theory of good, emphasizing the common weal. In this respect, Habermas learns from Hegel's critique of Kant to make a distinction between the ethical questions, which refer to the value of the good life, and morality, which is centered on the value of justice.

Ethical agreement is not a recognition of the universal validity which is aimed for moral judgements (that is, for *everyone)*, but, at most, an acknowledgment of individual and group preferences regarding values and life choices within particular historical and cultural contexts.

In sum, beyond its affinities with Kant's moral theory of justification, Habermas departs from Kantian morality in some major respects. Discourse ethics gives up the dichotomy between intelligible (duty, free will) and phenomenal (subjective motives, inclinations, political and social institutions, etc. This unbridgeable gap becomes in discourse ethics mere tension, which is a factual outcome of the normative force of counter-factual prerequisites of speech in everyday communication. Hence, the quasi-transcendentality of validity claims as reflected in idealizing counterfactuals of speech and action is definitively preferred to the Kantian nomological approach. Habermas prefers to explain reaching understanding about the generalizability of interests as the result of an intersubjectively mounted public discourse. "There are no shared structures preceding the individual except the universals of language use". (Habermas, "Morality and Ethical Life", in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 1991, p. 203). Furthermore, "facts of pure reason" become impotent and the effectiveness of the "ought" is not an *a priori* categorical imperative, but simply a matter of experience.

Habermas introduces the principle of universalization *(U)* as a bridging principle that enable us to reach agreement on practical matters. However its justification is not an *a priori* "ought", but is derived from general presupposition of argumentation and the universal condition for validity which may be checked out across cultures. A norm is justifiable provided that

(U) All affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its
general observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of
everyone's interests (and these consequences are preferred to those known
alternative possibilities for regulations) ("Discourse Ethics", p. 65).

If this principle of universalization assumes requires a norm be "equally good" for every

moral agent, the principle of discourse ethics *(D)* establishes the intersubjective ground

for the validation of a norm in terms of approval of all those affected and necessarily

involved in its rational debate.

(D) Only those norms can be valid that meet (or could meet) with approval
of all affected in their capacity *as participants in a practical discourse"*
("Discourse Ethics", p. 66).

This principle *(D)* has a procedural character referring to the discursive redemption of

normative claims to validity and not to substantive guidelines. "Practical discourse is not

a procedure for generating justified norms but a procedure for testing the validity of

norms that are being proposed and hypothetically considered for adoption" ("Discourse

Ethics", p. 103).

If we admit that there is a set of reasons the participants in discourse may

commonly agree upon, then justification and assessment is not a function of habit and

custom but becomes a question of rationality. Henceforth everyone disputing a norm

must provide a good reason for doing so. Yet the moral decision is to be based on an

unrestrained competition for "better arguments" and in this light and should be open to

criticism and eventual reorientation or change of beliefs and actions. At this point arises

what Habermas calls "the ideal speech situation" that is described by Habermas as an

implausible logical fiction applicable in counter-factual way, though its meaning may

vary as it is used in different contexts. For instance, we may find three semantic

connotations of this expression. *(1)* It is presented sometimes as a form of ideal

communication that approximates an ideal-type for the improbable conditions of reaching rationally motivated agreement through argumentative speech. *(2)* In an earlier analysis which still holds, it points to the reconstruction of "general symmetry" conditions in regard to their rational competence that every competent speaker must fulfill adequately in order to be able to participate in argumentation. *(3)* Finally, this is an idea Habermas borrows from Apel who wants to point out an "unrestricted communication community" that implies, perhaps, that rationally motivated agreement can be reached in principle only if the communication process continues long enough and is open enough to force the better argument alone to the fore (see "Discourse Ethics", p. 88; *TCA 1*, p. 42).

Habermas claims that his participants to discourse are not Kantian intelligible characters, but real and complex human beings who are driven not only by the search for truth. In order to neutralize their empirical space-time limitations to which they are inherently subjected, the "idealizing proviso" establishes a reasonable expectation that counterfactual conditions can at least be approximated to some satisfactory degree. As a matter of fact, the rules of discourse are inescapable presuppositions and not mere conventions rounded by traditions.

The presuppositions themselves become obvious as necessary rules of the game of argumentation in the case when one is caught in a performative contradiction. Nevertheless, such presuppositions that cannot be avoided or substituted are not justified in the strong sense of Kantian transcendental deduction. They are established by being accepted as a fact of reason in setting out to argue for or against a validity claim called into question. In this process one must appeal to the competence in speech and action that rests on intuitive pre-understanding, which makes possible the participation to

argumentation process and consensus that can be attained discursively. Here is

Habermas's example ("Discourse Ethics", pp. 90-1):

(1) "Using good reasons, I finally convinced H that p."

By this statement the speaker by using good reasons, convinced the hearer to accept the

truth claim connected with the assertion that p is true. The emphasis is on the idea of

good reason which must be compelling not only for that particular hearer, but for every

subject. That is why it would be nonsensical to say

(2) "Using lies, I finally convinced H that p";

Statement *(2)* can be revised by emphasizing the linguistic interaction and belief

formation,

(3) "Using lies, I finally talked H into believing that p"

It implies that H has been motivated to believe the p is true under the conditions that do

not permit the formation of convictions because lies cannot be good arguments and

therefore contradict the pragmatic presuppositions of argumentation that hold for all

instances. Contradiction is evident if one defends the truth of statement *(2)* and is aware

that one's conviction is based on the false beliefs induced by lies. As Habermas puts it,

"for as soon as he cites a reason for the truth of *(2)*, he enters a process of argumentation

and has thereby accepted the presupposition, among other, that he can never *convince* an

opponent of something by resorting to lies" ("Discourse Ethics", p. 90). Talking one into

believing that a statement p is possible in some rhetorical contexts, which are not based

on the pursuit of truth but in persuasion, though in such cases the justification of p is

weak and fails the test at the critical examination of propositional or normative content of

that statement. We may contrive some shorter examples such as,

(4) "Stalin excluded person *A, B, C,...* from the vote and obtained the unanimity" (as he actually did by killing the opponents)".

In such a case silencing the voices of those who are affected by the law, Stalin cannot convince anyone that a unanimous vote is justified as an expression of reasoned agreement and the conviction to adopt the law rest not on consensus motivated by reasons but imposed through terror.

An even simpler case of performative contradiction is this:

(5) "I don't think".

The inconsistency of the situation is evident since, by uttering the constative statement *(5)*, it is inevitable to do exactly what is being denied, namely to think.

Such a form of the argument is applied (by Apel) to the Cartesian *cogito* by reconstructing the judgement as speech act as follows.

(6) "I do not exist (here and now)"

One uttering *(6)* ineluctably makes an existential assumption that

(7) "I exist (here and now)"

In conclusion, the statements *(1)-(7)* prove that "a performative contradiction occurs when a constative speech act *k(p)* rests on noncontingent presuppositions whose propositional content contradicts the asserted proposition *p*" ("Discourse Ethics", p 80).

The universal foundations for the pragmatic justification of discourse ethics are set by Habermas's definition of the universalization principle as a rule of argumentation which backs up moral deliberation of norms within the community of all those whose lives are affected by them. So, the idea of justification of norms has nothing to do with transcendental deduction but depends on identification and observance of general and

unavoidable pragmatic presuppositions of argumentation that have a normative content

and thereby function in the form of discourse rules ("Discourse Ethics", pp. 96-7). In this

respect, we are urged to distinguish between "is" and "ought" in the form of contrast

between actual communication practice and ideal speech situation. The first bears upon

the historical and cultural contingencies in a real community of speakers, the latter can be

attached to lifeworld via counter-factual constraints.

Discourse ethics is a general theory of justification of norms which seek for the

universal validity that *everyone* is bound to agree on, and hence the particularity and

concreteness of Wittgenstein's and Winch's "forms of life" is contrasted with the context-

transcendence of counterfactual conditions of speech. Habermas accepts other conceptual

alternatives for expressing "our" cognitive achievements. He believes that it is not

important whether we use the notions of "form of life" and "language game" or we use

other expressions such as "practice", linguistically mediated interaction", "convention",

"cultural background", "tradition" and the like. What counts is the fact that these

"commonsensical ideas" attained a status of basic concepts in epistemology.

("Communicative versus Subject Centered Reason", p. 605, "Philosophy as Stand-In and

Interpreter", p. 9). However, in the light of internal validity conditions deducible from

Habermas's perspective,

> Winch's arguments are too weak to uphold the thesis that inherent to every
> linguistically articulated world-view and to every cultural form of life
> there is an incommensurable concept of rationality, but his strategy of
> argumentation is strong enough to set off the justified claim to universality
> in behalf of the rationality that gained expression in the modern
> understanding of the world from an uncritical self-interpretation of the
> modern world that is fixated on knowing and mastering external nature
> (*TCA 1*, p. 66).

In Winch's view, the limits of the world for the members of the same culture are

given by the limits of their language. They cannot step out of the horizon of their own life. Consequently, any attempt at understanding is also possible only from within after a mandatory cultural assimilation to the framework of the worldview where the members of a language community come to an agreement regarding the main themes of their private and social life. In addition, insofar as each culture establishes through the mediation of language a relation with reality, the concepts of "reasonable" and "irrational", "real" and "unreal", "true" and "false" make sense only within the linguistic system. On these grounds, Winch concludes that anthropologists (like Evans-Pritchard), who speak about the superiority of our pattern of rationality by pressing the demand for consistency over the natives further than the natives would naturally recognize, are in fact guilty of misunderstanding and commit a category mistake. We have seen before that such arguments convey for a Winchian social scientist an insurmountable dilemma which could be briefly formulated as follows: when we come across a set of what appears irrational beliefs is there merely a misunderstanding rooted into a defective translation? This difficulty disseminates in a wide range of subsequent questioning: Since rationality consists in the appropriate use of reason to make free choices in the best possible way, only for an individual capable of deliberative behavior and rational criticism, does it make sense to be irrational. Were we to acknowledge some apparently irrational beliefs, what should we understand and what should be our attitude toward them? Should we then explain how irrational beliefs came to be held? Or, instead, should we understand beliefs more charitably by asking ourselves if what appears to be irrational may be interpreted otherwise in its privately motivated or culturally justified context? After all, are there alternative and equally legitimated standards of rationality? If not, can one

translate between different linguistic frameworks or, else, what can one reasonably do in order to understand other people?

Habermas finds Winch justified, up to a point. There are reasons to insist upon the historical configurations of customary practices, group memberships, cultural patterns of interpretation, forms of socialization, and to adopt a participative attitude from within the totality of a form of life. Nonetheless, understanding must go beyond empirical mechanisms and must be conceived in terms of problem solutions open to systematic evaluations in light of universal validity claims: **propositional truth** for the describing the state of affairs or the objective world (the common perspective of a third person or nonparticipant), **normative rightness** for the common social world (which gives legitimacy to linguistic intersubjective interactions between participants in communication actions), **subjective truthfulness** for the expressions of the private world (which refers to speakers' intentions and aesthetic harmony as subjective mirror surfaces for normative expectations and certain facts or how states of affairs and valid norms and values look from the perspective of the first person) and comprehensibility as every action oriented to reaching understanding can be emphasized as a common negotiation of meanings that is instersubjectively recognized. Any cultural tradition makes available concepts to designate the three correlated worlds (objective, social, and subjective), must permit the necessary differentiation of validity claims (of truth, rightness and truthfulness) and correspondingly stimulate the differentiation of attitudes (objectifying, norm-conformative and expressive). Therefore, in order to set the conceptual framework of background convictions for such processes of coming communicatively to an understanding based on mutual agreement, Habermas prefers the phenomenological

connotation of "lifeworld". He says "the world concept and the corresponding validity claims provide the formal scaffolding with which those acting communicatively order problematic contexts of situations, that is, those requiring agreement, in their lifeworld, which is proposed as unproblematic" (*TCA 1*, p. 70). On this view, Winch is vulnerable to a critique based upon the procedural concept of communicative rationality which suggests that forms of life are an equilibrated inter-play of the cognitive, moral and aesthetic aspects. Habermas assumes that, in a long run, "it can be shown that decentration of world understanding and the rationalization of the lifeworld are necessary conditions for an emancipatory society" (*TCA 1*, p. 74)

In this context, considering the distinction we previously made in subsection 6.12 between conventional and post-conventional modes of communicative action we can refer to the parallel contrast between dogmatic-naive and critical-reflective forms of argumentation. In the first case, what counts as good reasons may be fixed by the cultural traditions of a given society and the validity may be regarded as beyond dispute. Unlike Winch, Habermas thinks that arguments based on force or are a matter of traditions slavishly followed are instances of irrationality. In such cases rational presuppositions are satisfied to a sufficient degree of approximation in theoretical, practical, and explicative discourses corresponding to the three types of validity claims that infiltrate the threefold world spheres. After all, discourse is the reflective form of linguistic practice associated with an open-ended and critical form of argumentation which is developed in modern societies.

As traditional forms of life are gradually dissolved in the process of social modernization, the disappearance of "value-imbued cosmologies and the disintegration of

the sacred canopies" leaves a gap behind as we are confronted with new premises about the question "how should I live?" ("Philosophy as Stand in Interpreter", p. 1). The collapse of religious and metaphysical worldviews inevitably leads to the disenchantment of the world and to the tragic condition that we are unwillingly left with a void.[54] We must face the challenge of the growing social complexity and irreducible pluralism of modern life which has gradually eroded the traditional beliefs people use to lived by. In modern societies, modes of communicative action are related to critical forms of argumentation and rationalization processes. Therefore the problem of rationality which has been traditionally associated with the hard core of humanity is explicitly tied to dilemmas of modernity and consequently implies our ability to negotiate our way through the "maze" of the modernization of society (consisting in the development of the conjoined areas of science with its technological application, market economies, formalized legal systems, bureaucratic organization, ethical codes, high art and mass culture, and so on). Hence, in a world which was robbed of the enchantment of the religious and metaphysical imagination, cultural custom is stripped of its power to influence the formation of personal identity and the structuring of beliefs systems. The postconventional communicative action is associated with open ended and critical debate based on reasons, not on force or unquestioned authority of a tradition as Winch has proclaimed. Therefore, rationality is tied to communicative competence which provides for meaningfully participation in discursive interactions. Understanding can be reached by redeeming validity claims of propositional truth, normative rightness, subjective truthfulness and aesthetic harmony geared to intersubjective recognition. Habermas says that, "this communicative rationality recalls the idea of logos, inasmuch as it brings along

with it the connotations of a noncoercive force of a discourse" ("Communicative versus Subject-Centered Reason", p. 607). Thus, the participants can overcome their at first subjectively biased views and reach a rationally motivated agreement which is expressed by a decentered understanding of the world.

(C) Finally, we may conclude these considerations with two discussions which will emphasize the postconventional character of the idea of discourse. The first one will refer to discourse in terms of rationally motivated consensus which is made possible by argumentation that come sufficiently close to satisfying idealizing presuppositions. The second one will present the specialization of discourse as a consequence of the process of modernization of society. And this will require a more general approach to Habermas's redemption of the project of modernity.

1) In *Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas uses the term *discourse* for forms of argumentation that come closer to satisfy the "exacting conditions" and in which participants are conceptually required to suppose that a rationally motivated consensus on the universal validity of contested claims is possible in principle, provided that the debate is critically open and would be carried long enough. Habermas singles out the claims to propositional truth and normative rightness as being conceptually linked to the idea of *universal* agreement on the *universal* validity of what is agreed (see *TCA 1*, p 388, *TCA 2*, pp. 400-1). Thus, the term *universal* applies to validity claims in two senses: *everyone* must agree on them and what is agreed is valid for *all* participants in discourse. To this extent, this idea is an idealizing presupposition which is unavoidable for certain forms of argumentation embodied in theoretical discourses (that thematize claims to propositional truth) and practical discourses (that thematize claims to moral validity).

In particular, Habermas's discourse ethics is built upon a middle ground where the inadequacies of universalist moralities are corrigible through the concrete needs and empirical claims of the lifeworld. However, rationality in practical matters does not have privileged access to particular moral truths. It cannot also absolve anyone of moral responsibility for making reasonable choices in the worlds we live. In the long run, Habermas crosses the border to social and political philosophy saying a last farewell to Kant. His theory of the rationalization of society which give legitimacy to a normative framework in a broader sociologic perspective implies a commitment to make a better world by assuming the great liabilities of our time. This remark leads us to the second discussion.

2) Habermas uses the term discourse for critical and reflective forms of argumentation as found in modern societies in contrast with "naive" forms of argumentation from conventional forms of life driven by custom and habit. He argues that in the process of social development, the fragmentation of traditional reason that leads to the appearance of "expert cultures" requires specialized pragmatic, ethical and moral discourses. These sociological connotations show the connection between the idea of discourse and his interest in redeeming the project of modernity. My exposition on this issue will emphasize the emancipatory aspects and the paradoxical effect of the Enlightenment ideals. But, in the first place, it will help us to understand the status and the role of discourses in the context of Habermas's response to the complex moral dilemmas posed by differentiation processes in our time.

Enlightenment thinkers formulated an optimistic and ambitious project of modernization of society which consisted in the effort to develop for the enrichment of

everyday life the related expert fields of objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art. In this respect, Habermas explicitly draws from Weber's idea that this cultural separation consists in a differentiation of substantive reason typical of religious or metaphysical world-views, which was first implied by Kant's concept of formal rationality, and relies on a "belief in a procedural rationality and in its ability to give credence to our views in the three areas of objective knowledge, moral-practical insight, and aesthetic judgement" ("Philosophy as Stand in Interpreter", p. 4, "Modernity - An Incomplete Project", in *Postmodernism - A Reader*, 1993, p. 103). The resulting specialized domains of thought inherently determined a division of labor in splitting fields of competence and responsibilities and consequently raise the problem of mediation between the compartments of reason. In this respect, Richard Peterson remarks in his recent book *Democratic Philosophy and the Politics of Knowledge* (1996), that "embodied rationality has to be conceived in terms of social practices, in particular specialized practices" (p. 155).[55]

Habermas rests his critical arguments on extensive sociological and ethnographical evidence provided by social scientists from Durkheim and Weber to Mead and Parsons, and from Marx and Lukacs to Horkheimer and Adorno. Such theoretical and empirical contributions are grounded in an understanding of the social character of the rationalization processes and are dialectically reevaluated within the comprehensive synthesis of Habermas's complex view of communicative rationality. Nevertheless, he admits many times how much his view is in debt to Max Weber's perspective on modernity. In "Modernity - An Incomplete Project" (in *Postmodernism - A Reader*, 1993, pp. 103-4) he appeals to Weber's view of cultural modernity as characterized by the

fragmentation of reason expressed in religion and metaphysics into the autonomous

spheres of science, morality and art. Habermas finds that with this cultural separation,

areas of competencies are inherently split. The resulting division of labor further expands

the distance between experts and the larger public. Thus, questions of knowledge, of

justice and moral determination or of taste will fall under specific registers of validity:

truth, rightness, authenticity and beauty.

The point is that the differentiation of cognitive-instrumental, moral practical and

aesthetic-expressive processes is associated to the Enlightenment project of developing

the field of objective scientific reasoning, universal concept of morality and law, and

autonomous art and art criticism according to their inner logic. Enlightenment thinkers

like Condorcet promoted optimistic scenarios regarding our unlimited ability to control

nature on our behalf and to understand the world and the self. They believed in the

progressive emancipation of mankind through the evolution of civilization which leads to

the "rational organization of everyday social life" ("Modernity - An Incomplete Project",

p. 103), and had no doubt that the reign of morality, justice and equality would provide

the institutional premises for the happiness of human beings. Habermas observed that our

century shattered that optimistic dream. From here, he raises a legitimate question

"should we try to hold on to the *intentions* of the Enlightenment, feeble as they may be,

or should we declare the entire project of modernity a lost cause?" ("Modernity - An

Incomplete Project", p. 104).

The emancipatory project of cultural modernity set the universalist premises for

the triumph of instrumental rationality which was obsessed by the success and efficiency

of purposive action, but the result was not universal human freedom as a progressive

morality but hidden and grotesque forms of repression and terror. Hence, Weber points to unresolved tensions and "aporias" of modernity and warns that its optimistic emancipatory scenarios were proven to be mere illusions, since, ironically, instrumental rationality leads to the imprisonment of human being into an "*iron cage*" of an impoverishing bureaucratic system which suppresses civic liberty and the individual's pursuit of happiness.

As Habermas observes, Weber detects the sign of a relativist age in the return of a new polytheism, what else if not an indication of a pluralist tendency: the conflicts of gods takes on the depersonified and objectifying form of antagonisms among irreducible values and life. And Habermas concludes on the negative result of a rationalized world that become meaningless. He quotes the inspired words of Weber, "over these gods and their struggles it is fate - and certainly not any 'science' - that holds sway" (*TCA 1*, pp. 246-7).

However, the idea of the selection of the appropriate means to achieve some preestablished end seems to be too problematic even in Weber's eyes, to preclude the idea of multiplicity.[56] The question becomes how could one set out the preferable goals and determine the most reliable choices among the means available to reach those goals within a particular society? Obviously, the grounding of the guiding norms of different societies and the understanding of different forms of life is only possible by appealing to different kinds of rationalities. Of course, we must understand whatever logical link there exists between mean and ends from a standpoint of a generally recognizable pattern of efficient behavior within that specific cultural and linguistic framework. And Weber concludes somewhat skeptically that we must choose between the "gods and demons"

alive within our cultural world, we decide to follow.

This idea is echoed Adorno and Horkheimer's tragic diagnosis of the recent history of world wars and holocaust which display an unprecedented brutality and terror. They explain this development as a paradox of rationalization which results from the negative dialectic of Enlightenment unfolding within industrialized societies obsessed by technological efficiency at the expense of values.

Habermas shares with the critical theory the idea that one-dimensional purposive reason deforms and encroaches the lifeworld and alienates people from everyday life. But he went further and distinguishes the rationality of the system, which is purposive and driven by efficiency, from the rationality of the lifeworld, which is inherently communicative. In cases of distorted communication or the prevalence of instrumental thinking, he speaks about pathologies and colonization of the lifeworld whose integrity is endangered and eventually collapses giving rise to legitimation of aberrant and alienating social behaviors and bureaucratic institutions which annihilate the autonomy of individuals. In this view, according to Wellmer, "the paradox of rationalization would be that a rationalization of the life-world was the *precondition* and the *starting point* for a process of systemic rationalization and differentiation, which then has become more and more autonomous vis-a-vis the normative constraints embodied in the life-world, until in the end the epistemic imperatives begin to instrumentalize the life-world and threaten to destroy it" ("Reason, Utopia and the Dialectic of Enlightenment", in *Habermas and Modernity*, 1985, p. 56).

Habermas understands that Weber's undecided resolution tragically pushes us to a sort of relativism which is the hallmark of our age. However, he thinks that the remedy is

still to hold on to the emancipatory intentions of the Enlightenment and for this reason he decides to save the project of modernity in a revised version. He suggests that we should not repeat the mistakes made by surrealist revolt against modern aesthetics. First, emancipatory effect does not fallow a destructured value sphere whose desublimating meanings are shattered and dispersed by extreme negation of traditional forms. Second, communication processes need an integrative cultural pattern that should cover cognitive meaning, moral expectations, subjective expressions and evaluations, which are interrelated in everyday linguistic interactions. He assumes that "a reified everyday praxis can be cured only by creating unconstrained interactions of the cognitive with moral practical and the aesthetic expressive elements" ("Modernity - An Incomplete Project, p. 105).

Therefore, he decides not to abandon the project of modernity as a lost cause and, instead, he advocates for a corrected alternative to it by learning from past mistakes. In this respect, Habermas would require the access to actors' **intersubjective** roles and discursively redeemable thoughts and beliefs regarding their pragmatic relation to the world and what they understand by "means" and "ends". Otherwise what warrantable proof might we get that we are not simply caught in a reflexive interpretation, that "*Verstehen*" is not just a self-projection of our own mental frame, intentional make-up or linguistic presuppositions? So, finally Habermas rejects Weber's "tail wagging" between rational and moral standards of cultures and he gives up the instrumentalist conception of rationality that shuttles back and forth between culturally impregnated "gods" and "demons".

From this vantage point, as Wellmer shows, Habermas finds objectionable both

Weber's too restricted conception of rationality and Adorno-Horkheimer's negative

dialectics which fail to properly express the internal logic of modern rationalization

processes. From the broader perspective of "a post-traditional conception of rationality"

"there would neither be a paradox of rationalization nor a 'dialectic of enlightenment';

rather it would be more adequate to speak of 'selective' processes of rationalization, where

the selective character of this process may be *explained* by the peculiar boundary

conditions and the dynamics of a capitalist process of production"("Reason, Utopia and

the Dialectic of Enlightenment", p. 56).

Habermas suggests that in empirical and contingent situations of conflict and

disagreement we have to move to the linguistic level of the discourse and of the

unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation in order to warrant the validity claims that

have been responsible for the breakdown of communication. If there is a prevailing force

that should show us the paths between the horns of the dilemma of "gods and demons",

that is the force of the "better argument". Rationality should play the role of a practical

guide helping us to choose how we shall live and to cut our way through the labyrinth of

the modern lifeworld. And this is the context in which we may evaluate the explanatory

value and the methodological limits of the concept of communicative rationality. This is

the goal of the next section.

6.4) COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY: AN ASSESSMENT

The discussion of Habermas's reconstruction of the universal and the formal

properties of communicative action points to the rational potential of the idealizing

preconditions of any meaningful speech act and provides an account of the possibility of

cross-cultural understanding. In this section I will return to the concept of

communicative rationality with an evaluative interest. The question is whether this concept can provide a context-transcendent ground for understanding. I will briefly evaluate the adequacy of Habermas's view by considering some enduring objections that confront his conceptual program. This will bring into target the concept of the *ideal-speech situation* which sets the counterfactual limits for the possibility of rational argumentation.

Two lines of discussion will be developed. First, I will critically explore the context-transcendent force of the concept of communicative rationality. Then I will make an attempt to draw an assessment of the concept of the ideal speech situation by describing mostly in a "narrative" way its possible application across historical contexts to some famous case studies. In this respect, I will outline an imaginary polemics between Habermas and Rorty, though developed from the premises of a real conceptual confrontation between them.

6.41) COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY AND THE TRANSCENDENCE OF CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

Habermas argues that rationality consists in communicatively achieved agreement based on arguments that contain reasons or grounds that are systematically connected with validity claims regarding a problematic speech act. He says,

> the rationality proper to the communicative practice of everyday life points
> to the practice of argumentation as a *court of appeal* that makes it possible
> to continue communicative action with other means when disagreements
> can no longer be repaired with everyday routines and yet are not to be
> settled by direct or strategic use of force. For this reason I believe that the
> concept of *communicative rationality*, which refers to an unclarified
> systematic interconnection of *universal validity claims*, can be adequately
> explicated only in terms of a *theory of argumentation* (*my emphasis, TCA
> 1*, pp. 17-8).

Habermas repeatedly insists that validity claims are not fixed, but can be contested, defended or revised with reasons. There are different ways to settle disputed claims. One may appeal to authority, urge the power of tradition, or use brute force. However, Habermas contends that giving reasons for and reasons against a claim is fundamental to the very idea of rationality. Habermas describes three possibilities for demanding reasons. First, when a speaker says, "it is snowing outside" he raises a claim to truth with a constative speech act about the state of affairs. We can imagine a hearer responding "what reasons do you have for saying that?" A second possibility is that the hearer does not refer to the truth-content of the utterance but challenges the speaker's right to say that or the appropriateness of the speaker's intent to establish an interpersonal relationship through dialogue in that particular context. Let's imagine that a professor in the midst of an explanation being interrupted by a student who asks: "What is your yearly income?" The professor may reply: "What reasons do you have to say that to me right now?" A speech act which calls for this mode of response is identified as regulative. Finally, the third possibility is that the hearer questions the speaker's truthfulness in saying what he says. For instance, when a man says "I love you" to his girl friend, he tries to establish an interpersonal relation with her on subjective grounds. But she could believe that he is deceiving her. It might happen that he just wants to take advantage of her naivete or exploit her credulity. Her doubts that he is not sincere may prompt her to say: "What reasons do you have for expecting me to believe that you mean that?" The speech act that demands for this kind of response is called an "expressive" speech act.

Habermas stresses the illocutionary aspect of an utterance that brings about the interactive use of language. This implies that a speaker who performs an utterance

establishes an intersubjective relationship with a hearer and accepts the binding force of

an obligation to justify with reasons what he says. For the hearer, to understand the

claims raised by the speaker means to know under what conditions that claim is both

valid and acceptable. Mutual agreement is not to be achieved through intimidation,

coercion, or terror, but through the appeal to reason. The obligation to act in a specific

way is related to the conditions of satisfaction or conditions of validation which specify

rational obligations to justify a disputed claim. These conditions are presented by

Habermas as a source of the binding force of speech acts. In this respect, an action of

communication makes use of the unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation in order

to gain intersubjective recognition for validity claims. As Thomas McCarthy puts it,

"there exists a 'reflective medium' for dealing with problematic validity claims - that is,

modes of argumentation or critique that enable us to thematize contested validity claims

and to attempt to vindicate or criticize them" ("Preface", in *TCA 1*, pp. xi). This

possibility exists for each of the three dimensions of communication that lead to a

discursive understanding: the claim to propositional *truth* can be challenged and

defended with reasons; the claim that an action is *right* or *appropriate* against a certain

normative framework, or even when one steps out of that framework and questions its

legitimacy as a whole; and the claim that an utterance is reliable, being a *sincere* or

authentic expression of one's private life or subjective experiences. The three possible

types of validity claims are associated with three corresponding structural components of

speech acts: truth is linked with the propositional one, normative rightness with the

illocutionary one and truthfulness with the expressive one. The illocutionary success of a

speech act depends on whether the speaker's motivation is genuinely communicative

oriented toward understanding or he simply acts strategically. In many cases this bring

about truthfulness which might be more convincingly characterized as an idealizing

presupposition. Habermas recognizes that in real contexts, not only is it difficult to say at

what extent one is sincere or straightforward, but at times anyone may be unable to see

the limit between the communicative intent and the strategic manipulation of speech.

Hence, Habermas explores the rational ground of possible agreement by introducing the

counterfactual idea of an ideal speech situation. This is said to be inherent in any possible

speech, since even intentional deceptions are designed in a way or another to pertain to

the claim of truth or normative rightness. Thus, the critical dimension of idealizing

suppositions, which applies to undistorted or unrestricted processes of communication

oriented toward understanding, is also relevant in the strategic case when structural

components of speech acts are disturbed and the effectiveness of language use is judged

in terms of successfully attaining ends. For practical conditions of reaching rationally

motivated understanding, idealizations approximate an ideal type of argumentation

process which is abstracted from the conditions of everyday communication. The ideal of

an "unrestricted communication community" (in Apel's words) implies that rationally

motivated agreement can be reached in principle only if the communication process

continues long enough and is open to the force of the better argument ("Discourse

Ethics", p. 88; *TCA 1*, p. 42). In this respect, Habermas holds that the reconstruction of

"general symmetry" conditions must be adequately fulfilled by every competent speaker

in order for discursive justification of validity claims to take place. This means that there

is a symmetrical distribution of chances for all members of a speech community to

understand and engage in a performative attitude. In the case of practical rationality, it is

implied that if all those affected by a norm are heard and claims are based on reason, not on authority, then consensus may be reached regarding a norm.

From a critical perspective, a close examination of Habermas's theory of communicative rationality may locate some difficulties with his theses regarding the understanding of validity claims and the idealizing suppositions of argumentation. I will shortly refer to the most important objections to Habermas's view of the rational potential of language in general, and on the context-transcendent aspects of communicative rationality in particular. Several critical challenges to his project will be addressed in a way consistent with Habermas's sometimes shifting view (even if some enduring ambiguities and his second thoughts on these issues will make this task difficult). Above all the next discussion is not designed to respond to all the problems he is facing, but to contribute to an assessment of the idea of communicative rationality and to emphasize its normative role in the treatment of the pathologies of modernity. In what follows, I will question four interrelated aspects of Habermas's view on the rational potential of language. First, I ask whether a suspension or an avoidance of validity claims is possible. Second, I challenge the thesis that all three kinds of validity claims are simultaneously raised with every speech act. Third, I point to some problems with the justification of norms in connection with the likelihood of the decline of consensus in the context of the growing complexity of cultural differentiation in modern societies. Fourth, I discuss in what sense the context-transcendent power of communicative rationality bears upon the unconditional character of the claims to truth and on the transcendence of the normative claims to rightness. We shall notice that the four situations which will be further discussed are converging on the issue of the therapeutic role of communicative rationality

in healing the illness of a lifeworld in which language is no longer suited to the pursuit of understanding. Universally raised validity claims and counterfactual idealizations of argumentative processes provide the unavoidable foundation for a use of language to achieve agreement and thus humans can save their inner selves and hold to their membership in the club of rational beings.

1) Habermas assumes that all speakers universally raise validity claims in every speech act and all hearers cannot understand symbolic utterances without taking a *yes or no* position on the claims to validity raised by the speakers. I will shortly examine here if such a claim may appear stronger than is warranted by his argument. McCarthy considers that interpreters of pluralistic cultures seem capable of understanding expressions of a symbolically structured reality without reacting to the claims to validity made by a speaker. In reality, people often seem to be indifferent, and they do not necessarily challenge one's grounds for moral or epistemic decision making. Moreover, many times we take claims to validity simply on faith because of a lack of knowledge or simply for convenience. Habermas acknowledges that, at least in some circumstances when reasons are not sound or secure enough, there may be a suspension of judgement. But, in his view, such abstention from decision can only be provisional. He argues that the illocutionary force of speech consists in dialogical interactions when speakers and hearers are in principle caught in a binding obligation of appealing to reasons. Habermas dismisses as irrational the situations when participants to communication are not bound by or do not recognize the compelling requirement of accepting or dismissing arguments and the communicative intent is sacrificed for the sake of strategic use of language in the pursuit of subjective interests and gratifications. In this respect, it seems to me that

McCarthy's objection referring to the possibility of suspension or avoidance of validity claims can be related to the issue of coercive speech. Habermas acknowledges the undeniable persuasive edge of authority and instrumental reason over truth and rightness, and he is aware that in the lifeworld the strategic mechanisms of influence frequently replace consent. He recognizes that the normative aspect remains an unlikely or a very improbable ideal condition, which only comes close to being accomplished in everyday day communication processes. Nevertheless, to avoid the strong idealizations of speech is an indication that language use has lost its basic communicative status to provide for agreement and has entered into a kind of parasitic mode which is driven not by the better argument but by interests. For Habermas, the counterfactual component of speech lays out the premise for the critical function of communicative rationality and is connected with his diagnosis of social pathologies. However, it seems to me that we can understand that in some empirical contexts, one's denial of rightness or deceiving behavior bears witness to the gap between everyday-life situations and the counterfactual conditions of the ideal speech supposition. Habermas admittedly faces this possibility by acknowledging that the counterfactual prerequisites of an ideal speech are not actually meet in any historic community, so far as social roles and economic statuses of those affected by the norms are not equal and democratically shared. Insofar as such normative conditions that set an ideal type of speech acts and are never to be reached as such, their essentialist or descriptivist interpretations are misunderstandings to which Habermas himself calls attention.

2) Habermas argues that three kinds of validity claims are simultaneously thematized with every speech act. This assumption sets the general framework for the

ideal speech situation and points to the idea of an equal ability to form comprehensible sentences specified in three classes of relations with reality (propositional-constative, moral-normative, subjective-expressive). I will examine in what sense we could defend such a strong thesis.

In Habermas's view, understanding is tied to the illocutionary force of an utterance, which consists in the intersubjective relationship bound by a reciprocal obligation. To understand a speech act means to identify the claims to validity that the speaker raises with that speech act and to comprehend the arguments which can be used by the speaker to justify a disputed claim or by a hearer to justify his acceptance or rejection of it. At this point we cannot avoid addressing again the recurrent question that keeps hunting us from behind – that is, in what sense is understanding connected with rationality?

As we have noticed in the section on universal pragmatics, Habermas distinguishes between the cognitive use of language and the interactive use of language. The first emphasizes the propositional content in constative speech acts; the latter focuses, with the help of regulative speech acts, on intersubjective interaction driven by the process of argumentation. The illocutionary force brings about the relationship established in communication between a speaker and a hearer bound by reciprocal obligations to justify their positions by appeal to reasons. This implies that, if challenged by the hearer, the speaker must give reasons to support his claim as being right or true. In reply the hearer might reject what is said, or argue that the speaker has no right to say that, or simply may express doubts regarding the speaker's truthfulness. In case of misunderstandings or confusions, the critical debate may continue until the speaker's

claim is recognized as justified and the hearer grasps the reasons which support the claim. The hearer may be wrong or purposively mystifying in his denial of the speaker's claim. Hence, he does not have the last word. The debate must be carried until an eventual agreement can be reached based on the best arguments available.

However, insofar as the main focus is not on the truth-content of utterances but on its illocutionary force, which consists of the binding mutual obligation to appeal to reasons, speakers and hearers could agree with each other in good faith that a claim is true when in fact it is false. For instance the fact that once everyone agreed that the sentence "the earth is flat" is true, did not make it so. The problem is different in the situation of the justification of norms. More recently Habermas (*Postmetaphysical Thinking*, p. 65) seems to acknowledge that consensus is neither a sufficient nor an appropriate criterion of truth. In contrast with his initial consensualist views, Habermas argues now that the eventual agreement to be reached about the propositional aspect of speech acts cannot function as a truth-criterion. It is just an account of the meaning or the definition of truth which is commonly shared by the participants in discourse. People may act communicatively and yet be wrong in their beliefs, which may be simply rooted in ignorance or illusions. Losing sight of the propositional component of speech may lead to holding falsehoods. Certainly, universal acceptance does not make a belief true.

Habermas may suppose that his shift of emphasis from the propositional to the interactive aspect of language-use protects him from such cognitivist objections as the one raised above. In fact he tries to avoid the difficulty derived from his consensualism by assuming that every speech act simultaneously raises all three kinds of validity claims (*TCA 1*, p. 101). His point is that if a claim to truth is primarily redeemed in an utterance,

the claims to normative rightness and truthfulness are raised indirectly or in a secondary way. In connection with this assumption, Habermas claims that every speech act can be contested from exactly the three points of view. According to Cooke this thesis that an utterance can be rejected as invalid from the angles of truth, rightness and truthfulness is not equivalent but different and weaker than the contention that the illocutionary success depends on reaching agreement with regard to all three validity claims simultaneously raised in every speech act (*Language and Reason*, p. 84). Habermas is aware that to require the hearer to be convinced by any one of the three claims is very unlikely in everyday communication. For example when a speaker says, "the snow is white", a claim to truth is raised in the first place. Also, indirectly, he raises a claim that it is appropriate (normative rightness) and that he is truthful in saying that. A hearer may agree that the snow is white and he may judge the speaker to be truthful. Nevertheless, if he finds that the remark is inappropriate (perhaps it is performed while they were singing in a choir or praying), the speech act will be unsuccessful. To make things worse let's imagine a participant at a forum who interrupts the lecturer saying: "Would you please tie my shoe-strings?" According to Habermas, we may suppose that, the offended lecturer and the unpredictable speaker will engage in argumentation. The first may give voice to his discontent regarding such a disturbing request and the latter may provide reasons for why he believes the speech act is far from being outrageous and is normatively in order. In this case, one cannot exclude the possibility that the utterance is so inappropriate and so obviously intended to embarrass the speaker that reaching a mutual agreement on normative matters is almost impossible.

The foregoing analysis shows that the condition of agreement on the basis of

simultaneous thematization of the three claims is too strong and more arguable than the weaker thesis that it is possible to contest every speech act from the three points of view. To further substantiate the difference between the two interpretations of Habermas's thesis let's imagine a bank-robber who shouts "hands up" while aiming a gun at a cashier. From a semantic point of view, orders or commands cannot be decided in terms of true or false; hence, although this utterance might have communicative sense, its propositional component is presumably suspended. By contrast, from the angle of the illocutionary aspect of speech acts, the bank teller is supposed to understand indirectly that the bank is being robbed (the state of affairs), may question his right of the speaker to do that (normative rightness) or even question his sincerity in performing this utterance. It is not necessary for the cashier to agree with the bank robber, but he cannot avoid taking an attitude and eventually rejecting one or all the three claims to validity raised in that speech act. The cashier might take the command as being a joke. Moreover, he may contest the bank robber's right to act as he does or simply have doubts that the bank-robber is truthful. Obviously, it is risky to disregard the demand as a false warning, or a sting operation. In such a case, an interpretive mistake or disagreement may be life threatening.

Habermas shows that the actual performance of utterances like "I beg you", or "this is a request" or "that's a promise" is not what it explicitly claims to be. Such expressions are designed to convince the hearer that the speaker is truthful, but they cannot be assessed from the point of view of their truth-value since "there is no parallel with constative speech act" (see M. Cooke, *Language and Reason*, p. 62). It seems to me again that the distinction between the communicative and the strategic use of language

may add more comprehensibility to such situations. The point is that Habermas's pragmatic evaluation of the processes of argumentation from everyday communication allows a rational critique of dishonest and immoral usage of speech, for instance when utterances like "that's a promise" or "this is the whole truth" are simply used to deceive the hearer. Although Habermas has little to say with regard to truth or justice themselves, the critical thrust of communicative rationality transcends the historical and cultural contexts.

Habermas argues that communicative action oriented toward understanding represents the primary mode of language use. Therefore, the instrumental manipulation of language (assuming falsities, wrong doings or untruthfulness) with a strategic intent is "*parasitic*" on the communicative use of language (*TCA 1*, p. 288). For instance the command of a bank robber, the demand of a rapist, and the declaration of love made by a womanizer could be explained as being centered on the success and fulfillment of aims and desires. Habermas suggests that the latently strategic use of language merely simulates the communicative use. It success depends on the power of persuasion of a pretense. In this respect, it is parasitic because it is based on the successful creation of the illusion that the actors are using language with an orientation toward understanding (*TCA 1*, p. 294). Cooke assumes that in speech acts performed with a strategic intent, the raising of validity claims is suspended in many circumstances. In this category are examples of orders or threats ("Give me money or I will shoot you" , "Get out") and certain insults or curses ("May your child die before you") (*Language of Reason*, p. 24). We learned from Habermas already that such a distorting use of language should be distinguished from the contexts where language is used communicatively. An utterance

which may be used strategically, may be also used to reach understanding on the context-transcendent basis of communicative rationality (e.g. a pretending declaration of love versus an authentic declaration of love). This brings about the strong idealizations that have a normative-counterfactual nature and are very improbable descriptions of the state of affairs. The integrative role of the communicative action is essential to the reproductive processes of the lifeworld. This fact is emphasized once more by Habermas's thesis of the colonization of the lifeworld by the mechanisms of functional-systemic integration.

In conclusion, the strong thesis of simultaneous redemption and vindication of the three claims to validity with any speech act is not defensible in many of the cases described above. (Some critics show that sometimes either one's verbal behavior is awkwardly inappropriate or insincere and that in some speech acts one's claim may be even suspended). However the weaker thesis that it is possible to contest every speech act from the three points of view is more acceptable. A speaker acting communicatively raises validity claims but this does not require in all circumstances that a speaker and his hearer achieve an agreement with regard to all three kinds of validity claims. In fact, sometimes a better understanding just makes a disagreement more comprehensible. Habermas seems to assume that a successful communication depends on the speaker's implicit warranty for the validity of the one direct claim and the two indirect claims and the hearer's acceptance or rejection of what is said. If the hearer finds the speaker's reasons for defending the offending claims as ultimately convincing, then the linguistic exchange will be successful and an agreement can be reached. In this light Habermas's main concern is to contrast empirical contexts of speech which are under the (implicit or

explicit) pressure of authority and tradition with the likely effectiveness of the counterfactual fiction of the ideal speech, which is the unavoidable foundation for "the humanity relations among men who are still men" (after J. Thompson, "Universal Pragmatics", in *Habermas - Critical Debates*, p. 125). This means that all participants to a non-manipulative and noncoercive communication must rest their decisions on commonly binding rational grounds if they are not to lose the normality of their inner selves.

3) Another source of criticism of Habermas refers to the idea of reaching consent in matters of moral justification of norms. For instance, the interpretation of one's actions should consider not only the common case of a possible disobedience of a norm, but also a consideration of the possible rejection the norm itself. In such cases, we can legitimately presume that the participants to practical discourse are self-deceiving or, at best, that they are misled by empirical evidence. Nevertheless, validity claims provide the internal formal structure and the counterfactual demands for participating in the argumentative process and reaching agreement. Their proper implementation determines one's ability to utter a coherent and meaningful statement and even to demonstrate one's normality of mind. The presuppositions of argumentation are characterized by Habermas as unavoidable universals that provide the necessary grounds of moral deliberation and make possible the communicative action oriented toward reaching understanding.

Among other considerations, Habermas suggests that the strong idealizations implicit in argumentation include the assumption that any one is capable of speech and is supposed to take part in debate with an equal voice. Given communicative competence, every participant in communicative exchange is entitled to question every assertion, to

introduce new topics, and to express new attitudes, needs, or desires ("Discourse Ethics", p. 76-7). This idea is controversial. Some critics (Seyla Benhabib, Maeve Cooke) observe that these idealizations can be interpreted as moral intuitions which are not shared by everyone, but only by those participants in communicative action who accept the universalist moral thinking. For instance, the principle of "universal moral respect" and "egalitarian reciprocity" are necessary presupposition of argumentation only for those members of postconventional ethical communities who call into question the theological and ontological bases of inequality (see Cooke, *Language and Reason*, p. 31). If the context-transcendent power of the rational justification of such norms seems appropriate for a liberal-democrat, it hardly fits in the mental make-up of a religious fanatic or of a radical advocate of cultural difference.

A related question is in what sense the rational requirements of argumentation could still be fulfilled in the midst of the confusion of the social-political crisis of our time? Perhaps it is needless to say that the growing complexity of modern societies affected by differentiation and the multiplication of value perspectives increases the likelihood of a decline of consensus. The unprecedented bureaucratization of our world justifies a reasonable expectation for the temporary regimentation of the communicative interest of reaching agreement with the strategic mechanisms of integration. Habermas indicates that possible participation in the postconventional processes of communication makes reference to an ideal speech, which sets the counterfactual conditions of critical argumentation. But how useful is this really to understand people at home in a world colonized by instrumental reason and impoverished by traditional cultures? In this respect, Habermas argues that the request of unquestionable compliance with traditional

value-orientation or obedience to authority or the decision to silence political opponents, or, simply, have them beheaded, are disclosing vistas toward the dark side of our history, the field of repeatable irrational battles long fought since the early dawn of civilization. However, on some accounts (Wellmer, Benhabib, McCarthy), Habermas's demand for consensus in the face of the irreducible pluralism of modern democracies would make moral judgments impossible to achieve so far as the idealizing norms set implausible or utopian conditions for historical subjects (see M. Cooke, *Language and Reason*, p. 153). In his reply to critics, Habermas acknowledges that the basis of questions on which universal agreement can be reached is getting progressively narrower and this raises the question of the theoretical relevance of his discourse ethics. Although he seems to be aware of the universalist limitations of his point of view, he still sticks to his central notion of rationally motivated consensus.[57]

Habermas weighs the skeptical challenge of such problems pointing to the irrationality of the world as a counterbalance to the soundness of the transcendental-pragmatic derivation of moral principles. Nevertheless he refuses to leave the moral theorist on the unstable ground of wishes, desires or subjective decisions and contrives a negative counterfactual argument to prove that the option between the rationalist standpoint of universal presuppositions of justification and the skeptical attitude is ultimately not a matter of free choice. In Habermas's view, one may refuse to act communicatively by temporarily bracketing validity claims or keep moral norms in disregard. But even a skeptic "cannot reject the ethical substance (*Sittlichkeit*) of life circumstances in which he spends his waking hours, not unless he is willing to take refuge in suicide or serious mental illness" ("Discourse Ethics", p. 100). Therefore, one

may seek for normative dissent or avoid the idealizing presuppositions only at the expense of the extreme consequence of no longer counting as a rational agent.

4) Now the question is in what sense does Habermas hold that communicative rationality transcends cultural and historical contexts? In order to outline an answer, I will make first some comparative observations regarding the context-transcendent power of rationality with reference to the claims to truth of theoretical discourses and the claims to normative rightness of practical discourses. Then I will look to the idealizing universals of argumentation which account for the critical thrust of communicative rationality. Nonetheless, Habermas repeatedly argues that the performative attitude involves participation from within the social world. If this is the case, the question that arises is whether arguments are neutral or culture-laden. In this respect, as Th. McCarthy remarks, to understand what reasons are about,

> we have to draw (at least implicitly) upon our own (intuitively mastered) competence as members of a lifeworld and to assess the internal connections between ideas, to evaluate evidence and arguments, to distinguish the valid from the invalid, the sound from the unpersuasive ("Reflections on Rationalizations", in *Habermas and Modernity*, p. 184).

Habermas's reply on this matter may appeal to the weak transcendental argument which insures the universal and unavoidable, and yet fallible and pluralist, rational ground for communicatively oriented action. His emphasis is not on the cultural or historical content of thematized validity claims, but on the possibility of raising them universally and on the transcendental dimension of the strong idealizations. Habermas suggestively describes the impact of the context-transcendent power of rationality on the empirical and multifarious cultural and historical landscapes as a "thorn in the flesh of social reality" (*Postmetaphysical Thinking*, p. 47).

We have seen that in general the idea of discourse refers to a reflective communicative action oriented toward an understanding tied to the idea of universal agreement. In this respect, it offers a context-transcendent sense of validity that goes beyond the "provincial agreements of the specific local context" (*TCA 1*, p. 444). However, theoretical discourses wherein the truth-claims rely on scientific evidence and are internally connected only with the idea of universal agreement, are different from practical discourses wherein the moral claims are specially linked with argumentation in the process of *discursively* achieved universal agreement. This means that the validity of moral claims is conceptually bound by the critical practice of giving reasons in a way which cannot be inferred about the claims to propositional truth. Nevertheless, Habermas's position is not unambiguously clear in this respect. In *Theory of Communicative Action* ([1981], 1984) Habermas argues that the "*the concept of the validity of a sentence*" cannot be dissociated or explicated apart from *"the concept of redeeming the validity claim raised through the utterance of the sentence"* (*TCA 1*, p. 316). Therefore, we are compelled to analyze the conditions of propositional truth in terms of its intersubjective recognition. He admits that a speaker might still produce verifying grounds which are objectively available "according to a procedure that can be applied monologically". That is, the explanation of whatever supports a validity claim does not need to move from the semantics of sentences to the pragmatic level of using language communicatively. However, he further quotes Dummett saying that "an assertion is a kind of gamble that the speaker will not be proven wrong", and relies on his connection between the content of an assertion and a speaker's commitment in making it. Habermas takes this as an indication of the fallibilistic character of argumentation which

makes possible the grounding of claims made in uttering a sentence. In this respect, he

stresses that the validity of a sentence is criticizable in principle and this bears upon the

illocutionary dimension of speech. On this basis he defends the thesis that truth

conditions cannot be explicated independently of the discursive redemption of that

corresponding truth-claim. He argues that "to understand an assertion is to know when a

speaker has good grounds to undertake a warrant that the conditions for truth of asserted

sentences are satisfied" (*TCA 1*, p. 318).

In contrast with such consensualist views Habermas argues more recently, in

Postmetaphysical Thinking (p. 65), that an agreement on truth-value is reduced to the

explication of a commonly shared meaning or definition of truth, but it cannot function as

a truth-criterion. This implies that the only way a rationally motivated consensus is

relevant for the idea of truth is when it is connected to moral responsibility. The point is

that every rational person as a competent participant in a theoretical discourse should

honestly accept the arguments and evidence of truth and admit its universal and infinite

validity (see Cooke, *Language and Reason*, p. 156).

The case is obviously different with respect to moral and ethical justifications that

are inevitably caught in the middle of social conflicts and cultural clashes or whenever

political or ethnic groups struggling for recognition dispute the legitimacy of normative

establishment. Moral and ethical questions are addressed from the perspective of

participants in their effort to find concrete answers in particular situations, "if the

questions and answers are not to be robbed of their normative substance and their binding

force" (*Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, p. 24).

Nevertheless, the moral perspective requires the participants to transcend the social and

historical context of their particular form of life and generalize the maxims and contested

interests. If the consent on normative matters were not to be coerced, it must be adopted

the point of view of all those possibly affected. Habermas quotes Hobbes who claims

that agreement "would have to grow from inside human life"(in idem, p. 24). And yet,

Habermas argues that truth achieved in theoretical discourse is a regulative idea which

point to the possibility of an infinite rational agreement and implies an anticipation of a

"final consensus". One the one hand, he contends that only in the performative attitude

one can advance a claim that "transcends all cultural and historical bounds". On the other

hand, he suggests that truth supposes an infinite rational agreement, which is possible "in

the forum of an unlimited community in communication". ("A Reply to my Critics", in

Habermas: Critical Debates, eds.: J.B. Thomson and D. Held, 1982, p. 277). Though it

is not completely clear how this expression could be interpreted. For instance, we may

infer, as we noticed before, that the discursive redemption of the propositional truth-

claims is no longer a criterion of truth. This suggests that for constative utterances such

as "there are unicorns", ""the earth is round", "there are tigers in Africa" the

argumentation does not play a constitutive role. If a constative utterance is true, this is

not because an agreement might be achieved with regard to the validity of the claim

raised, but because conclusive empirical evidence could support the claims (Davidson is

right on this matter). In this respect, Habermas's point would be close to Putnam's

contention that "truth is a property of a statement which cannot be lost, whereas the

justification can be lost" (*Reason, Truth and History*, p. 55). In this light, the idea of truth

contains a moment of *unconditionality* that inherently transcends all cultural and

historical contexts. Comparatively, whereas moral validity claims justified through

agreement are in principle subject to revision in the light of new arguments, in practical

discourse, the well-foundedness remains conditional and fallible. In an inspired

description of practical discourses, which ought to be the dominant mode of reaching

consensus, Habermas compares them with "islands threatened with inundation in a sea of

practice" ("Discourse Ethics", p. 106). The context-transcendent voice of communicative

rationality driven by the force of the better argument is almost always silenced by narrow

and instrumental aspects of a history and a culture driven by the goals of domination and

control. The reflective agreement which must be grounded by compelling arguments is

thrust aside by the appeal to authority of an institution, inviolability of tradition or the

instrument of force.

That is why Habermas's acknowledgement that the notion of "*ideal speech

community*", which points to the strong idealizations of speech acts, seems very unlikely

to be fulfilled in satisfactory manner in everyday communication. And yet, he contends

that all forms of argumentation reveal often in a counterfactual way a set of idealizing

universals which are rooted in the structure of the action oriented toward understanding.

Here lies most of the strength of the transcending power of communicative rationality. In

this respect, Habermas insists on two related points: *(a)* Whereas the special context-

transcendent power of truth claims is often too weak to hold and the special context-

transcendent power of validity claims is too restricted to a narrow basis of moral

judgments, the counterfactuals of argumentation may provide to a greater extent the

universal and unavoidable grounds for the possible understanding. Such a

communicative idealization is the assumption that all participants in a discourse are

consistently exchanging the same linguistic expression with the same meanings. *(b)* The

transcontextual force of the critical dimension of communicative rationality resides precisely in the "the tension between the normative promise contained in the strong idealizations implicit in the very notion of argumentation and what happens in actual empirical practices of argumentation" (Cooke, *Language and Reason*, p. 157). We have noticed repeatedly that the process of giving reasons is guided by the presuppositions that participants in discourse are motivated only by the force of the better argument and no other force will prevail, that all hypotheses must be critically assessed and no voice should be excluded form debate.

In addition, Habermas maintains that all forms of argumentation make reference to the idealization that all communicatively competent participants regard each other as accountable. This thesis is twofold. On the one hand, everyone is bound by the obligation to support with reasons a claim made in a given speech act. The failure to do so leads to the strategic use of language when not understanding but success becomes the main concern of action (see *TCA 1*, p. 332, *TCA 2*, pp. 180-81). On the other hand, all participants are supposed to manifest a willingness to reach understanding. A violation of this presupposition would count as a denial that one is acting as a rational agent. It seems to me that the lack of accountability, the avoidance of the binding responsibility to justify a disputed claim or sheer caprice are instances of this type.

The context-transcendent power of the strong idealizations allows the critical assessment of the violations of argumentation in everyday linguistic interactions. This aspect can be traced down to various normative deviations and psychological disturbances which point to the pathologies of modernity. The contradiction between the idealizing counterfactuals of action oriented toward communication and the imperatives

of success and efficiency of strategic action provides for the recognition and a conceptual therapy of the dishonest and unjust practices of argumentation. This is often perceived as an existential tension which explains the drama and, at time the martyrdom, of the proponents of reason feeling alienated in a world actually driven by the instrumental forces and impoverished by the blind authority of traditions. Those who could not negotiate their moral or cognitive ideals or compromise their honesty were many times crushed by the "infernal mechanism" of the *vanity fair* of their historic times. We should not forget that the factory of our civilization has usually eliminated those too big to fit thorough the eyes of a needle which sews the carpet of the institutional system of their world. There are plenty illustrations in this respect: Anaxagoras was chased out of his city to his death at sea; Socrates was condemned to drink hemlock; Thomas More was beheaded by Henry Vlll for refusing to accept his break out with Rome, Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake, Galileo was forced to recant his scientific beliefs; and we can go on and on.

The critical thrust of the idea of communicative rationality yields an emancipatory promise. Habermas believes that in postconventional forms of communication, understanding is progressively freed from bureaucratic imperatives and the impoverishing value orientation of cultural traditions. In consequence, participants can self-critically distance themselves and better see the difference between action oriented toward understanding and action oriented toward success.

The foregoing remarks lead in a more general direction expressed by the conflict between normative reason and the purposively oriented practices in the labyrinth of a lifeworld. In general, in terms of discourse ethics, the paradoxical situation which seems

inescapable for practical rationality trying to answer "*How should I live?*" is suggested by a Socratic dilemma. This story emphasizes the divergence between man's highest pursuit of truth and justice, and the necessities of political life. Socrates never allows us to forget that any reconciliation between individual longings and state power should not be reached at the expense of moral virtues.

In my judgement, the difficulty has two interesting sides. I will limit myself to a simple indication of these issues without elaborating on them at this time. On the one side, we need to set up the rules of the game of life according to which we know what is reasonably acceptable behavior and what is not. So, Wittgenstein is right to stress the interplay between individual interactions within the network of social intricacies. This is the structure of the intersubjective tapestry which weaves roles and statuses in a form of life. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein's skeptical contention (in *On Certainty*) that justification come to an end since we have no way to know the extent of the groundlessness of our beliefs must be taken with serious reservation. There might be many arguable presuppositions which are continuously questioned in every day life interactions, but we cannot wipe out all rules and still pretend to be players in the game or even to have a game after all. In fact, at bottom there must be a stopping point which might consist in defining moral conditions binding for everyone. We all recognize that it is wrong to torture the innocent, to needlessly break a promise or tell a lie,... Don't we? Our own outrage or guilt feeling when things in the world go otherwise are an undeniable proof that our deep seated expectations are violated.

We have seen that Habermas aims to provide the rational ground for the possible understanding in terms of an argument with a "*transcendental twist*". He declared once

that one cannot have access to knowledge and develop nomological theories or get rid of self-deceptions by reasons unless certain presuppositions are universally binding (Reply to Kai Nielsen in "Discussion" published in *Rationality To-Day*, 1979, p. 274). Here we go full circle from the problem formulated in the beginning of this chapter. However, in the case of practical discourses which need to acquire intersubjective recognition in the face of the impoverishing burden of social conflicts and outright irrational behavior, the problem is more complicated than in theoretical and explicative discourses made from a third person's objectifying neutral position.

At this juncture, I will try to explore the context-transcendent power of Habermas's idea of communicative rationality by analyzing the concept of ideal speech situation against some famous case studies which call into question the rationality of some posthumous societies.

6.42) THE COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY VS *A WORLD WELL LOST*

The historical considerations which follow aim to outline, mostly in a narrative form, the complex dimensions of Habermas's perspective and will make clear why I take this to be his most valuable conceptual contribution. In order to check the cross-cultural endurance of Habermas's methodology of understanding, I will examine the normative implications of the concept of ideal-speech against some historical times or traditions. Notice that the idea of *ideal speech situation* represents the counterfactual hard-core of Habermas's theory of rationality. This implies that the idealizing presuppositions (which apply *if and only if* such and such conditions obtain) are neither to be met by the case studies from my next stories, nor can they be refuted by empirical evidence. All we can expect is to be able, on the basis to the context-transcendent and critical potential of

Habermas's notion of communicative rationality, to judge the illnesses of "*a world well lost*" (Rorty's excellent expression) in which personal identities are subjected to disturbances.

Next, I will test the strength and normative value of the ideal speech situation against the lifeworlds in which the good life cannot be universally shared and justice fails. In the meantime I will try to avoid any possible misunderstanding of this idea to which even Habermas calls attention. In a recent interview (*New Left Review*, 229), he expresses some regret for ever using the notion of "ideal speech" which is "too concretist" and vulnerable to "essentialist" misinterpretations (see also *Between Facts and Norms*, 1996, and M. Cooke, *Language and Reason*, pp. 31, 172-73). For this reason, in the later works he prefers to use instead the term "strong idealizations" or "idealizing presuppositions". However, considering that in his great synthesis, *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas still employs the term of "ideal speech situation", I will continue to refer to it to designate the hypothetical situation in which counterfactual idealizations would be satisfied.

As the argument proceeds, I will stage an imaginary theoretical meeting between Habermas and Rorty which is designed to display the context-transcendent power of Habermas's concept of communicative rationality. Other references or digressions will be avoided unless they help the critical exposition which is intended here. We shall see not all practical questions raised by individual lives (like those referred to in the next biographical stories) can be redeemed discursively. As Habermas indicates, the practical questions can be divided into pragmatic questions, which are not concerned with general interests and the best we can hope for is a fair compromise, and evaluative questions,

which ask what is the good life and refer to interests specific to individual histories and thus are not generalizable. I will first discuss the case of Socrates against his prosecutors.

In the *Apology*, Plato envisages Socrates as a "*gadfly*" within Athens, acting as a *private oracle* coaching the citizens about *virtue (piety)* and trying to persuade them that "*the unexamined life is not worth living*" (*Apology*, 38a). Unlike those who judged him, he thought that the real moral difficulty is not to elude death but to outrun vice. Consequently, by challenging their minds oriented to efficiency rather than to wisdom, he found that "*the fully examined life cannot be lived*". As we know, Socrates was condemned to death in order to silence his 'stinging" voice. His cross-examination among the "money changers" of the city disturbed the intellectual inertia and moral complacency that underlie dogmatic civic mentality, and hence eroded the political stability of his society. In fact, he put the Athenian democracy on trial, and the guilty verdict is actually a self-condemnation of a corrupt society.

No doubt, in light of counterfactual constraints of the idea of the ideal speech community, Habermas must find that Socrates's attitude is rationally acceptable against the background of his society. Such a conclusion is supported by the demand from a recent study ("Copying with Contingencies - The Return of Historicism" (in *Debating the State of Philosophy*, 1996, p. 21) that rational acceptability must be stretched beyond the limits and the standards of any local community. In this respect, Habermas contends that the line between '-*is true*' and '-*is justifiably held to be true*' must be blurred. Socrates's judges were convinced that they served the truth by delivering their "guilty" verdict, Meletus, his accuser, that withstand with an arguable tradition, we must avoid confusing the speech of with what is rationally justifiable and authorizes acceptability derived from

the idealizing presuppositions of an ideal speech situation. Habermas says, that "if someone states '*that p*', he or she must (implicitly) at least) be prepared to justify '*p*' by appealing to a rationally motivated agreement of other publics, not just ours, a public of experts, an ever wider public of reasonable person, or a public of people who are 'better versions of ourselves'" ("Coping with Contingencies", p. 21).

It has been said that Habermas's notion of "ideal speech situation" shares some features with Putnam's limit-concept of "*ideal truth*" defined as a transhistorical posit which allows us to speak of different conceptions of *rationality*. While rationality is a matter of applying criteria, ideal truth consists of a universally valid ground of knowledge, a bedrock beyond culture and time which lays the premises of objectivity.

From the relativist camp, Rorty disagrees with Habermas and challenges the normative dimension of his concept of communicative rationality. Rorty presses the issue in the opposite direction of an ethnocentric view and appeals instead to "solidarity" or culture as the only legitimating factor. He believes that the whole story of truth and rationality is about the familiar procedures of justification given in a particular society, ours or any other. To avoid self-refuting consequences he assumes that "true" and "rational" are flexible terms and are characterized by a diversity of references and procedures for assigning them. Nevertheless, it is hard to make sense of his claim that this very flexibility is compatible with the identity of meaning and that it insures the intentional sameness in the same way as terms like "here", "there", "you" and "me", and even "good" or "bad" mean the same in all cultures ("Solidarity or Objectivity" in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Antology*, 1996, p. 576).

According to Rorty, Habermas's description of rational discourse in terms of

universal presuppositions of argumentation for validity has similar implications as Putnam's formula of "rational acceptability under idealized conditions" ("Emancipating our Culture", in *Debating the State of Philosophy*, 1996, p. 28, "Relativism - Finding and Making", in *Debating the State of Philosophy*, p. 42). Such a convergence between communicative reason and Platonism vindicates my claim that Socrates's accusers are convicted of their wickedness by reason. This conforms to Plato's interpretation of reason as the gatekeeper for the ideal order of Truth and Rightness. Insofar as the candidates for truth and rightness are already assessable in principle for an ideal speech community that is inherently rational, it seems a fair inference that all the arguments which might be brought for or against the "guilty" verdict must be available for ideally competent rational speakers. All that remains is to argue out the matter by justifying a deliberation in the view of the reflective consensus to be reached by such an ideal community and inevitably rejecting what seems to be true and right for Socrates's jurors. That is, to assume that they were not blinded by their conservative prejudices or narrow concerns for setting an example by silencing his stinging voice, and their judgement did not succumb to their personal idiosyncrasy against that uncomfortable 'gadfly'. I do not see how Habermas would dissociate himself from such a possible interpretation.

By contrast, Rorty imputes to Habermas the spiritual perfection suggested by the Platonic approach. Consequently, he agrees with one of Habermas' critics (Geuss) that the notion of "'ideal speech situation' plays no part in the theory of social criticism. He suggests that the pragmatist emphasis on *our* community of liberal intellectuals is much more appropriate to give post-factum account of any change of view (see "Habermas, Lyotard on Postmodernity", in *Zeitgeist in Babel*, 1991, p. 87). Rorty stresses the idea

that our ability "to justify ourselves to our earlier selves" is not built into human nature or universalistic competence. "It is just the way we live now" ("Solidarity or Objectivity", p. 583). All we can do is to abandon the great rationalist scenarios and engage in the rhetorical task of making different world descriptions or"vocabularies" to look as attractive and persuasive as possible for "*us*".

Rorty is animated by a kind of "romantic hope" for an utopian world which is not yet but will come sometime in the future. He nurtures the expectation that everything would be utterly, wonderfully changed, though he does not say what he means by that world, other than that the idea of truth as "rational acceptability" is too limitative. He believes that "you can only idealize what you have already got. But maybe there is something you cannot even dream of yet" ("On Moral Obligation, Truth and Common Sense", in *Debating the State of Philosophy*, p. 51). The way he thinks of imagination and sentiment as an alternative to reason recalls Hume's preference for "people with whom you can feel at home". And this obviously implies that Habermas's ideally competent speakers are people with whom you cannot feel at home, they being relatives of Descartes's subject-centered-reason (once exposed to Hume's criticism).

Perhaps, the example of a utopian thinker, so akin to Rorty, who chose not to bend his reason in face of authority may illustrate the difference between Rorty and Habermas. Thomas More was an eminent thinker of his time but his fame did not hinder Henry Vlll, who also praised his nimble mind, to behead him for disobedience. As far as More caught in the conflict with his sovereign seems to be able to discern what is rationally justifiable from what is just motivated by subjective interests or sheer caprice, his case could throw some light on Habermas's idea of reaching understanding. One may wonder

why a person of such wide intellectual tolerance, exceptional poetry and purity of life apparently so idly chose to have resented king's demand, an heroic refusal which paved the road to his death? After all, he announced the communist scenario, the defiance of the lust for gold. But he also blamed the religious asceticism and sectarian exclusivism, and had faith in the excellence of man. Then, why did he forsake his philosophy of tolerance which could have saved his live and adopted instead an uncompromising attitude which triggered the whole chain of events which culminated with him being accused of high treason and, in the end, executed.[58]

And yet, I must observe that this example proves again the case of the conflict between strategic-instrumental and communicative reason. As soon as one compares More's theoretic and normative beliefs with the vicissitudes of his practical life, one cannot be but shocked to see the contrast between his prophecy of rational compromise rooted in what he believed to be truthful and trustworthy and his senseless martyrdom caused by his inflexibility toward his tyrannical sovereign. Maybe, as lord chancellor, More learned that the philosophical reasons of projecting an imaginary land and the pragmatic reason required by the administration of a real country are often not overlapping each other. In obeying political reasons one must give up the prerogatives of free thinking ant that might amount to losing one's self. It happens that More did not accept to pay this price while many others did (the only other exception of the archbishop John Fisher). He chose to die not for the sake of a knightly observance of the code of honor, which was simply ignored by all his contemporaneous who unconditionally surrendered to king's demand, but for preserving the integrity of his own self by resenting the evil. Implicitly, the moral order is saved and rationality prevails. Though we may

imagine the dilemma More has been through in the finest hour of his life, given the tension between his tolerant beliefs and the inflexibility of his conduct. This calls to my mind the conflict between the pursuit of understanding and the strategic reasons of success. Lifeworld has been always more vulnerable to the emotional or rhetorical accents of political agendas promoted by different group of interests than the .genuine commitment to knowledge. In our time of individualist insurgence and cultural clashes, the gap between truth-seeking and the mere goal of persuasion, as well as between rightness and efficiency, seems even more acute than before. For instance, Habermas might supposedly judge that an *idealized* king or an *idealized* Chamber of Lords would agree with More upon the force of *the better argument,* provided that they are able to engage in a process of undistorted communication - that is, to take the side of what is right and not being completely subdued by subjective interests as it happened to be. In the same way, Galileo could be found innocent by a rational tribunal and Luther would reach consensus with the Diet of Worms. Rorty may pretend that it is not clear how an idealized speech community deliberating exclusively on rational grounds would look. Instead, he dreams ahead to a coming utopian society where past injustices to be reevaluated, and that can avenge More versus the king and nobles who caused his death, Galileo against the Inquisition and Luther against the Diet of Worms. Supposedly, Rorty can put in More's mouth while his executioner is untying the buttons of his shirt and prepares his neck for the sharp blade raised in the waiting: "Some day you people... are not going to be relevant" ("On Moral Obligation, Truth and Common Sense", p. 51). Just that, and slash! (his head rolls in dust). Judge yourself if this would be a fair posthumous consolation! As of myself, it certainly helps though I wouldn't put my money on it.

An even more difficult question is, on what basis would Rorty assume that a future society would not be even worse than the one confronted by Galileo? What justifies Rorty's optimism in our age in which we live under the terrifying specter of a nuclear or ecological disaster? It's hard to tell unless he would admittedly adopt a kind of ideal of progress which emerges form the emancipatory project of the Enlightenment. But that implies that Rorty must take Habermas's redemptive interest in modernity and, consequently, admit that Habermas is right in the transcendental justification of the universal potential of understanding. Rorty is thus caught in the dilemma of accepting the context-transcendent power of idealizing presuppositions and therefore coming to terms with Habermas regarding the nature of communicative rationality or abandoning his romantic hope in a utopian society as pure speculation.

Thus, if Rorty does not discard the idea of rationality, that is because he prefers to use it in connection with what he calls "moral virtues of a rich and secure culture", that are in his view "curiosity, persuasion, and tolerance". This aspect has nothing to do with knowledge or truth but with the "superior sort of audiences" which become possible in utopian tolerant societies ("The Notion of Rationality", in *Debating the State of Philosophy*, p. 85). In the line of relativist argument, Rorty think that there is only dialogue and no objective, extra-historical and universalist bridge can be found beyond conversations between cultures other than "*us*", fallible humans ready for the bound of solidarity ties rather than falling into existentialist despair. That is why he wants to put the search for truth on equal footing with good politics. He thinks that the gap between truth and justification is not bridgeable by any transcultural rationality which can be used to criticize other cultures and praise others from an extra-mundane ground, "but simply as

a gap between the actual good and the possible better" ("Solidarity and Objectivity", p. 575).

My point is that, in order to know what is the warrant for such a possibility of progress, Rorty has to appeal to a kind of rationality which may insure that his hope is not proven to be mere illusion in the bitter end. This implies that he would stand close to the Enlightenment ideal of emancipation and, implicitly, he is bound to speak Habermas's language - that is, exactly what he seems to reject. This involves not just a cognitive commitment, but a moral responsibility which presses harder and more dramatically on our shoulders than ever before as a result of the irreducible diversity and pluralism of our style of living. We cannot expect that undeserved or unnecessary suffering will be avenged at a Final Judgement or the Day After since God is no longer a viable hypothesis or an option so compelling (as it surely was in the past). Nevertheless, it certainly brings relief to think that your claim will be vindicated and assessed on the scale of reason and not on sheer caprice or brutal force. And in this respect, Habermas, and not Rorty, has the last word. Habermas's theory points to the rational potential of language and claims that a person can withdraw from the rational communication processes based on the transcendental force of the idealizing presuppositions only at the price of losing the competence to act as meaningful being. Therefore, Habermas comes to the conclusion that a human being cannot be a normal mind and give up the claims to validity which are tied to the unavoidable counterfactual conditions of argumentation. To give up the conscious intent for reaching communicative agreement would be as alienating as it would lead to the loss of the self or plunge into deep existential despair, suicide, etc. On this conceptual basis, his interest in a critical social theory opens a window to the

understanding of "irrational choices", which are linked to the recourse to force and instrumental means to maximize effects of the strategic action. (For instance, when survival is at stake, as it happens in conditions of famine and wars, the demise of dignity and moral respect, let alone the *poverty* of the search for truth, are very likely consequences.)

And yet, insofar as the prerequisites of rationality typified by the concept of an ideal speech situation are presented as counterfactuals, they are not falsifiable by experience. The conditional statement is that speakers can properly understand each other in the process of linguistic communication *only if* they rationally participate in dialogue. In this respect, Habermas suggests that people cannot avoid making validity claims to truth, rightness and truthfulness and elude the universal demands of argumentation. In a strong interpretation, this implies that failing to do so would call into question one's membership in the club of normal human beings. And this is exactly the sense in which Habermas's assumption of ideal speech may end up implausibly rationalizing people, as I said above.

Once again the devil lies in the details. The world we live in is not a dream land of rational communication, but a common place for lack of sincerity, intentional deceiving and injustice where having character is more sparsely rewarded than making money or having authority. If we look at our impoverished history we become aware of the tremendous role played by brutal force, cunning power and violence, which destroyed dreams of freedom and ruined the life of so many people. In order to avoid unnecessary deception and betrayal, one needs to accept a much weaker sense of the notion of "*ideal speech*". I am inclined to accept that norms of rationality are useful guides that show

where to go and what we should do. The reflective agreement can be reachable under the provisions that all speakers participating in a discourse have an equal voice and are honestly engaged in communication processes driven by the "better argument", which is to be determined from the vantage point of a universalist moral commitment to equality, justice and well-being.

Nevertheless, the fact such improbable conditions are not actually plausible, and one may have justified doubts that they will ever be met, that does not mean that our world is completely flooded with irrationality. In fact it isn't. Were people ever telling lies or deceiving themselves all the time, we would be incessantly living in a state of delusion. In such a case, no utterance would make any sense. The absurd consequence, obviously denied by evidence of ordinary speech interactions, is not only that understanding becomes impossible, but even our survival would be an unintelligible mystery: after all, we wouldn't know how we have continued to exist for so long. As a matter of fact, we may understand that, at times, people may be wrong provided that their background beliefs are basically correct. Thus, Davidson's caution could help avoid overstating the issue and inappropriately drawing "*ought*" from "*is*". In this more modest sense, I find that Habermas's concept of ideal speech has a real normative value for everyday communicative processes. In the mean time, life becomes more bearable because one knows what to expect from an imperfect world like ours. And if politicians would be required to issue their speeches from a chair provided with a lie detector, we might be shocked by our findings, though we would not be completely lost in disillusionment and emotional distress. The critical thrust of communicative rationality helps dissociate the parasitic mode of language from the moral and truthful intent of

reaching understanding. On this theoretical basis Habermas identifies two kinds of

pathological developments in modern societies: the cultural impoverishment of the

lifeworld and the colonization of the lifeworld by "the system", wherein the mechanism

of functional integration takes over individuals' lives (see *TCA 2*, pp. 301-2). Habermas

can explain the paradox of modern processes of rationalization in terms of unwilling and

devastating effects such as *anomie* (word coined by Durkheim), *loss of meaning*

(expression used by Weber) and *mental illnesses* (analyzed in psychopathologies, Freud's

mechanism of frustration). If Habermas could offer a diagnosis of these symptoms as

causal consequences of the colonization of lifeworld, he may use the concept of

communicative rationality as "a yardstick for the assessment of these disturbances"

(Cooke, *Language and Reason*, p. 148). He contends that he can do this by a pragmatic

account of systematically distorted communication. But, except few suggestive remarks,

he has not made a serious attempt to work out an articulated account of the violations of

the internal idealizing structure of speech. However, in the long run, the awareness of

what we can expect in a world dominated by the drive to success and efficiency would

show us what has been spoiled and what must be fixed or surrendered in the process of

societal modernization. This suggests that the normative standards of rationality that

would permit the criticism of corrupted components of speech acts make possible the

account of possible distortions of communication.

In sum, Habermas's concept of communicative rationality has some idealizing

tendencies in two aspects: *(1)* the implausible portrayal of speaker-hearer communicative

interactions in which claims to validity are justified and regulated by the force of the

better argument; and *(2)* the idealizing projection of societies in which a rationally

motivated consensus can be reached in open-ended critical debates, in conditions in which no argument can be excluded and every one affected must participate with an equal voice in discourses about moral justification of norms. The sacrifice of people like Socrates, Galileo and More, sketched above bears witness to the contrast between their power-driven world and the utopian ideal of a rationalized lifeworld where suffering and frustration is presumably vindicated. If the basis of universal agreement is as limited as my stories show, one may question the usefulness of Habermas's discourse ethics which does not tell much about the cognitive content of judgements and norms in particular historical and cultural contexts. In this respect, one critic observes that "if we accept the substance of Habermas's discourse theory as an account of what constitutes the validity of moral norms and judgments, the class of moral norms and judgements becomes so small that the part played by moral reason in dealing with the practical questions of everyday life shrinks alarmingly" (Cooke, *Language and Reason*, p. 154). We could imagine that Habermas's response would put the emphasis on the idea of ideal speech, which represents the counterfactual core of communicative rationality. He may repudiate for instance the descriptivist or essentialist interpretations of his account and contend that he has little to say about the concrete problems and hardships confronting individuals and communities in their daily life. In such a case one may have justifiable doubts regarding his repeatedly made assumption that strong idealizations are pointed by everyday communication processes which come close to fulfilling the requirements of argumentation. In addition, the inherently restrictive sphere of Habermas's discourse, would need to be complemented by another theory of human experience and action which must cope with the practical question left out by him.

And yet one should not lose sight of Habermas's achievements in the midst of idiosyncratic readings of his project. He attempts to reconstruct the formal and universal conditions of raising claims to validity in the postconventional use of language - that is, to establish a decentered worldview, to justify appropriate norms and to structure a personal identity that is autonomous and individuated. The fact of the matter is that in a reflective communication process, the conceptual debate is open-ended and the alternative bases of criticism must remain open. Therefore, Habermas himself would self-consciously agree that there should not be anything unusual in the evaluation from may angles of the merits and limits of communicative rationality. Here lies his undeniable modernity. What is particularly impressive in his attempt to provide the universal and unavoidable idealizing grounds for possible understanding is his determination to reconstruct the context-transcendence power of communicative rationality in a world in which the value of the good life is no longer valid across cultures. He looks to the rational potential of language to find normative presuppositions which serve for the critique of social pathologies of a "world well lost". The required assistance of communicative rationality in dealing with injustice and disturbed individual identities may not be designed to cure for good either our utopian hopes and illusions or skeptical pessimism and relativism about values. However, its critical thrust may, at least, prevent us from taking any claim to validity on unquestioned faith or succumb in the face of authority or force. Reflective participation in communicative action implies a fair debate in which all participants have an equal voice and no argument is exempted from critical examination. On these rational grounds may rest the critique which could help to avoid unnecessary suffering and on which we may rely while we are repeatedly subjected to the blow of unfairness and meanness in our

daily lives. But we should not expect Habermas to tell historical subjects what to believe or how they should live their lives nor to propose a perfectly organized, harmonious and transparent society which would suppress difference in favor of an artificial unity for the sake of consensus. Therefore, it is a misunderstanding to expect communicative rationality to describe concrete forms of life or to imagine a prophecy about a future stage of post-traditional cultures, which are necessarily outcomes of the modern development. Despite Habermas's warning against such misinterpretations many critics still see "grounds for unease" with regards to the utopian content of his project (see Cooke, *Language and Reason*, pp. 31, 162-3, 166).

In the light of foregoing considerations, we may conclude that the concept of communicative rationality is not a speculation about a dream world but a normative projection with a critical theoretical function, which points toward a rationalized lifeworld in all three of its constitutive spheres. First, it yields a vision of a lifeworld in which *cultural traditions* would be reproduced through the critical and open processes of intersubjective evaluations of validity claims. Second, it projects a vision of a lifeworld in which *legitimate orders* would be reproduced and regulated through critical and open-ended argumentative processes designed to justify norms and aimed at reaching consensus. (Naturally, this involves opinion-formation and a discursive will according to which participants' main concerns should be moral, legal and political rights, not the common value of the good life). Third, it implies a lifeworld in which *individual identities* ought to be self-regulated through reflective practices of assessment based upon the better argument *(TCA 1*, pp. 66-7, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, p. 163). Briefly put, from the perspective of normative interpretation of

Habermas's project, the participants to a discourse must be willing to cogently consider

every arguments and continue the discussion indefinitely or until an agreement is

achieved. In this intersubjective context of linguistic interactions, the idealizing

presuppositions of speech establish the counterfactual rules of the game for the process of

reaching understanding and thereof point to the critical thrust of communicative

rationality.

Chapter 7)　　　　　　　　　<u>**CONCLUSIONS**</u>

<u>**7.1) CLOSING REMARKS**</u>

In this chapter I will conclude the dissertation by clarifying the argument along with a few closing thoughts about a larger project. In the meantime, I will briefly summarize where I am after the discussion presented so far.

The aim of this dissertation was to explore in what sense rationality secures the ground for the possibility of cross-cultural understanding and to question what kind of understanding, if any, can be valid across cultures. In this respect, the preliminary reference to Descartes has shown that for him the difficulty of understanding between peoples from different cultures never arises. His idea of a unique and self-sustaining reason establishes the universal premises of understanding across the peculiar diversity of "*custom and example*". In this way he is confident the he can secure the unity of knowledge from the demons of skeptical doubt and insure the universal validity of the language of the mind. But we have seen that later research in anthropology and sociology called into question Descartes's subject and challenged the nature and the prerogatives of his notion of rationality and, implicitly, the validity of his view on understanding. The interpretation of other people is now made possible in terms of unconscious perceptual associations (Frazer), "language-habits" (Sapir), religious ceremonial (Durkheim), and patterns of thinking (Weber). Furthermore, the universalist ambition of the Cartesian project was undercut by Wittgenstein's and Winch's criticism. On the basis of their relativist ideas of "language-game" and "form of life" used to describe linguistically enclosed world-views, they prompted the demise of the Cartesian idea of the universal authority of reason as a basis from which understanding across cultures is possible. Since

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there is no transcultural ground to ascribe to other cultures rules of behavior which are not familiar to their home-language, the best we can do is to understand one's way of life by surveying the way one uses language. From this perspective, there is no *court of reason* to rule outside a shared linguistic framework on what is a meaningful utterance and what is reasonable or correct behavior. Thus, what appears as irrational or incomprehensible to us can make sense within the context of the rules governing the ways of life in which agents are embedded and to which they assent. Insofar as an ethnographer cannot rely on some neutral middle ground of a common rationality, when he leaves his home-language venturing in a hitherto unknown culture to investigate alien speakers, his capacity to understand his informants depends solely on his ability to translate their language. Here the issue of translation arises. We must ponder the impossibility of making sense of alien verbal behavior by considering Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation (bound to the inscrutability of reference). He believes that apparent linguistic uniformity bears upon the behavioral associations and has nothing to do with the problem of the equivalence of meanings (see his parable of the "outward uniformity" of trimmed bushes in elephantine shapes but with different forms of twigs and branches below the surface). To optimize the chance of agreement between two speakers of different languages, Quine appeals to the maxim of charity, which stipulates that a bad translation is more likely than a faulty mind when our tentative translation manual yields some weird or silly assertions made by our informants. Davidson capitalizes on this tack to argue that languages are indeed essentially interpretable and, consequently, he contends that Quine's radical assumption of a complete failure of translation is mistaken. Davidson's concept of understanding relies not on the behaviorist notion of "stimulus meaning" but on the quasi-

mentalist idea of "holding true beliefs" most of the time, as developed in his principle of charity. And yet, he delimits himself from any transcendentalist reading of his thoughts regarding the appeal to charity and sets empirical limits to the process of linguistic interpretation. Hollis goes in the direction rejected by Davidson and assumes an *a priori* reason, which is expressed by rational "bridgeheads" consisting of beliefs universally shared by mankind. But he fails to prove this strong claim.

By reviewing the positions taken by major figures from Wittgenstein and Winch to Quine, Davidson, and Hollis I have tried to consider what conceptions of rationality can support possible understanding across cultures. At the end of the first five chapters, I had found no adequate treatment of rationality for this purpose. To restore confidence on this matter I turned to Habermas's conception of communicative rationality. He explains on the basis of an argument with a weak "transcendental twist" how understanding is possible across cultural and historical contexts. His pragmatic reconstruction of the universal conditions of speech acts establishes three linguistic links between participants in communication which can generate a mediating ground set by explicit or merely implicit *claims to validity*. His point is that every utterance unavoidably redeems and vindicates claims to *the truth* of the propositional content in relation to the state of affairs or facts, to its *rightness, legitimacy, justifiability or appropriateness* in the social context of the shared norms and values within a lifeworld, and the *truthfulness, sincerity, or authenticity* regarding subjective expressions of the speaker's internal intentions, feelings and desires. The validity claims represents three fundamental illocutionary modes and are present in three corresponding types of utterances (constative, regulative and expressive) which are associated with three extra-linguistic domains (the objective

domain showing how things stand, our social domain which is formed by their intersubjective interaction, or in my private domain of internal and subjective experiences).

In his view such unavoidable universals make possible understanding as a relation between a hearer who has the elementary capacity to take an affirmative or negative stance toward what is said by a speaker who can defend by reasons the validity claim being made. For instance, a hearer may contest what is being said and ask the speaker, "what arguments do you have to say that" or the hearer might find the claim either inappropriate or immoral, or simply suspect that the speaker is not sincere. To be convincing, the speaker has to present reasons to defend the disputed claims. Therefore, understanding the claims to validity is inherently connected with the process of argumentation. Such claims to validity are bound by the idealizing presupposition such as the condition of linguistic consistency and the meaning equivalence, which is counterfactually pointed by actual everyday communicative processes. He thinks that the "lifeworld" provides the context of communication. The universal and necessary conditions of possible understanding are thus built into the fabric of "the intersubjective structures of social reproduction".[59]

On the basis of this discussion I conclude regarding the problem of rationality and cross-cultural understanding that Habermas's concept of communicative rationality is the best way to make sense of cross-cultural understanding among the conceptions I have explored. From his vantage point we can criticize productively the other positions discussed so far. First his concept of procedural rationality breaks all monological conceptions of reason. Above all, he rejects the kind of subject-centered reason as found

in Descartes. Habermas's concept of rationality mainly refers to "the disposition of speaking and acting subject to acquire and use fallible knowledge" and its criteria are not simply found in standards of truth and success that govern the relationships of knowing and purposively acting subjects to the state of affairs. He treats action oriented to communication as a kind of social interaction designed to reach agreement on the rational basis of a common recognition of corresponding validity claims raised in speech acts.

As Habermas realizes the relevance of language games argument, he concedes to Wittgenstein and Winch that it is right to insist upon the historical configurations of customary practices, group memberships, cultural patterns of interpretation, forms of socialization and to adopt a participative attitude from within the totality of a form of life. But he further argues that such an argument is vulnerable to a critique based upon the procedural concept of communicative rationality which suggests that forms of life are an equilibrated inter-play of the cognitive with the moral and the aesthetic-practical. Whereas Wittgenstein and Winch rebel against the transcultural standards of rationality, they are found liable by Habermas to the imputation of reducing the complexity of rationality to the one-sidedness of the cognitivist aspect of worldview at the expense of the other moral-practical and aesthetic expressive dimensions. Habermas shows that to understand an alien speaker means to understand the validity claims he raises in his utterance and to grasp the reasons he gives to support his claims.

Habermas admits that a competent social scientist must be focused on the use of language and should begin to reconstruct the universe of discourse from within. Since we cannot make sense of meaning and interpretation of other cultures unless we evaluate the validity claims and the reasons used by the participants in these forms of life,

understanding is based upon a context-transcendent power of communicative rationality. But as the investigation proceeds he should determine if his informant's speech is driven by the authority of the shared tradition (for instance, whether the native speaker obeys a custom or fears the menace of his gods or, eventually is forced by the chief of his tribe to undisclose the truth or, simply happens to be unright or dishonest). The researcher's competence is tested in the field by his ability to grasp whether his subjects use language with a communicative intent or whether they just strategically pursue some interests. In the first case, validity claims are thematized and the reasons offered by the speaker to support them may hold cross-culturally. In the latter case, the behavior under scrutiny may be shown to be deceptive (i.e., the native may say something just to get a reward, to have fun or humiliate the scientist, a foreigner to him).

Therefore, in contrast with Wittgenstein and Winch, Habermas argues that we are in general able to understand in a rational context of language-use the claims to validity raised and to come to grips with reasons given to support them. He argues that a reflective agreement, which involves a critical attitude and a world decentration, is possible in the postconventional modes of communication in modern lifeworlds.

Unlike Quine, Habermas argues that everyday communication reveals idealizing suppositions which are approximately realized by every communicative exchange in which words and expressions are likely used in the same ways and with identical meanings. This is exactly what Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation rejects. He admits that the "outward uniformity" of behavioral dispositions is imposed by society to insure a "smooth communication", notwithstanding it bears upon patterns overlying a "chaotic subjective diversity" of connections between environment and behavior. In this

respect, complex behavioral associations could explain with a good deal of linguistic uniformity verbal dispositions to give assent or dissent to various sentences within a community of speakers. In a way comparable with bushes trimmed to look identically from the outside but different in their inward twigs and branches, linguistic forms may appear as the same, though communication presupposes no similarity in nerve nets.

In consequence, on this view we can never know which meanings of our phrases would appropriately describe the native's overt behavior because language is essentially indeterminate with regard to the things in the world which are captured by it. Hence, Quine concludes that we could make countless translations depending on the translation manuals we use, but we will never be able to tell which translation better matches the meaning of alien utterances. His radical translator make use of charity as a simple rule of thumb, which is more useful in the early confusing stages of translation when understanding an alien behavior may be just a empirical matter of good psychological guessing. While Quine ultimately relies on psychological conjectures, Habermas adopts a Kantian approach. He works in a transcendental framework in a symbiosis with reconstructive sciences (such as Chomsky's generative grammar, Piaget's psychological development of mental structures, and Kohlberg's theory of moral stages). Habermas takes formal commonalties as unavoidable grounds that provide the internal formal structure of utterances and make possible the process of reaching agreement in terms of validity claims and counterfactual conditions of argumentation. As a matter of fact, one's ability to perform a coherent and meaningful speech act depends on their implementation. On these arguments, Habermas finds a way out of relativism in terms a rational reconstruction of communicative competence that is based on the universality of

validity claims. He assumes that the idealizing presuppositions of linguistic equivalence are counterfactually and implicitly redeemed by actual communicative practice. And this likelihood of fulfilling the condition of the consistent use of meanings across the cultural divide shows that coming to an understanding is not only possible but takes place in social interactions between people speaking different languages. From this concrete historical and sociological angle, although the case of radical translation may be contrived as a mere theoretical possibility, it is neither a real problem nor relevant for actual interlinguistic relations.

Davidson may agree with this critical conclusion so far as he shows that all languages are basically interpretable. But he claims that this is just an empirical condition since he does not assume that they *must* be so. But because he is frustrated by the futility of attempts to answer "what is meaning", he shifts his concern to what would suffice an interpreter to understand the speaker of an "intractable" language. In this respect, first, Davidson thinks that one's beliefs must be mostly true, and one's inferences must be mainly the right or normatively appropriate ones. If not, it will be impossible to assign any interpretation to one's verbal behavior and ascribe any interpretation to one's mental state. Second, his theory of truth associated with a theory of rationality bearing on the principle of charity provides support for the idea of partial, rather total failure of translation. This implies a common ground between intersubjective structures of beliefs, which point to the quasi-mentalist idea of *holding true sentences*. Davidson argues that while the idea of truth remains relative to language, it is as objective it can be. And yet, the theory of interpretation and translation involves a high degree of rationality as a prerequisite for assigning reasonable "intentional content" to one's utterances and to

mental states they presumably express. Therefore, on Davidson's view, the constraints of charity means more than a simple rule of thumb, and its test is represented by successful communication. The appeal to charity shows how disagreement is possible on the basis of some agreement and this bears upon holding mostly true beliefs. But, so far as we are imperfect beings capable of being mistaken, we need charity to interpret others.[60]

For Habermas, communicative rationality has a context-transcendent power and, from this perspective, Davidson may appear unnecessarily cautious. At the same time, Habermas does not share Hollis's substantive notion of bridgehead for being monologically assumed as consisting in rational beliefs and rules of coherent judgement to which a rational man must subscribe. For Habermas, rationality is inherently discursive and interlocutors *must* assume the possibility in principle of an undistorted dialogue seeking for truth, rightness and sincerity and governed by the force of the "better argument". However, so far as his account of understanding via agreement relies on a universally shared "communicative competence", describable as ability to raise validity claims and giving reasons to support them, it is consistent with the requirement of charity but it is somewhat stronger and more compelling. His pragmatic reconstruction puts together a transcendental argument that insures universality and necessity with an empirical method of testing fallible hypotheses against historical and cultural reality of the lifeworld. In this perspective, the idea of rationality is given a stronger and more precise conceptualization in terms of validity claims, which are universally thematized in speech acts and linked to the normative requirements of argumentation that make understanding via agreement possible. He assumes that the "better arguments" should prevail in rational disputes. One's ability to utter a coherent and meaningful statement

depends on formal commonalties that provide the internal structure to argumentation. One's failure or avoidance to do so could lead to a breakdown of communication but also raises doubts regarding one's mental competence.

Faced with transcendentalism and skepticism, Habermas avoids each extreme in the philosophical tug of war regarding understanding and develops better conceptual weapons than any other theorist in our day, ranging over a wide spectrum from language theory to sociology. Further, he is not limited like a Wittgensteinian philosopher to descriptions of *how the world is* and finally to leaving it unchanged. As the only alternative to rational dialogue is endless conflict and unavoidable wars, Habermas's concept of communicative rationality provides for the chance to meet pragmatic demands by helping us to increase our potential for survival in a world torn apart by splitting cultural differences and political contrasts.

In fact, at the metatheoretical level, we have noticed that the participants in the relativity debate (including Winch, Quine, Davidson, Hollis, and Habermas) must accept the universal and unavoidable presuppositions of argumentative reasoning and the conditions of consistency and coherence which make their thought comprehensible in critical dialogue. If communication is to remain possible, to raise doubts about the standards of rationality requires to be able to replace them and start again by adopting, in the first place, new rules governing the belief-formation and actions, and then by determining the "charitable" implications of the validity claims within the "discursive attitude". We have seen that social scientists returning from their cultural explorations cannot consistently deny a common pattern of reason which is non-discursively shared by two different systems of beliefs or native forms of life, and, in the mean time, to argue

that these are just as good as or superior to their own. In this matter, Habermas gives up the monological and one-sided positions and establishes an idea of critical debate based on arguments which makes intelligible the dialogue between different conceptual alternatives.

In the light of this conclusion, I consider that the problems which remain to be solved are presented by the most enduring objections to Habermas' theory of communicative action. In chapter 6, I provided a relatively lengthy exposition of his position and, particularly, in section 6.4, I showed which are the challenges he must face to buttress his view. Several critical objections to Habermas's project revealed gaps and ambiguities in his sometimes shifting perspective. The following discussion is not designed to respond to all the problems he faces, but to contribute to the idea of communicative rationality and to emphasize its normative role in the treatment of the pathologies of modernity. In this respect, we may question four interrelated aspects of Habermas's view on the rational potential of language: First, some critics observe that a suspension or an avoidance of validity claims is possible. Second, we have seen that the strong thesis that all three kinds of validity claims are simultaneously raised with every speech act can be challenged and that sometimes we just can contest an utterance from the three points of view. Third, I pointed to some problems with the justification of norms in connection with the likelihood of the decline of consensus in the context of the growing complexity of cultural differentiation in modern societies. Fourth, I discuss how the context-transcendent power of communicative rationality bears upon the unconditional character of the claims to truth in a way which is different from the discursive vindication of the normative claims to rightness. To reach consensus may be a

constraint on practical discourses and may be also relevant for some cognitive issues

which cannot be decided on the basis of empirical evidence which is available (e.g.,

epistemological questions regarding the existence of anti-matter, the nature of the Big-

Bang, the space-time structure with black holes, etc). But propositional truth usually

involves a kind of unconditionality which does not depend on agreement between

participants in communication in a way similar to the grounding of a norm, when the

consent *must* be achieved in the situation of a debate permeated only by *the better*

reason.

These four critical aspects were described as bearing on the issue of the

therapeutic role of communicative rationality. Habermas's contention is that universally

raised validity claims and counterfactual idealizations of argumentative processes provide

the unavoidable foundation for a use of language to achieve agreement by which humans

can save the integrity of their inner self and maintain their identity as rational beings. In

connection with this Habermas points to a pathology of modernity that may be used as a

diagnosis of the illnesses of a lifeworld in which language is no longer suited to the

pursuit of understanding. He shows that the development of modern societies leads to

unwilling and devastating ill-suited effects such as *anomie, loss of meaning* and *personal*

disturbances and suggests that such social and personal anomalies of communicative

action account for a disturbed processes of understanding in linguistic exchange. In

connection with this attempt to identify the pathologies of lifeworld, Habermas

dissociates *the parasitic* mode of language oriented towards success and efficiency from

the primary use of language to reach *understanding*. He explains the paradox of modern

processes of rationalization in terms of the cultural impoverishment of the lifeworld and

the colonization of *the lifeworld* by *the system* in which the mechanism of functional integration takes over individuals' lives. The awareness of the contrast between the imperatives of instrumental reason which permeates a system driven by success and efficiency and the lifeworld structured by communicative rationality oriented toward understanding play an important critical function in the process of argumentation of validity claims. In this respect he projects a vision of a utopian lifeworld in which we can imagine politicians acting in good faith for the cause of truth and justice instead of merely fighting for their own benefit or, at best, promoting the narrow interest of *the good life* of their community.[61]

Although Habermas does not properly elaborate the intricacies of such a theory, he wants to have the last word in the rationality debate. He admits that the skeptic may be right to refuse to argue and prefer instead to "assert his position mutely and impressively". Nevertheless by refusing to speak out and take a *yes and no* stance he extricates himself from the communicative practice of everyday life in which he is *a fortiori* forced to participate unless he is ready to terminate for good his membership in the social community or to discontinue the reproduction of his life in the intersubjective web of a shared form of life. That means in Habermas's view that the "skeptic may reject morality, but he cannot reject the ethical substance (*Sittlichkeit*) of life circumstances in which he spends his waking hours, not unless he is willing to take refuge in suicide or serious mental illness" ("Discourse Ethics", p. 100). One may refuse to speak or may not act communicatively by bracketing validity claims. However, one may withdraw from the discourse where reason is the judge who adjudicates the disputes only at the expense of the extreme consequence of putting in jeopardy one's mental normalcy.

In sum, on the basis of the critical thrust of communicative rationality, Habermas contends that he can provide a pragmatic account of systematically distorted communication and provide "a yardstick" for the assessment of the disturbances bearing on understanding. He believes that we can recognize what components of language have been distorted and what must be fixed or surrendered in the process of societal modernization. However, this focus on language makes Habermas liable to the accusation that his "overemphasized" tendency to "linguistify" human experience and action is made at the cost of the failure to account for the non-linguistic and pre-linguistic dimensions. I have also indicated that he has not made yet a serious attempt to work out an articulated account of the violations of the internal idealizing structure of speech.[62]

*In thinking about these problems I believe that a **three-fold reconstruction** of reason may be an appropriate project.* I think that we may discuss the idea of rationality as analytically distinct on the three levels: phenomenological, scientific-theoretical and normative. However, at this moment, I can only point to a possibly fruitful research programme. I will briefly refer to this larger project in the closing section of these conclusions.

7.2) A REFERENCE TO A LARGER PROJECT

My initial project aimed at a three-fold reconstruction of rationality. The required theorization and arguments go beyond what I could develop in this dissertation. My concern here is to offer a glimpse of an unfinished idea. It remains a program to be pursued in the future as one of my intellectual challenges.

I believe that to determine a common core of rationality across cultures and account for overlaps between different conceptual schemes or ways of life we must

explore three interrelated fields: first, the intelligibility of styles of living and patterns of behaviors different from ours; second, the possible dialogue among different theoretical discourses and scientific explanations; and, third, the common ground of agreement on moral matters in practical discourses. By imagining a three-tier-rationality, we can approach a more comprehensive project that may enable us to account for cultural breakdowns and for intercultural dialogue and agreement. We can do this from three angles: a) phenomenologically, we may stress the web of social interaction from the behavioral aspects to concrete ways of living which are culturally impregnated; b) theoretically, we may be concerned with the scientific grounding of knowledge; and finally, c) from a normative standpoint, we may focus on the justification of moral standards and criteria of rationality which must be observed if understanding and, in general, social life is to be possible. These three aspects are analytically distinct, though they are interrelated in the social practices of acquiring understanding. On the first level, we often bear witness to pre-logical or pre-theoretical intuitions, unquestioned rules of behavior followed by people caught in a specific tradition or custom. In this respect we refer to a historically and culturally bound rationality (contextual or "short range"), which is sensitive to the needs of the lifeworld. On the second level we may raise the issue of a rational potential for scientific understanding linked to theoretical language as it is translatable and consistent in communication (e.g. rigid designators, specialized scientific descriptions, etc). On the third level, we may refer to the ideal-normative aspects of rationality (cross-cultural, or "long range"). This may provide a common ground for understanding that can justify norms and help construct cross-cultural bridges between different lifeworlds.

Were we to succeed in the articulation of a challenging *three-tier-model*, then we would provide a simpler and more comprehensive notion of rationality with which we could face problems of cross-cultural communication. Such a three-tier-reconstruction could help account for successful understanding across linguistic and cultural frameworks. When understanding breaks down, its failure points to possible gaps of understanding which may appear when people do not meet on the same level of the discourse (i.e., cognitive or theoretical reasons are mistakenly taken as moral or practical reasons). However, as my reflections on this issue are not systematically worked out, the convincing story about the promise yielded by the three-tier structure remains yet to be told.

NOTES

NOTES (1-12) to INTRODUCTION (pp. 1-38)

1)   The word "*reason*" originates in Latin "*ratio-nis*", which comes from the Latin translation of the Greek term "*nous*" used by Greek philosophers from Anaxagoras to Plato and Aristotle. Given that "*nous*" is often translatable as "*intellect*", the word "*intellect*" could be used as interchangeable with "reason".

In a more common use of the term, one may account for the evolution of one's own personal intellectual experience, in an effort to show how one arrived at that particular thinking. However, in general all those mental functions, including intellect and reason in the first sense, are characterized by spontaneity rather than receptivity, so excluding sensibility.

2)   People are inclined to see themselves as rational. As Vilfredo Pareto once observes, people like to put a "varnish of logic" over their conduct.

3)   In fact, Greek philosophy approached the issue of rationality long time ago. Pythagoras is credited for having first coined the term philosophy. He distinguishes between "*the slavish*" that naturally pursue the glory and riches, and philosophers searching for truths (*aletheia* -- See Diogenes Laertios, *Life and Doctrines of Philosophers* 8.8; after J.O. Urmson, *The Greek Philosophical Vocabulary*, Duckworth, 1990, p.130).

Consequently, the conventional translation "*love of wisdom*" seems to be less accurate than "*love of rational understanding*" or "*love of knowledge*" ("*episteme*") as opposed to simple opinion ("*doxa*"-- According to J.O. Urmson, "*wisdom*" has in common English a practical reference (e.g. wise policy, precautions, plans, investments, etc), whereas "*sophia*" means theoretical skill intellectual excellence (J.O. Urmson, *Greek Vocabulary*, pp. 131, 151-152)

"*Sophia*" is after all the capacity for rationality that defines our being and gives us distinctiveness in the universe. That is to exercise reason in order to make sense of the world, and to act in accordance with some acknowledged epistemic or moral goals. For him, particularly, the language of reason that gods speak is that of number. And yet the fear of irrational still blocked many paths. According to a story, the theorem bearing his name, that the square root of 2 was an infinite surd was drowned (by pure mischance) at sea. It was hard to accept that even gods were at times speaking gibberish.

The same paradigm of thinking is valid for that entire age of philosophizing. Reason alone, declares Parmenides, can establish what *Is*. If we have access to the truth it could not be on the basis of sensory appearance. The truth opens to logical mind only and Being is what a thought seeking for ontologic consistency declares it to be: there is no distinction between Reason and "*the One*". His disciple, Zeno of Elea aimed to prove as absurd the alternatives to Parmenides's account. His paradoxes (*aporias*), which still puzzle our intellect, were aimed to prove that there is an irresoluble conflict between the demands of reason and of sense. Heraclitus' dictum that everything changes may seem plausible to the latter, but all differentiation (not only the temporal flux) leads examining mind to an inescapable contradiction. Thus Zeno's arrow is eternally flying, and it never reaches the target.

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For Plato, reason is described by metaphor of the charioteer which encourages the white horse, symbolizing the good and restricts the malefic behavior of the black horse, the image of evil. However, Plato goes further than this suggestive metaphor. According to Mittelstrass (*Scientific Rationality*, p. 85), Plato refers to the idea of rationality in two ways. On the one hand, **giving reasons**, or the **grounding criterion** *(logon didonai)* was always a constitutive element expressed by among the criteria for rationality, (Leibniz called it *principium reddenda rationis*). On the other hand, explanation serves for speaking about objects already constituted: that is, for establishing the validity of propositions referring to objects (*"torein ta phainomena"*). Explanation has also has a conceptual structure by being theoretical knowledge (*"episteme"* or *"teoria"*) and a logical form by being deductive. It consequently emphasizes a *"grounding structure"*, which, according to Aristotle, with respect to the establishment of beginning principles or axioms is *"epagogic"*.

In this tradition, rationality was best represented by science. Thus, instead of speaking about scientific culture one may wish to use the term "rational culture" referring primarily to scientifically articulated theories and practices. That would mean that rationality of science provides a model for the whole sphere of culture. Consequently, science is not responsible for faulty knowledge. We must be held accountable for committing epistemic mistakes. It is the psychological basis and the historical and cultural ups and downs, which are pointed out by the modern philosophy of science as being irrational.

4)   The use of the term "pluralistic" as pertaining to rationality may again strike one as being additional evidence of ambiguity in semantic matters: different models of rationality? This idea is offensive at least for the traditional European philosophy and science which embraced the view of a monistic, unitary rationality, characterized by the lack of alternatives with respect to rational orientations. Once abandoned the image of a one growing rational culture, the plural rationalities undermined the monopoly of the single "law court of reason" and opened the way for a required principle of toleration. This principle assumes, according to Mittelstrass, that "no decision can be made with regard to the claim to rationality from the point of view of lacking alternatives, and even more (because this only express the fact of the finiteness of man) that theories, with respect to paradigmatic circumstances, are capable of becoming "rational, perhaps, bearing in mind their designers, even "blessed"" (*Scientific Rationality*, p. 84).

5)   Blaise Pascal's complains: "*L'homme n'agit point par la raison qui fait son estre*" (*Pensees*, 395, p. 210). Then, the question is what makes human beings to behave as "fouls" by ignoring the rules built in their own selves? Pascal does not hesitate to answer: "*La corruption de la raison paroist par tant de differrantes et extravagantes moeurs. It a fallue que la verite soit venue, afain que l'homme ne vesquit plus en soy mesme*" (*Pensees*, 396, p. 210). This contrast between reason as a truth securing faculty and corrupting "*different and extravagant customs*" puts Pascal in the rationalists' camp together with Descartes.

6)   As individuals are liable to prejudice, they cannot be exempt from such fallibility. In this light, Pascal is right then, only fools could take senseless collective judgements

for the pure and trustworthy light of Reason. Culture is questionable and unreliable, Reason is beyond doubt.

7)   Hume has been more cautious than Descartes. He would not blame God for our mistakes. Instead he warns us in the *Treatise of Human Nature* that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions; and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (Book II, Part III, Sect. III, p. 415).

Nevertheless, one may argue that, on the one hand, he fell back to "*custom and habit*" which Descartes was so eager to blame for all our miscommunications. Therefore he undermined the claim of rationality in underlying the formation of beliefs. Though, we cannot say yet that Hume refers to the notion of culture as lifeworld, in a sociologic sense, that Descartes tried to freed himself from in the rational quest for self-justifying, self-generating certainty. It is merely the psychological custom of the mind that explains the manner in which we can reach or build the world. As Ernest Gellner noticed the difference between the two programs: "If Descartes was anguished because he could not bear the idea of God the deceiver, Hume was anguished because he could find no good reasons to trust the convictions by which we live" (Gellner, *Reason and Culture*, p. 21)

On the other hand this modern skeptic found the Cartesian "ego" empty because, "For from what impression could this idea be derived?", he asks (*Treatise*, book I, part IV, sect VI, p. 251). The self is reduced to "bundle or collection of different perception, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux or movement" (*idem*). For Hume mind remains a passive receptacle impregnable by the bundle of perceptions. Consequently Hume limited the scope of inquiry to how world happens to be made out of customs and habits as a mere contingent and unwarranted working of our sentient nature. Since we cannot validly derive "ought" from "is", Reason becomes silent in matters of values as well, and its deliberative role played in practical decision making or value assessment is undercut. Nevertheless he allowed it to characterize the mathematical and logical reasoning. In fact, his problem was to provide a proof that inductive reasoning could be rationally maintained. Even if induction does work, the question what makes it a rational proof and not a simple matter of psychological association explainable as habit or custom, and, in general, why should we trust any rational argument?

Unlike Hume, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant uses the concept of reason as a special mental faculty (distinct from sensibility, and intellect) which in thinking ideas (leading to antinomies) of absolute completeness and unconditionedness transcends the conditions of the possibility of experience;

8)   In our days, Descartes's evil genius that deceives all human simultaneously is no longer a hypothesis we should believe or take for granted. In some contexts deceiving oneself could be desirable, generating a "vital lie" that safeguards happiness or stimulate the ability to cope with difficulties. In other contexts, it suggests "bad faith", "inner hypocrisy" or plainly "false consciousness" leading to the refusal to acknowledge our mistakes and character flaws. Sometimes self deception is unintentional consisting in stubborn denial, idiosyncratic avoidance or biased understanding of one's self and/or the world. Other times, it is purposeful process to avoid unpleasant or painful realities (see Mike W. Martin, "self-deception" in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Robert

Audi, general editor, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 720-1). Deluded mental states are explainable through ignorance, false opinions, lack of self-awareness or wishful thinking. The most typical situations are when lovers are blind either to the "ugliness" or the "unreciprocated affection" of their partner, parents tend to exaggerate the virtues of their children, smokers rationalize their self-poisoning habit, dying patients of cancer pretend to themselves that their health is improving, and so on and so forth. While deceiving others could be justified by a possible expected utility, the thesis of intentionally deceiving oneself seems paradoxical, unauthentic or self-defeating in the light of reason. Existentialists such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre denounce it as dishonest cowardly refusal to face tragic but significant truths regarding death, responsibility and freedom. Sartre, for instance, treats it as rather spontaneous, and not explicitly reflected upon, but Freud found it motivated by unconscious repression.

9)   Durkheim concludes, "forcing reason back upon experience causes it to disappear, for it is equivalent to reducing the universality and necessity which characterize it to pure appearance, to an illusion which may be useful practically, but it is denying all objective reality to the logical life, whose regulation and organization is the function of the categories. Classical empiricism results in irrationalism; perhaps it would even be fitting to designate it by this latter name" (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p.14). According to Durkheim, the empirical thesis compels us to deny the universal and necessary categories of knowledge which generally make things of the world knowable and are independent of any particular subject. He claims that "these essential ideas... do not merely depend upon us, but they impose themselves upon us" (*idem,* p. 14).

Durkheim thinks that our rationality is essential for being human and represents our logical ability to systematize and classify the world, as we can know it. But he found the categories of knowledge gravely incomplete with regard to the explanation of reason as a merely form of individual, sober experience inherent in the nature of our mind. One the one hand empiricists "believe that the world has a logical aspect which the reason expresses excellently. But for all that, it is necessary for them to give the mind a certain power of transcending experience and of adding to that which is given to it directly; and of this singular power they give neither explanation nor justification" (*idem,* p. 14). On the other hand, Durkheim considers that the structures of reason evolve out of cultural practices. Hence Kant mistakenly claims that intellectual categories can be deduced transcendentally. On the basis of ethnographic study of people engaged in social cooperation, Durkheim thinks that he is able to justify scientifically what Kant believed to be simply inherent in the transcendental nature of human intellect. Only within society it makes sense why particular wills and minds, irrespective to their lifeworldly origin, could commonly agree upon the Kantian anhistorical kingdom of ends and transcultural truths.

10)   Durkheim claims that, generally, in the same way as an initially undifferentiated reason, all the essential institutions of society have been shaped in the early social interactions of the magic ceremonies. In the dawns of civilization, in fact until recently, ritual prescriptions were according to Durkheim indistinguishable from legal and moral rules. Because the idea of society is describable as the "soul of religion" (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* p. 419), "and it is humanity that has reaped the fruits" (*idem,* p. 420).

11) As Weber assumes, "the intensity of the search for the Kingdom of God commenced gradually to pass over into sober economic virtue; the religious roots died out slowly, giving way to utilitarian worldliness" (*Protestant Ethics*, p. 176).

12) In addition, the abandonment of the Cartesian unshakable foundations of knowledge leads to an unexpected step back from the epistemological angle of the regression of certainty.

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NOTES (13-29) to CHAPTER 2 (pp. 39-84)

13) If we are to continue this line of questioning in a post-modernist fashion, one may ask on what rational ground can we base our choices, say between contemporary medicine and Zande witchcraft, between Big Bang cosmologies and Summerian Myth of Creation, between the old Chinese architecture and American Functionalist School of Chicago, etc.? Some may argue that art, empirical sciences and formal disciplines represents different levels of discourse. Not so for a relativist. However, it is not my aim here to address such an extensive line of questioning which weakens our focus and moves us outside the conceptual framework of our discussion.

14) When Wittgenstein has been informed by his doctor that the "darkness" is coming, he said, "*Good!*" His last words, before he lost consciousness, were "*Tell them I've had a wonderful life!*" How could one explain this stoic, peaceful attitude in the face of the imminence of death? Perhaps, he felt at that last moment that he had reached the bottom of his 'fate" and fulfilled the meaning of his life by suggesting what a post-metaphysical culture might be like.

At his last farewell, he probably knew that a God's eye perspective is mere an illusion. Therefore he sends his message to those for whom he has written showing that there is more between heaven and earth than can be seen by the use of a single vocabulary as sought by philosophical quest for certainty. On these grounds Wittgenstein counsels us to give up the ideal of philosophy from Plato and Descartes to Russell and Moore as far as it aims to represent the world. He also critically refers to himself as the author of Tractatus where he defended a logical atomism and looked for devising an ideal language in which for each simple object or property there would be fixed, unambiguous symbol. (*Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 23).

In what follows I do not intend to directly cope either with the analysis of the Wittgenstein's influence over the last decades of philosophy or to articulate in a coherent manner his theory in order to judge its consistency. Such an attempt would be inappropriate for two reasons: First, Wittgenstein himself denies that he has a theory (*Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 109). To investigate philosophically is neither to seek theses or theories nor to find static meanings or objects permanently picked out by words. It is to understand by attending to the uses of language relevant in the specific context. The 'aura of mystery' and arguments concerning the sense and directions of later philosophical approaches (including *On Certainty*) make them subject to various interpretations, sometimes even contradictory. Wittgenstein declares (*Philosophical Investigations*, "Preface") that he had hoped to bring the remarks into some coherent whole, but such an attempt could never succeed because philosophical investigations

involve coming at the problem from different directions.

Secondly, this topic would go beyond the objectives of this paper. In consequence we will restrain the discussion to later Wittgenstein's view on meaning as the vehicle of understanding between people.

15)   See Wittgenstein - *On Certainty* (esp. sec. 566); see also Peter Winch - *The Idea of Social Science*.

16)   Wittgenstein compares the tools in a toolbox with words. A hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-plot, glue, nails and screws have the same functions as the functions of the words (*Philosophical Investigations,* sec. 11). He questions the meaning of the words in the same way we ask about how we handle a tool. "But what if the thing that any of us would take for a hammer were somewhere else a missile, for example, or a conductor's baton? Now make the application yourself" (*On Certainty*, sec. 352).

Wittgenstein believed that his later view could be better understood if one sees it against the background of his *Tractatus*. Surprisingly, though, he did not articulated an explicit analysis of the *picture theory of meaning* he shares in his early philosophical period and the references that can be found are usually 'enigmatic' and ambiguous. The *Tractatus* holds that the ultimate elements of language are names that designate simple objects. In the later works it is argued that the words 'simple' and 'complex' have no meaning in the abstract, devoid of context. The distinction always depends on what sense of these words we have in mind. "It makes no sense at all to speak absolutely of the 'simple parts of a chair' (*Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 47). By such examples Wittgenstein tries to show that the ideas of "*simplicity*" and "*complexity*" which are "super-concepts", cannot be defined as in absolute terms since they are in fact relative to a language game. For him, the question is not metaphysical but a practical one: how to apply those notions.

17)   For instance, metaphysics, in Plato's tradition, distinguishes between genuine knowledge of essences (*episteme*) regarded as timeless, universal and immutable and mere opinion (*doxa*) as ephemeral, parochial, and contingent. Plato's speaker, Socrates inquires into the essential features of all concrete objects that are 'good', 'pious', 'virtuous' or 'beautiful'. Subsequently, the meaning of a word is given by what all things identified by that word uniquely share in common. An ontologic commitment, in this very influential view, is described in terms of indefatigable search for ultimate grounds or foundations of being.

Closer to our time and from a different angle, Russell (in *On Denoting)* is also interested in how your philosophical analysis can dissolve various puzzles, and Moore in *(What is Philosophy)* maintains that, "the first and most important problem of philosophy is: To give a general description of the Universe." We realize also that for Wittgenstein the idea of 'agreement with reality' does not have any clear application (*On Certainty*, sec. 215). We shall further see that Quine also adopts a conventionalist approach. According to his view, the ontological entities have the same status as the verses describing the Homeric gods. They are just manners of speaking.

18)   Th. Kuhn, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1960), uses Wittgenstein's concepts as family resemblance or similarity relations in order to define the concept of paradigm. Kuhnian paradigms are defined as social commitments commonly shared by the members of scientific group. Such social practices give content Kuhnian notion of 'normal science'. According to Kuhn, scientists learn the ways of practice of making empirical judgements not by learning explicit rules like 'symbolic generalization', but by getting more familiar with the similarity relations that help us to discriminate among exemplars defined as common judgements shared by the members of disciplinary group. Such an idea was first advocated by Ch. Peirce in "How to make our Ideas clear?" where he speaks about the norms and values sanctioned by scientific community. If Peirce seems to be forgotten, nevertheless, in this respect, Wittgensteinian influence was considerable.

19)   Wittgenstein criticism applies not only to Descartes, but also to himself. If in *Tractatus* he held that any proposition presuppose the whole of the linguistic portrait of the world as framework of meaning, in the later work he made shift from the world-picture to the more modest and relative context of language games, as a house which carry the foundation-walls (*On Certainty*, sec. 248). Henceforth, Wittgenstein's philosophical home is built no longer built on the Cartesian absolute certain grounds but in mere finite and relative experience (if are to paraphrase W. James). At one hand, the world is just a moving target; on the other hand, we have to accept the contingency of the world we leave, knowing that nothing outside the "flux" secures the metaphysical grounds of a "view from nowhere" (as Th. Nagel calls it). His later conception makes the correction by conceiving of language as a tool and of use of language as a *form of life* involving different specific techniques.

20)   There is a strange fragment where Wittgenstein assumes: "It would strike me as ridiculous to doubt the existence of Napoleon; but if someone doubted the existence of the earth 150 years ago, perhaps I should be more willing to listen, for now he is doubting our whole system of evidence..." (*On Certainty*, sec. 185). The point is that it makes more sense to doubt about the entire system of evidence than to doubt just an isolate proposition regarding the existence of Napoleon. He continues this idea in other place: "The existence of the earth is rather part of the whole picture which forms the starting point of belief for me." (*On Certainty*, sec. 209). Such a statement is meaningful against his *Tractatus* where Wittgenstein exiles philosophical problem regarding the existence of the whole system in the realm of the bad grammar. As Russell puts it in the Preface, his argument at that time was that "an eye in the vision field cannot see itself", otherwise you can not avoid the self-referential character that leads to paradox. Now he seems to admit the contrary.

21)   Nevertheless by assuming that no further test was needed and even possible, Wittgenstein seems to contradict the process of the growth of science as a dislocation of error embodied in common sense. Knowledge is a continuous subject to revision upon the impingements of new and recalcitrant experiences. Perhaps it would more appropriate to restrain the field of any possible test to that specific time.

22) I am surprised to discover a seemingly opposite statement allowing a foundationalist interpretation: "And the bank of the river consists partly of hard rock subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which nor in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited." (*On Certainty* sec. 99).

23)   We may observe that the same kind of Cartesian illusion survives in many empiricists, Carnap, Russell and Quine among others. In particular, Quine himself cannot escape the double scope of Wittgenstein criticism from *On Certainty* (sec. 356), though Peter Winch whose new concept of a descriptive social science gave up the traditional pattern of rationality, is more likely convinced by Wittgenstein's warning regarding the difficulty to envisage any private language of thought. In consequence, against Quine's observational sentences which, "wear the meaning on their sleeves", Wittgenstein could argue that they are thoroughly bad and cannot serve as foundation since "if they turn out to be false, are replaced by others". Furthermore, against the "Cartesian subject", Wittgenstein contends that since by doubting *in abstracto* one would not know where a doubt get a foothold nor whether a future test is possible, that is because what to Putnam appears as a purely "disembodied mind", as *"cogito"*, gives no guarantees of what will happen, obviously certainty is not mere a mental act. Wittgenstein's conclusion applying to any epistemic subject engaged in a solitary journey which ambitions to re-shape the world also overshadows Quine's explanation of one's ontologic commitment.

24)   Fodor-Lepore argument against "nothing is hidden" thesis suggests that it involves omniscience available to God only. If this is the case it either uninteresting or is a faulty and inapplicable to humans and therefore it makes no sense.

25)   Wittgenstein's concepts such as "language-game" and "family resemblance" defined in terms of similarity relations have inspired Th. Kuhn interpretation of scientific rationality within a "paradigm" (see *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*). For instance, the psychological dimension of paradigm is relative to a Gestalt as specific way of seeing the world. From a linguistic perspective, paradigms are describable in the terms of a global employment of the notion of 'language game' as framework of meaning. Insofar as paradigms are emphasized as noncumulative and successive historical units, rationality within ceases to be a normative problem of formal assessment, a *"quaestio jure"*, and becomes a practical matter, a *"quaestio facti"*.

Such ideas parallel Peter Winch's idea of Social Science which tries to describe different patterns of social practice allowing a descriptive concept of rationality. He shows the idea of ways of living plays a methodological role in the conceptual reconstruction of a specific cultural practice like Azande magic. In this case the activity of following a rule is to be distinguished from governed by rule.

26)   Charles Taylor also holds this point in "Rationality" - *Rationality and Relativism*).

27)   See Charles Taylor - "Rationality" in *Rationality and Relativism* (1982). On this issue Jacques Ellul in *The Technological Society* also makes an interesting point

28)   In Chapter 6, the analysis of Habermas's concept of action oriented toward

reaching understanding which is distinguished from the strategic-purposive action oriented toward success and efficiency the notion of apparent irrationally gets a new relevant dimension.

According to Nozick (*Nature of Rationality*, Princeton University Press, 1993), the *intellectual component* consists in not believing any statement less credible than some incompatible alternative, and the *practical component* is bound to decision-value and implies believing a statement only if the expected utility of doing so is greater than that of non believing it (*Nature of Rationality*, p. 64).

29)   The paradox applies as well to Kuhnian historians of science. It is not intelligible why the historian would enjoy the privilege of escaping the framework of a paradigm whereas others can't.

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NOTES (30-34) to CHAPTER 3 (pp. 85-125)

30)   See also James F. Harris, *Against Relativism*, ch. 4, and Carl Kordig, *The Justification of Scientific Change*, ch. 2.

31)   Shortly put, first, so far as a translation scheme would be made possible by the appeal to the discredited standards of analyticity and synonymy, the systematic ambiguity of such notions undermines the attempt at mapping out the meanings, and inherently the foundations of cross-linguistic understanding. Second, although stimulation is described by Quine as a private affair, if stimuli appear as synonymous for each member of a linguistic community they are socially uniform stimuli as their synonymy is generalizable at the level of community. But even this observational synonymy does not survive outside the border of a language (bilingual cases can't be normally contrived if translation is to remain radical). Third, Quine's conclusion is that rival systems of analytical hypothesis can fit totally to speech behavior and disposition of speech behavior and still specify mutually incompatible translations of countless sentences unsusceptible of independent control.

32)   Quine's examples in *Word and Object* and *Ontological Relativity* refers mainly to the indeterminacy of terms. It is not clear to me how he considers the indeterminacy of more complex sentences. Maybe he simply thinks that this analysis is no longer needed as far as the terms of statements fail the test.

33)   In addition, such an explanatory hypothesis precludes the possibility of adopting a realist construal of scientific theories because of the semantic undetermination. Since the Indeterminacy of Translation undermines the truth searching of scientific theories are consequently pragmatically legitimate to reject it as explanatory hypothesis. Nevertheless, Quine is not ready to accept such skeptical consequences of his view, which preclude the pursuit of truth.

34)   In this respect, see Harris's acceptance of Stroud's argument in *Against Relativism*, p. 129.

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NOTES (35-44) to CHAPTER 4 (pp. 126-167)

35)   Wittgenstein's discussion of the privacy of the language of thought in *Philosophical Investigations* has been very influential in analytic philosophy. I will make a hint to his objection though I do not purport to recount or discuss the disagreements about it.

Wittgenstein imagines the absurd case when one relies on a private language:

> I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign "S" and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation. -I will remark first of all that a definition of a sign cannot be formulated. -But still I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition. -How? Can I point to the sensation? Not in a ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation - and so, as it were, point to it inwardly. -But what is this ceremony for? For that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of a sign. -Well, that is done precisely by the concentrating of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connection between the sign and the sensation. -But 'I impress on myself' can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right' (*Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 258).

The idea is clearly revisited in *On Certainty* (sec. 281) where what counts as right or evidence is described as a result of the inter-subjective agreement of a community. Meanings are established in the process of word-employment within language games. Such socially recognizable patterns of linguistic practices of a cultural framework which absorb customs and standards of judgements are simply there 'like our life' (*On Certainty*, secs. 61, 559).

I will consider Wittgenstein's controversial argument here only as it casts doubts on one's capability to understand what is in another's mind from one's own personal experience. And this issue raises the question of the intelligibility of the inner voice of the Cartesian subject.

> -Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a "beetle". No one can look into anyone's else box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle. -Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. -But suppose the word "beetle" had a use in these people's language? -If so it would be not used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language game at all; not even as *something*: for the box might even be empty. (*Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 293).

Wittgenstein seems to rhetorically urge us to 'look and see' (*On Certainty*, sec. 96) whether there is any universal feature like substance or general nature common to all contents of "private" boxes. He is sure that there is none.

36)   Wittgenstein says, "We may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanation, and

description alone must take place. And its description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems" (*Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 109).

37) However, a group of interpreters (R. Suter among them, see *Interpreting Wittgenstein*) argue that when Wittgenstein claimed that philosophy can only describe ordinary language leaving the things as they are he misunderstood the entire spirit of rationalism. For this reason, sometimes the later Wittgenstein , against his early held views is seen as being very close to the position of ordinary language philosophy defended by J.L. Austin who also joins to the chorus of those who discarded the search for a systematic ideal language.

38) R. Nozick claims that if a particular reliable procedure yields an action or belief which counts as rational, "not only must the procedure involve a network of reasons and reasoning, but this also must be (in part) why the procedure is reliable" (*Nature of Rationality*, p. 71).

39) Conceptual schemes can be compared with systems of "pigeon holes" to borrow a nice expression used by Imre Lakatos to characterize conventionalist views (see *Selected Papers*, vol. 1, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes,* Cambridge University Press, 1978).

40) One may argue that these statements are true as far as they stand in certain relation with experience like predicting, organizing, facing, fitting. But Davidson associated this aspect with the problematic application of a conceptual scheme.

41) Furthermore, "naturalized epistemology" is also an account of how are we to articulate a satisfactory theory given the evidence available. The best available theory for Quine, is our present science, but the sense impingements which back up the meaning of our sentences and, all of our knowledge, provide us the only cues to "what goes around".

42) When Davidson exposes his realist goal of describing the speech in terms of being clearer about the entities of the world, he seems to draw again from Quine's premise of a pure extensional language. He points out, "our present scheme and language are best understood as extensional and materialist" ("Idea of Conceptual Scheme", p. 188).

43) See Fodor-Lepore counter-argument from the standpoint to an atomistic view on language, (*Holism - A Shopper's Guide*, p. 101)

44) Putnam observes that "if one recognizes that the radical interpreter himself may have more than one "home" conceptual scheme, and that "translation practice" may be governed by more that one set of constraints, then one sees that conceptual relativity does not disappear when we inquire into the "meanings" of the various conceptual alternatives: it simply reproduces itself at a metalinguistic level!" ("Truth and Convention", in *Relativism- Interpretation and Confrontation*, p. 181)

45) According to Davidson, insofar as charity appeals to the concept of reason, it

appears as a teleological explanation. We may conclude also that traditional ways of acting are socially privileged (see "Thought and Talk", p. 159).

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NOTES (46-47) to CHAPTER 5 (pp. 168-182

46)   Hollis alludes to Davidson when saying "Reason thus advises a blend of charity and judgements in the understanding of social life and hence a dup-proof course for the sociology of knowledge too" ("Social Destruction Of Reality", p 69)

47)   Henderson assumes that the weighted principle of charity can be subsumed as derivative from the principle of explicability (see *Interpretation and Explanation*, pp. 49, 58-59). However, I thing that the relation is the other way around. The principle of charity provides for the possibility of understanding a subject as holding beliefs or doing actions and it is understanding what backs up explanations. Therefore understanding is prior to being able to give explanations as it is also prior to communication. Otherwise one has to admit the strange thesis that one can explain what one does not understand. In fact, to make an explanatory scheme or engage in communication one needs first to understand what it is being said. And understanding makes the need for charity.

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NOTES (48-55) to CHAPTER 6 (pp. 183-295)

48)   I use the term "utterance" interchangeably with the term "speech act" as they both refer to the elementary unit of linguistic communication.

49)   In addition to Davidson condition of interpretability (also accepted by Lewis, Dennett, Grandy), Fodor and Lepore make an inventory of premises for what they call "argument form T", as follows:

   No language is radically interpretable unless...
   ..."there are behavioral criteria for all its psychological terms" (Wittgenstein, Ryle);
   ..."there are observable criteria for application of all its theoretical terms" (Ayer);
   ...contains no "terms available only to one speaker" (Wittgenstein);
   ..."there are public criteria for ascriptions of knowledge of the language (Dummett);
   ..."it contains singular terms" (Strawson);

        Some of these presuppositions were already implicitly discussed in my paper (chaps. 2 & 3) in connection with Wittgenstein, Quine and Davidson ("Is Radical Interpretation Possible?", pp. 57-8).

50)   This assumption reminds Quine's regulative function of logical rules. Nevertheless Habermas counts the presuppositions of meaning identity among these idealizations which conflicts with Quine's claim of indeterminacy.

51)   Habermas considers three distinct positions of *a priorism*: the analytic reception of the Kantian program (Strawson), the constructivist positions (Lorenzen) and critical rationalist position (Popper). In addition, he delimitate himself from Apel's approach of "transcendental hermeneutic" or "transcendental pragmatics" (see *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp. 21-23, "Philosophy as Stand-In Interpreter", pp 6-7).

52)   After Hegel's and Marx's conceptions on the social character of reason which

resulted in a "disempowering of philosophy" through a "desublimation of spirit" proves Descartes to be wrong about a kind of reason stepping out of the world. Nevertheless, in a way Habermas intends to redeem some prerogatives of the Cartesian reason which lies below the surface of phenomenology (in Husserl's version) or analytical philosophy (as we remarked in the case of Quine).

53)   Before turning to the main issue, we owe few conceptual clarification.
The way Habermas faces historicist and culturalist claims about the variability of world-views and forms of life raises the question of an irreducible plurality of standards of rationality. Does such variability preclude the universal validity of his notion of "communicative rationality"? Does he open again the Pandora's box of relativism? Since the region overshadowed by distinct clouds which metaphorically represents various culture, covered by what Habermas often calls "lifeworld" can he still consistently maintain that rationality was to shine over the shadow and peculiarity of delineated clouds of idiosyncratic customs and habits? At this moment we owe a conceptual clarification. The phenomenological connotations of this term express the need to oppose the dry rationalist demands which grew out from an austere intellectualist philosophy which implacably reduces the vital, the empirical and the relative to logical form. I shall prefer to use this term whenever it would be appropriate to contrast the Cartesian Reason with a intersubjectively lived experience and to express concrete social interaction between people engaged in cultural practices. In the past, though, I will make more use of the expressions "ways of life" or "forms of life", which were introduced by latter Wittgenstein in analogy with "language games" and considered lately by the new kind of social science, proposed by Peter Winch, as a holistic framework of social interaction for the understanding actual *rule-governed-behavior*. Insofar as these terms refer to global social contexts for meanings and distinct cultural practices *in contrast with abstract norms* of a transcultural Reason, their meaning is in some extent met by the notion of "lifeworld" from phenomenological vocabulary coined by Edmund Husserl, developed by Heidegger, and applied by Habermas to the web of everyday life and communication to provide a referential context for the process of mutual understanding which backs up the participants in social interactions. On his view, agents draw from lifeworld the common background of "consensual patterns of interpretation", the presupposed solidarities described as "normatively reliable patterns of social relations", and speaking competence acquired in the process of socialization. However Habermas tolerates as well other conceptual alternatives of expressing "our" cognitive achievements as he often uses the term "form of life" as we noticed. So, for him it is not important whether we go on Winch's and Wittgenstein's way and call them "form of life" and "language game" or we use other expressions like "practice", linguistically mediated interaction", "convention", "cultural background", "tradition", and the like. What counts is the fact that these "commonsensical ideas" attained a status of basic concepts in epistemology. ("Communicative versus Subject Centered Reason", p. 605, "Philosophy as Stand-In Interpreter", p 9)).
As we know, Husserl introduced the description of the "Lebenswelt" in the fifth *Cartesian Meditation* as a concrete surrounding world of culture within which all man and communities relatively or absolutely separate live, undergoing a continuous change (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, pp. 132-3, se. 160). He claims:

"Manifestly the men themselves also change as persons, since correlatively they must always be taking on new habitual
properties" (*idem*, p. 135, sec. 162)

Consequently, the full concreteness and incessant character of lifeworld "applies likewise to all particular formations of the surrounding world, wherein it presents itself to us according to our personal upbringing and development or according to out membership in this or that nation, this or that cultural community (*idem*, p. 136). From here, Husserl's project is to integrate the concept in his conceptual scheme: the world in which we live belonging to an extremely low cultural level is subjected to the phenomenological reduction. Idealized and objective entities of science draw their sense from the structures of appearance, identification, evidence and truth of the lifeworld. Such idealizing and objectifying abstractions excludes actor's daily life on social scene and all facts of culture which originate in practical human activity. As alfred Schultz remarked
"this model is not fully peopled with human beings in their fully humanity, but with properties, with types (Schutz, Alfred, *Collected Papers 1*, *The Problem of Social Reality*, Martinus Nisjoff, The Hague, 1962., p 255). Since actor's actions and reactions do not originate in a living consciousness they remain merely fictious.

However, I have no interest for the purpose of this paper to follow ontological application of lifeworld and its place within "constitutional transcendental phenomenology". Unlike Husserl, I do not understand the lifeworld as a pre-scientific realm, ready made to fill up theoretical abstraction. In my approach there is only a distinction of degree between lifeworld sphere, cognitive and normative aspects which provide a more certain and secure rational ground only in the backing up of cross-cultural communication. In the sense that theorists' lives are also immersed in the same given lifeworld (notwithstanding its self images allow a plurality of versions of it), theoretical and normative constructions are part in the structure of a tradition of thought (though it might be gradually demarcated from set of beliefs less coherent and empirically verifiable structured in common sense mentalities and ideologies).

In my view, lifeworld is the social world in its historic and cultural framework. Its content is a way or form of life as a particular representation of social reality including all human relationships from the simple and familiar acquitances to the most diverse types of interaction within an array of communities (from ethnic, politic and religious to disciplinary-professional). First, our everyday experience is part of the intersubjectivity of the lifeworld because we live in it as concrete individuals among other individuals, bound to them through common expectations, desires, goals, influence and work. Secondly, the cultural world of customs and habits also defines the lifeworld because we are always conscious of its historicity and because we inhabit not a world of things, but of meanings. Consequently, the intelligibility of these meanings requires understanding how their communication is possible after all. It is a consequence of sharing cultural relations that makes us to be human and drives us to behave as we actually do. This is indeed the field targeted by scientists of human affairs (anthropologists, sociologists, economists, linguists, etc.). In spite of some inherent looming semantic ambiguities, I will make use of the concept of lifeworld in a somewhat vague and unspecified description of the humanly lived world. That is precisely because its stronger reference to social reality that has a specific significance and relevance for individuals in their daily thinking, feeling

and acting. As far as human beings are interrelated within it in manifold ways of cultural interactions, its meaning is closely approximated in my usage by the Wittgensteinian notion of ways of life or forms of life. In this respect one's cultural framework may be idiosyncratic and primordial over against any alien culture.

54)   Such a dramatic situation of modern societies is suggested by Weber.

55)   Habermas assumes that the modernization of society led to the fragmentation of three distinct dimensions of rationality: the positive science, post-traditional ethics, and autonomous art and the institutionalized art criticism. Although many claims that these segmented areas can manage without philosophical justification, Habermas believes that the very existence of the gaps posed by cultural differentiation poses problems of mediation between specialized domains. In relation with this aspect there arises two kinds of questions. One the one hand, the question is about the possibility of a balance between separated moments of reason in the horizon of the impoverished traditions of the lifeworld. The challenge is how can we rejoin, without altering their regional rationality, the isolated the scientific moral and aesthetic discourses resulting from the ever-deepening division of labor. In other terms, this problem refers to the inter-relationships between the three fields of expert cultures typifying esoteric and abstract forms, which appear intricately related in the process of every day communication. In this respect, Habermas assumes that instead of playing the arrogant role of arbiter that inspect the culture, philosophy can be a translator standing in and mediating between everyday world an the autonomous sectors of cultural modernity.

On the other hand, the question refers to the issue of legitimation and rationalization of society, which has been inspired to Habermas by Weberian interpretation of modernity. Habermas thinks that in this context arises the palpable need for philosophy to serve the role of rational justification which cannot be just a matter of custom or habit. In this respect he provided a procedural concept of rationality which offer grounds to norms on the basis of a pragmatic logic of argumentation. This concept is richer than one-dimensional rationality which was tailored by the imperatives of success and efficiency of the purposive action, which reminds the Weberian version. On Habermas view, communicative rationality avoids the paradox of rationality, which seems inescapable for Adorno and Horkheimer by integrating the instrumental-cognitive goals with the specific demands of the moral practical and aesthetic-expressive domains of value orientation.

55)   Weber strives to insure a kind of instrumental rationality (endorsed by many others, among them Bertrand Russell), which bears upon the assessment of the appropriate justifiable means to achieve specific ends, but ultimately he despaired about the possibility of a rational warrant for universal norms that guide our lives. Instrumental reason is silent about values and cannot indicate us "where to go", at best it can tell us "how to get there". It is like a mercenary for hire to be use in the service of any kind of goals, no matter whether they are good or bad. In consequence the pattern of rationality which provided the intellectual premises of the capitalist society leads to the bitter awareness that the ineluctable modernization processes.

If Hume is right in warning us that values are beyond proof, then human

preferences are a kind of given. In such conditions, as twenty four centuries ago the orator Demosthenes warned, "nothing is easier than self-deceit. For what each man wishes, that he also believes to be true" (*Third Olyntiac*, sec. 11)

Another kind of counter-argument to the Weberian instrumental rationality is elaborated by the "holistic-romantic" conception of society as found for example in the later work of M. Oakeshott and mentioned by Gellner (*Reason and Culture*, p. 134). In this view human communities are complex but unique and symbolic wholes which are not amenable to the same putative criteria for the selection of means in terms of cost-effectiveness. Such societies idiosyncratically defined could be understood only by people immersed and intimate to in the traditions they engender.

57)   In *Between Fact and Norms: Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (William Rehg's translation, Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1996) Habermas proposes a new formulation of "D" in order to distinguish between the moral principle and the principle of democracy. He claims that postconventional morality requires anew form of law.

58)   When the time came, More resigned the chancellorship in protest for the general compliance to king's rule while all other nobles in hypocritical submission kissed the hand "they could not bite", even if they wished that. Although he theoretically admitted that all religions are equally legitimated, he was ready to face the execution for high treason instead of recognizing his brutal sovereign as the chief of his church. In the end, he was beheaded for refusing to recognize Ann Boleynn's unborn child as heir, though his heroic but suicidal gesture did not prevent the irreparable breakdown between the Church of England and Rome that soon occurred. Only John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester joined him by lashing to the clergymen for their cowardice. Both paid their courage with their lives.

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NOTES (59-61) to CHAPTER 7 (pp. 296-312)

59)   Habermas describes the contrast between the "lifeworld" and the "system". The notion of lifeworld refers to "the horizon-forming horizon" of communicative action and points to the symbolically structures spheres of society which are distinct from the "system" permeated by the strategic-instrumental reason. The idea of understanding and the consensus-formation make sense only against the "horizon of the lifeworld" which set up a background of convictions which are more or less diffuse to the extent they are articulated and thematized by validity claims. When the system takes over the lifeworld, Habermas talks about the colonization of the lifeworld. In such a case, the reflective processes of reaching consensus are replaced by bureaucratic mechanism base on influence (authority, power). Thus, in modern societies the rationalization of the system takes place on the expense of the communicatively structured spheres of the lifeworld which are wiped out by the imperatives of functional coordination and control.

60)   It seems to me that if I am to understand what 'X' feels when 'X' is desperate in isolation (no public knowledge is possible), and I cannot verify all huge psychological knowledge which covers all special circumstances in the world and in 'X's soul (God certainly can do that, but I doubt that anybody else could). That's why I may be wrong

about 'X''s feelings. But when I think what desperation (as opposed to hope) means I have a good chance to instantly grasp 'X''s mood without reviewing all Quinean critique of meaning or making the inventory of all psychological theories of pertaining to mental depression, or scrutinizing all environmental conditions present in the world of 'X', etc... In addition we cannot describe 'X' in the same way sciences talk about Oxygen atoms or the Milky Way. It is not wonder that I am liable of being wrong in understanding 'X', but, at least, Davidson may *charitably* assume, I cannot be mistaken all the time because in that case interpretation would be impossible. According to Habermas, the concept of communicative rationality brigs about the possible understanding in terms of a basic competence for undistortive communication and noncoercive agreement.

61)   I think that Habermas's broad redemptive interest regarding the necessary and unavoidable conditions of a meaningful use o language might provide for an escape from what I metaphorically called the relativist "Tower of Babel". This is the mythical place of linguistic idiosyncrasy and mutual misunderstanding, a metaphor of the fragmentation of reason in the postmodern world and the problem of mediation between separated value sphere as emphasized in the post-modernist attack on reason and the relativist retreat. In this respect, some post-structuralist and neo-pragmatist critiques of Habermas such as the ones represented by Rorty announces the end of philosophy as a privileged truth-telling discourse and Lyotard adopts an attitude of incredulity toward Habermas's theory as an example of metanarrative which must be given up. The reason for presenting the post-modernist criticism is not only to point out potential weaknesses of Habermas, but to check his response to this attack ant to assess his effort to preserve the emancipatory dimensions of ideal of understanding as cherished by the Enlightenment.

I this paper I expressed my hope that by suggesting a universal pragmatic approach of the concept of "communicative rationality" by drawing from Habermas's theory, we can open its gates of Babel, and, eventually make cross-cultural communication between its separated floors possible. Such a discussion is related by Habermas to the emancipatory goals that emerge from the redemption of the project of modernity.

The defenders of the intellectual tradition of modernity find the claim that rationality can secure the ground for cross-cultural understanding as unproblematic and intrinsic intelligible. In this respect, one cannot contest the validity of such a statement and still count as a reasonable subject, since it is acknowledged that it must be universally acceptable for any bearer of reason to accede to such a deductive truth. The consciousness which warranted the infallible knowledge of the external world and of its human inhabitants found itself justified in silencing any skeptical voice which eventually tried to erode its presumptuous epistemic confidence and could proclaim itself as reasonable and dictate its norms. In this perspective, the meaning of diverging cultures of life and particular times were described as convergent and inherently translatable into a universal language and were to be abstracted by an objective and anhistoric "code" of understanding meaning. The kind of rationality that provided for a transparent and transcultural scheme of intelligibility also legitimized the drive toward an ideal of rational society.

The criticism attacked the credibility of traditional rationality. For instance, a post-modernist criticism of marxist persuasion condemned rationality as being class-

biased or taking the ideological side of the rich and powerful to instrumentalize the imperialist domination over the poor and exploited. More recently, reason has been farther accused in various culturalist approaches for being at best "overly structured" or "too restrictive" and "formal", and at worst "bigoted", racist", and "ethnocentric". In addition to these pejorative connotations, many contemporary feminist philosophers revealed a "sexist" dimension.

Consequently, relativists like Paul Feyerabend say farewell to the universal notion of human understanding, which has grounded the theoretic optimism concerning the possibility of cross-culturally meaningful discourse and the approach of solving human conflicts within lifeworld. In the face of everyday complex experience, reason is not only defeated and rendered inapplicable but "conceited, ignorant, superficial, incomplete, and dishonest", according to Feyerabend (*Farewell to Reason,* New York, 1987, p. 25. See also his attack on scientific rationality in *Against Method.*)

In sum, it's a sad irony that while the traditional rationality was designed to be able to notice and correct biases as an impartial fair judge, it makes itself no exception, proving itself a distorted and one sided representation of the state of affairs. In this respect, in the last decades, reason's claim for objectivity was targeted again for dishonestly concealing either an economically politically-based or a male oriented or a "main cultural-stream" attitude. Since notion of rationality inherited from the philosophical tradition was under the suspicion for being unfit to accommodate to multiple kinds of societies, it was made accountable for cultural intolerance and strategic domination. In consequence, as we have seen, a new kind of pluralistic rationality has been advocated by sociologists, anthropologists and by post-Wittgensteinian philosophers of social sciences (like Peter Winch) when seeking more flexible patterns of understanding radically different ethnographic practices (e.g the ideal of salvation vs the ideal of atonement pursued by archaic religions). In this context, thinkers of relativist persuasion (Taylor, Feyerabend) ridiculed the arrogance and self-legitimation of classical reason emphasized as the only good path leading to the objective Truth revealed to God's eye.

The relativism seems to be the most enduring paradigm of our age, which displays the splitting difference between us at the surface of our culture. In the last decades, new voices joined the chorus of critics singing in the same key against the old fashion reason. The traditional image of people coming from different cultural and political spaces and greeting each other within *One Level World* fades out in the chaos spreading on the multiple floors of Babel, a symbol of fragmentation of societies. On this suggestive analogy with the biblical tower, the unity of reason worshiped by Descartes vanishes in the enlarging gaps created by the autonomization of cultural islands which are inhabited by communities appearing exotic and odd one to each others and are speaking in peculiar and divergent tongues.

62)   To be fair, one cannot hold Habermas accountable for the failure to properly articulate such a broad point of view. After all, given the unusually broad scope of his theoretical project, he went farther than anyone in this direction. It seems to me that this is not a one man mission, nor just an epistemological effort but so far as we are concerned with finding a rational way to settle through dialogue our cultural differences this is a moral obligation. It is a task which involves an interdisciplinary effort at the intersection

between human sciences, which tell the story of our historic and cultural contingencies of understanding (such as sociology, psychology, anthropology and linguistics, among others), and sciences which may be broadly conceived as sources of knowledge which fills out the scheme our world view. And yet, I believe that philosophy can mediate between such scientific disciplines playing the role assigned by Habermas - that is, the "guardian of rationality" in our culture.

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