WORKSHOP - IDEALISM, PRAGMATISM AND REALISM: A REAL DIALOGUE ON HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF A CONTEMPORARY PROBLEM

Guest Editor: Cinzia Ferrini
Approaching Contemporary Philosophical Problems Historically:
On Idealisms, Realisms, and Pragmatisms,
Combining Undergraduate Teaching & Research

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Abstract: As guest editor of this special issue of Esercizi Filosofici, the author introduces Kenneth R. Westphal’s and Paolo Parrini’s position papers on pragmatism, idealism and realism by elucidating the background and rationale of the workshop she organized on 29 April, 2015 at the Department of Humanities of the University of Trieste, within the framework of her undergraduate course in «History of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy». The Appendix lists questions posed by students and by the audience, to which the invited speakers replied in discussion following the presentations; their respective replies follow their main papers.

Key Words: Teaching systematic philosophy historically; research and teaching for undergraduates; contemporary issues and modern philosophy; pragmatism.

1. Background

The workshop, «A Real Dialogue on an Ideal Topic», with Kenneth R. Westphal1 and Paolo Parrini2 on idealism, realism and pragmatism took

1 Kenneth Westphal has held (full) professorships in philosophy in England (Norwich, Canterbury), visiting professorships at Northwestern University and at the Martin Luther Universität Halle (a.d.Salle), and research fellowships in Heidelberg, Bielefeld (twice) and Göttingen. He has now settled in Istanbul as Professor of Philosophy at Boğaziçi Üniversitesi. The main focus of his research is on the character and scope of rational justification in non-formal domains, including both morals (ethics & theory of justice) and theoretical philosophy (epistemology, history & philosophy of science). In response to the Pyrrhonian Dilemma of the Criterion, and drawing upon Kant, Hegel, classical American Pragmatism and analytic epistemology, he has been developing a pragmatic, social and historical account of rational justification which provides sufficient ground for realism about the objects of human knowledge, and strict objectivity about basic moral norms: independent of debates about (moral realism) and motivation. His books include Hegel’s Epistemological Realism.
place on April 29, 2015, partially sponsored by the Department of Humanities of the University of Trieste. It was conceived and organized within the framework of my 2014–15 undergraduate course in «History of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy», entitled: Idealism, Realism and Pragmatism: Historical Aspects of a Contemporary Philosophical Problem. Students were involved in preparing for the workshop: A reading group worked on additional material provided by the two invited speakers, which the group presented to the class, and they prepared a set of questions for discussion at the workshop.

At the methodological level, one main aim of this course was to avoid the pitfalls of the stereotypical historian devoted to the close, antiquarian study of past ideas, the prevailing analytical trend to dismiss meticulous and supposedly sterile attention to philosophy’s history and the theoretical distortions of instrumentalizing texts of the past for present purposes.

(1989), Kant’s Transcendental Proof of Realism (2004), and How Hume and Kant Reconstruct Natural Law (2016). He edited the collected later papers of Frederick L. Will, Pragmatism & Realism (1997), and recently Realism, Science and Pragmatism. He has published over a hundred research articles.

2 Paolo Parrini served as full professor of theoretical philosophy at the University of Florence until 2010–11. He anticipated his retirement to devote himself to research. He is founding member and president of the Italian Society of Analytical Philosophy, founding member and member of the Board of the Italian Society of Theoretical Philosophy, and member of the Board of the Florence Centre of History and Philosophy of Science. During his academic career he was continuously and closely involved with doctoral training programmes in Philosophy, not only locally but nationally. His research addresses the major fields of theoretical philosophy: epistemology, ontology, metaphysics, and hermeneutics, with special focus on the issues of realism, truth and rationality. His books include: Knowledge and Reality (Conoscenza e realtà, 1995; Engl. tr. 1998) and Il valore della verità (2011). He is currently working on a book on «Epistemology and Ontology», addressing the issue of realism from the standpoint of the subject-object relationship. An international speaker in the field, he has published nearly 200 research works, including translations into other European and extra-European languages. His international prominence is also indicated by his editing Kant and Contemporary Epistemology (1994) and co-editing Logical Empiricism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives (2003).

3 I gladly mention the participants: Gabriele Buzzai, Belén Colom (an Erasmus student from Argentina), Nicola Freschi, Tobias Kompatscher, Federico Passavanti and Giacomo Pirani.

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A decade ago this set of issues was already prominent within Anglophone scholarship: in his Introduction to a collection of Descartes’ sources for the *Meditations*, John Cottingham wrote: «the practice of <up-to-date> analytic philosophy risks becoming obsessive and shortsighted unless it is informed by a lively awareness of the philosophical tradition that delivered us where we are today».

More recently, this year Robert Pippin published a book aiming to show the bearing of the practice of the history of philosophy on philosophy itself.

Embedding this spirit in the scope of my course, my first purpose was to show how great issues of the past remain pertinent to current philosophical debate, and how thematically focussed instruction in history of philosophy develops students’ abilities to discern and define the basic parameters of these issues and to recognize the interplay between persistence and changes in philosophical problems across the ages. To foster students’ reflective and sensitive analysis, assessment, conclusions and decisions, they must develop these skills and abilities by confronting competing considerations bearing on the philosophical issues, to consider arguments for and against proposed solutions, to evaluate the grounds of philosophical approaches and claims – both present and past – and to identify which challenges these must meet: in short, to mature their capacity to judge through an historical-philosophical education which I regard as indispensable when majoring in philosophy.

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5 Pippin (2015). According to the editorial presentation: «Robert B. Pippin offers the thought-provoking argument that the study of historical figures is not only an interpretation and explication of their views, but can be understood as a form of philosophy itself. In doing so, he reconceives philosophical scholarship as a kind of network of philosophical interanimations, one in which major positions in the history of philosophy, when they are themselves properly understood within their own historical context, form philosophy’s lingua franca. Examining a number of philosophers to explore the nature of this interanimation, he presents an illuminating assortment of especially thoughtful examples of historical commentary that powerfully enact philosophy» (available online at: http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/I/bo20299044.html).
7 See on the point Westphal (2012a), (2012b).
Now history of philosophy is not merely preparatory to something else, that is, to how philosophical problems and questions, taken in abstraction from their historical context and instances, should be articulated, presented, defined and practised; historical philosophy is itself a rational and critical enterprise. For example, if anti-Cartesianism has become a prominent issue today in epistemology, philosophy of language, phenomenology, ontology, philosophy of mind and philosophical psychology,\(^8\) to identify Cartesian or Anti-Cartesian features of contemporary views requires understanding both Descartes and the Cartesian traditions flowing from his work.\(^9\)

This concern does not simply reflect a traditional Italian historical approach to philosophical studies. Today, the critical dimension of the history of philosophy is internationally acknowledged also in research works which reflect an Anglophone philosophical orientation and examine the fundamental standpoints and terms of reference of philosophical enquiry from late modernity to contemporary reflection. For instance, in his introduction to a collection of essays examining the «transcendental turn» in philosophy from Kant to Husserl, Heidegger and Merlau-Ponty, Sebastian Gardner (2015: 1) insists on taking together the historical and systematic aspects, arguing that: «In so far as historical interest has a critical dimension, it will constantly broach systematic issues, just as any convincing account of the nature of transcendental philosophy will need to take account of the historical development». Pippin’s *Interanimations* (2015) argues that no strict separation between the domains of history of philosophy and philosophy is defensible; reviewers of his book highlight that it shows us how «philosophizing historically is very much a future-oriented enterprise, addressing the foundational philosophical concerns...»

\(^8\) As Amy Schmitter (2010: 497) writes: «Descartes is a figure who looms large in many different spheres both inside and outside of philosophy, and in considering how to weight the reception of his work, we cannot avoid intersecting with several such spheres».

\(^9\) This was the subject of my 2013–14 course and is the topic of my forthcoming book: *Cartesio contemporaneo. L’invenzione della disembodied mind* negli studi anglo-americani: un mito cognitivistico?
of our culture». In a similar vein, the recent historical turn in philosophy of science focusses either on the historical dimension of the evolution of science or on the problems, solutions and motivations of earlier projects in the philosophy of science, examining how the historical figures engaged in these projects understood them. As Paolo Parrini (2007: 142) remarks: «First, this historical approach is of pivotal importance in reaching a correct interpretation of the philosophies of the past. Second, this approach must interact suitably with theory both in order to give good historical results and to contribute to the evaluation and development of the problems under consideration».

Consequently, the course culminated in the class preparations for the workshop, by forming a study group to formulate in advance significant questions for the invited speakers, which address distinctive features of their positions against the backdrop of the historical material that students studied in this course. Albert Einstein observed: «The value of an education in a liberal arts college is not the learning of many facts, but the training of the mind to think something that cannot be learned from textbooks». I would rather prefer to speak, more modestly, of training the mind to think of something by studying textbooks which cannot be learned ‹from› textbooks.

The specific aim of this course was to address a serious challenge arising from the contingent place of the course within the undergraduate

10 Reviewing Pippin’s book, R. Lanier Anderson remarks: «Pippin has long been a leading voice in the history of philosophy. With Interanimations, he brings his readership right into the process of philosophizing historically. The book brings together eleven chapters that engage with other important readers of some of his touchstone historical philosophers (notably Hegel, Nietzsche, Kant). It thereby advances debates with prominent thinkers like McDowell, Brandom, Nehamas, Williams, Heidegger, and MacIntyre. But its real stakes are still larger: Pippin’s book aims to show us what it is to advance philosophy through engaging the great minds of the past—and through an ongoing conversation and argument with others doing the same. From this point of view, philosophizing historically is very much a future-oriented enterprise, addressing the foundational philosophical concerns of our culture» (available on line at: http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/I/bo20299044.html).

11 Einstein’s statement is quoted from A. Calaprice (2011: 100).
programme. In our Department of Humanities, the course in «History of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy» is to serve both students who shall continue studying within philosophical disciplines and also students who will graduate in historical disciplines. Therefore as a professional historian of philosophy, my main pedagogical challenge is to provide both a service course interesting and useful to students who will not pursue additional courses in philosophy, and yet at the same time to serve students majoring in philosophy by initiating them into current philosophical practices by studying historical philosophy. This dual challenge is certainly demanding, though also intriguing.

To meet this challenge, I sought to connect the expected study of some number of canonical texts and authors to what now occurs in contemporary culture and society, within which students live every day, and which demands and requires elucidation and reflexion. Put otherwise, I usually design my syllabus to address thinking, intellectually maturing young people in a «post-postmodern» society, one largely based on scientific rationality and its various applications, where culture has unveiled our human production and «construction» of so many apparent «facts» of nature by post-structuralist analysis, post-colonial discourse, coining of new philosophical categories and various works in ethics, politics and phenomenology. As Westphal (2014: 1) remarks: «Realism about particular objects and about their features or relations became problematic in Twentieth Century philosophy when it became generally recognized that we cannot, as it were, set aside our concepts, theories, beliefs, or, in general, our language to inspect the fact themselves and on that basis assess our beliefs, statements, or theories about them». In particular, in preparing the syllabus for this 2014–15 course, I anticipated my future mixed group of young people exposed (by media and news) to the debate which, say, associates (permissive) multiculturalism with relativism and confronts problems of rational justification. Today, our young people are also exposed to forms of fundamentalism as faith in «absolute» truths which are threatening the European historical achievement of the idea of non-confessional, universal human rights based upon values such as common humanity, the free exercise of reason and gender equality, all of
which complicates issues about the rationality (or irrationality) of beliefs. Against this background, Locke’s (1689) *Letters on Toleration* are as urgently important today as ever, and to inquire, say, à la Locke, into the grounds and degrees of our opinions, persuasions and assent, to account for the ways by which our understanding can set down any measures of the certainty of our knowledge, to evaluate different notions of truth (either necessary or sufficient), to face the sceptical dilemma of the criterion, to rework à la Kant the meaning of realism and idealism, making sense of both scientific and moral experience, can acquire the significance of examining very basic issues within philosophy while reflecting on contemporary issues from the agent’s perspective – namely the students’ perspective – who may fully discover, appreciate and exercise her or his cognitive and rational capacities only through her or his «practice-laden being-in-the-world». This perspective is nothing but the practical starting point that makes pragmatism «a most significant framework for contemporary discussions of rationality, knowledge, morality and values» (Pihlström 2011: 6).

2. *Rationale*

Accordingly, this course focussed on the set of key words which characterize a central contemporary philosophical debate about overcoming the apparent opposition between idealism and pragmatism, without abandoning realism. The outlook of Pragmatism (with its origins in Peirce and James and antecedents in Reid) can be summarized in the following «pragmatic maxim» of Peirce (1931: 5.412): «a conception, that is, the rational purport of a word, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing...»

12 As to the «perennial epistemic problem of the rationality (or irrationality) of religious belief», see Pihlström (2013b: 27): «This epistemic problem arises from the – real or apparent – conflicts between science and religion, or reason and faith, in particular. Here pragmatism can offer us a very interesting middle ground. As William James argued, in *Pragmatism* (1907) and elsewhere, pragmatism is often a middle path option for those who do not want to give up either their scientific worldview or their possible religious sensibilities». On Pihlström’s pragmatist philosophy of religion, see also Pihlström (2013a).
upon the conduct of life». In this way, pragmatism aims to challenge the empty metaphysical abstractions «of a philosophy that has no relation to our activities within the world» and their practical consequences. One classic issue about realism is whether, «in addition to the physical objects and events we perceive, are there also non-physical, and hence non-perceptible forms or ideas of kinds or characteristics, variously instantiated in physical particulars, but which exist independently both of their instances and of what we may happen to say, think, believe or know about them?» (Westphal 2014: 1). By contrast, generally speaking, idealism has been described as the claim that reality cannot be explained only by matter and motive forces, for it is also essentially constituted by ideas or mental structures and active spiritual principles. The history of philosophy shows a long tradition of «idealisms»: beginning with Parmenides and Plato, then passing through modern times with Descartes, Leibniz and Berkeley, ending up with Kant’s transcendental idealism and Hegel’s absolute idealism. However, a line of ancient thought also offers relativism with Protagoras and the Skeptics, whereas the development of modern thought is crossed by Galileo’s metaphysical and epistemological realism as well as by Locke’s and Newton’s empirical realism and

13 The Leverhulme Trust currently sponsors an international project entitled «Idealism and Pragmatism: Convergence or Contestation?» Its network includes the Universities of Pittsburgh, Sheffield, Cambridge, Sydney and Frankfurt, together with Columbia University, Vanderbilt University and the Collège de France. The aim of the project is described as follows: «a retrospective assessment of both the possible interactions between the two philosophical traditions of Idealism and Pragmatism and their potential towards the production of future original thought in philosophy». According to its rationale, «As such, pragmatism offers a distinctive account of meaning, knowledge and metaphysics, which is opposed to the abstractions of a philosophy that has no relation to our activities within the world. Laid out as such, it may seem that idealism and pragmatism have little to do with one another and could indeed be seen as intellectual opponents; [...] So, it may appear on the one hand to pragmatists, that the idealist represents just the kind of empty and abstract metaphysical theorizing that they want to overturn, while to idealists on the other hand, the pragmatist may be viewed as offering a position that cannot resolve the problems that concern them, in refusing to engage with such problems properly by offering instead a crude appeal to «practical consequences». It could be assumed, then, that these two traditions will simply confront each other as philosophical opposites» (http://idealismandpragmatism.org/project).
generalizations. Another approach claims to combine truth with necessity, to oppose demonstration and rigorous universality to a notion of truth attained with sufficiency, proportionality, probability.

It became apparent that instructing students about significant selections from many ancient and modern authors provided good comprehension of questions central to current philosophical debate, such as those presented by Westphal in the Introduction to his recent collection, *Realism, Science and Pragmatism* (2014). Central to my course are these questions: Does realism contrast to idealism when it holds that material objects exist and have mind-independent characteristics? Is perception direct awareness of external objects? Is scientific knowledge about theory-independent phenomena and unobservable entities possible? The course focused on these specific topics: 1) American Pragmatism: the agenda of its founding fathers; 2) truth, real being and its manifestation to subjects in the Atomists’ fragments; 3) description of phenomenal reality by ancient Skeptics and the dilemma of the criterion of truth; 4) perception and unification of sense-data in Platonic idealism; 5) the nature of Galileo’s ontological and epistemological realism; 6) the quest for an absolute foundation of science in Descartes; 7) primary and secondary qualities, nominal and real essences in Locke; 8) immaterialism and sense reality in Berkeley; 9) Hume’s skepticism about reason, and its relations to ancient and modern philosophy; 10) Berkeley’s idealism regarded from the standpoint of Kantian transcendental idealism. The idea to organize a workshop on idealism, pragmatism and realism was conceived against this background.

An interesting coincidence is that the July 2015 London conference of the above-mentioned Leverhulme Trust project includes the following presentations:$^{14}$ David MacArthur (University of Sydney): «Pragmatism and Skepticism»; Robert Pippin (University of Chicago): «Pragmatist Themes in German Idealism»; Ulrich Schlösser (University of Tübingen): «On Some Differences Between American Pragmatism and Ideal-

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$^{14}$ See: [http://www.hegelpd.it/hegel/london-idealism-and-pragmatism-convergence-or-contestation-conference/](http://www.hegelpd.it/hegel/london-idealism-and-pragmatism-convergence-or-contestation-conference/)
ism: Peirce and Hegel on Meaning, Confirmation and Reality»; Claudine Tiercelin (Collège de France): «Why Pragmatism Implies Realism»; and Robert Brandom (University of Pittsburgh): «From German Idealism to American Pragmatism – and Back».

In Italy, media attention was cast on Maurizio Ferraris’s 2012 book Manifesto del nuovo realismo; this revival of interest in the Realismusfrage was further supported by Umberto Eco’s critical remarks «Il realismo minimo». A conference on the topic was organized and the meeting was held in May 2012 in Bologna «Quale realismo? Postmoderno e nuovo realismo nel dibattito contemporaneo» (invited speakers: Paolo Parrini, Maurizio Ferraris, Umberto Eco and Patrizia Violi). This meeting occasioned Paolo Parrini’s reply to both Ferraris and Eco, and his reassessment of realism, reality and sensible experience in his 2012 essay, «Realismi a prescindere». This upsurge of interest paved the way to welcome reception of such very recent publications as Il pragmatismo dalle origini agli sviluppi contemporanei, which focusses on American classical pragmatism (Emerson Peirce, James, Royce, Mead, Morris, Lewis), the diffusion of Pragmatism in Europe, and its relations to analytical philosophy (Quine, Sellars, Davidson), to critical theory (Apel, Habermas, Honneth) and to naturalism (Sydney Hook and Morton White); and considers specific contemporary versions of pragmatism developed by Rescher, Bernstein, McDermott, and Margolis, who follow the classical tradition, and concludes with neo-pragmatism (Putnam, Rorty) and the latest trends in the field (West, Brandom, Shusterman, Haack). In this way also Italian scholars and university students can now rely on a work similar to the Continuum Companion to Pragmatism (2011), edited by Sami Pihlström.

The speakers invited to our workshop are two distinguished guests. Kenneth Westphal has developed a pragmatic account of rational justification which identifies and justifies universally valid basic moral norms

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15 This work was required reading in my course.
16 Calcaterra, Maddalena and Marchetti (2015).
17 Parts of this (2011) Companion were read and discussed in my course.
and shows how a sophisticated social and historical account of empirical knowledge justifies realism about the objects of commonsense and also of scientific knowledge. As the foreign guest of the workshop he was invited to speak first and he presented a paper entitled «Some Observations on Realism, Science and Pragmatism». Paolo Parrini is an expert in philosophy of science and analytical philosophy of language and epistemology, who has written extensively on realism and anti-realism. To quote Westphal, Parrini «is one of the few genuine experts both on Kant’s epistemology and on philosophy of science – especially Carnap and Quine – and more generally on analytical semantics». Parrini presented a paper, «Empirical Realism without Transcendental Idealism: Comment on Kenneth R. Westphal», which identifies points of agreement and disagreement with Westphal’s position.

Our proceedings are arranged in two sections: Presentations and Discussion. Since Parrini’s paper offered also some comments on Westphal’s approach, the discussion began with Westphal’s reply to Parrini’s remarks, followed by questions from the floor to both invited speakers. The following Appendix lists the issues raised by the students, myself and members of the audience. The Discussion Section contains two papers: Ken Westphal’s «Some Replies to Remarks and Queries by Professor Parrini, Students and Members of the Audience» and Paolo Parrini’s «Some Replies to Questions Posed by Students». Both speakers elected to answer questions in a thematic order, and indicate the number of each question answered in the Appendix.¹⁸

To conclude, Ken and Paolo indeed proved to be, beyond expectation, the ideal characters to engage in genuine dialogue on the topic «idealism, realism and pragmatism», by focussing on truth and rationality, the justification of knowledge and the criticism of both metaphysical realism and radical relativism, against the background of Kantian Critical idealism. I wish to thank them both once again for their availability and generosity.

¹⁸ In using author-date references to their own or to each other’s papers or replies, they use the same designations: «Westphal (2015a)» or «Parrini (2015a)» for the main papers; «Westphal (2015b)» or «Parrini (2015b)» for the replies.
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APPENDIX: Questions posed by Students and by the Audience

To Kenneth Westphal:

Q1. One main point of your presentation is to reconstruct the key concepts of American pragmatism against the background of the distinction between semantic internalism and externalism and their respective links with versions of nonrealism (antirealism, relativism, constructivism) and reference to objects or events in one’s physical or social environment. Would you please clarify how do you pass from this assessment to the recovering of the Kantian roots of pragmatism and in which way your inquiry significantly differs from from Sami Pihlström’s approach we examined in our class? (Cinzia Ferrini)

Q2. How and in which regards the picture of pragmatism (which emerges from reconnecting it with Kantian transcendental idealism and empirical realism) may change when we consider the possibility of an Hegelian legacy? (Cinzia Ferrini)

Q3. You argue that neo-pragmatism is committed to irrealism by its meta-linguistic accounts of meaning and reference, whereas pragmatism is committed to realism by its semantic externalism and its use of Carnapian explication. What, then, do you make of Brandom’s neo-pragmatism, which now claims to account for modal realism about subjunctive, causal conditional truths regarding the objects of first-order discourse, whether commonsense or scientific? (Paolo Labinaz)

To Paolo Parrini:

Q4. We would like to know whether there are significant similarities between your «positive philosophy» and Peirce’s pragmatic and regulative characterization of truth in terms of the indefinitely long run convergence of the scientific community’s opinion towards a dynamic (evolutionary)
reality that constrains inquiry? (Students)

Q5. Would you please clarify the respective functions of science and philosophy in your view as well as their mutual links? More specifically, in respect to the working scientists, should the philosopher reflecting on science subordinate the philosophical analysis to specific problems, or in your view there is a legitimate space for the autonomy of conceptual, apparently «useless» questions? (Students)

Q6. In our class we learnt that according to ancient Scepticism and to Hume that is a «question of fact» whether the perceptions of the senses are produced by external objects that resemble them. However, according to Hume, here experience must be entirely silent, because the mind can’t possibly experience the connection of perceptions with objects. It seems therefore that no «compelling» conflict between an extra-mental reality and our cognitive claims can overcome scepticism via sensible experience. The question is, how can your positive philosophy, distrusting «the transcendental» and relying on sensible experience address this Pyrrhonian/Humean representationalist, and indirect realist challenge? (Student: Nicola Freschi)

To both speakers:

Q7. According to you, what difference does the pragmatic maxim make to philosophy? (Students)
**Abstract:** I first highlight a main theme of the collection I edited and issued last year, *Realism, Science and Pragmatism* (Routledge 2014), by contrasting classical pragmatism and neo-pragmatism in terms of the distinction between semantic externalism and semantic internalism, and exhibiting how both of these semantic views are concisely stated by Carnap (1950a, 1950b), though neither he nor his followers recognised this contrast, nor its profound methodological and substantive implications – although they were highlighted at the time by Wick (1951), published by Wilfrid Sellars and Herbert Feigl in the second year of their journal, *Philosophical Studies*. I exhibit the continuing influence of semantic internalism – which dominates Quine’s, Rorty’s, van Fraassen’s, Brandom’s and Huw Price’s neo-pragmatist views – and argue against it with pragmatic realist considerations drawn from Kant, Carnap and Sellars.

**Key Words:** Pragmatic realism, scientific realism, neo-pragmatism, conceptual analysis, conceptual explication, semantics, reference, Carnap, Kant.

1. **Introduction**

To begin I warmly thank Professor Ferrini for so very kindly arranging our seminar today (29 April, 2015)! It is a special occasion in many ways. Starting already in my own undergraduate studies at your age and in courses like this, I began pondering issues about knowledge, truth, realism, relativism and rational justification, in moral and political philosophy and also in epistemology and in history and philosophy of science. I had significant background in construction and in engineering, and was shocked by Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, its anti-realism, relativism and paradigm incommensurability.\(^1\) To my great for-

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\(^1\) I remain grateful to Thomas Nickels, then visiting the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, for his excellent undergraduate introduction to philosophy of science.
tune I was able to study with two past masters in epistemology: William Alston and, informally, Frederick Will, both of whom took very wide-ranging, far-sighted and exacting views on this field and its issues. I was also convinced by another of my professors, Richard Schacht – surely unwittingly – that if anyone had thought through relativism from the inside out and won, it was Hegel. I also became intrigued by Kant’s notion – I then had no more than a notion – of transcendental proof. I wanted to understand what anti-sceptical implications such proof might justify, and further thought that if I were to study Kant in that regard, I should also take Hegel’s views on those same methods and topics into account. – In short, I was utterly out of my naïve, uneducated mind!

Fortunately, no one – certainly not I – then realised just how audacious were my dreams and surmises. No one is more surprised than I to come before you today, to say that in fact it has all worked out astonishingly well! Drawing from these and other past masters of the craft of philosophy, I have been slowly but steadily developing a robust pragmatic account of rational justification within non-formal domains, which identifies and justifies universally valid basic moral norms – regardless of debates about moral (anti-)realism and about moral motivation (Westphal 2016a) – and which shows how a sophisticated social and historical account of empirical justification justifies realism about the objects of commonsense and also of scientific knowledge.

I first made acquaintance with Professor Parrini by correspondence. I wrote to him regarding his excellent 1994 collection, *Kant and Contemporary Epistemology*; only later did I learn of his extensive, outstanding work in philosophy of science and analytical philosophy of language. It is truly an honour for me – and a tribute to the contributors – that he finds it worth his while to consider and comment upon the volume I edited, *Realism, Science and Pragmatism*, and the issues addressed in it. Professor Parrini is one of the few genuine experts both on Kant’s epistemology and on philosophy of science – especially Carnap and Quine – and more generally on analytical semantics. Like the very best of my own professors, he too takes a very broad, deeply informed, long-range view on these issues and their critical examination. He is, in brief, the perfect
2. **Realism, science & pragmatism**

This volume of essays developed from a conference on the topic: «Realism in Its Multiple Forms: A Case of Mere Homonymy or Identifiable Common Commitments?», hosted and sponsored by the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies in June 2011, together with the Academy of Finland, NordForsk and the Swiss National Science Foundation. The conference was excellent; for the last quarter of 2011 the Helsinki Collegium generously hosted me, as I completed most of the editorial work on the collection. It is no accident that this occurred in Helsinki. There is both a philosophical and a practical point I wish to stress: Today the field of philosophy is fragmented as never before into mutually disinterested sub-specialities. One common division is between ‹philosophy›, which by definition is supposed to be contemporary, and historical philosophy; another is between ‹analytical› and post-Kantian ‹hermeneutical› philosophy. These divisions are entirely artificial and typically self-serving, but they simplify academic life and are supplanting the much more demanding, comprehensive approach which recognises that philosophy can only be systematic by also being historical and textual, and by exploiting the techniques and insights of both analytical and hermeneutical philosophy. This is how Professor Parrini philosophises, and I sincerely admire and commend him for it! It is, as already indicated, what I aspire to. Why will emerge again later in my remarks.

3. **Pragmatism & its revival**

Presently there is something of a revival of pragmatism, accompanied by confusion about just what ‹pragmatism› is. Despite the wide range of distinctively ‹pragmatist› views, I think there is a significant difference between the original, robustly realist and very practical pragmatism devel-
oped by Peirce, Dewey, Mead, C.I. Lewis (1929), and much of the time by James; and contemporary varieties of neo-pragmatism. Their distinction can be illuminated by considering two important semantic developments by Carnap, both in 1950.

3.1 The context of Carnap’s semantic developments is provided by distinguishing three main aspects of the study of language, as identified by Carnap’s colleague at Chicago, Charles Morris: syntax, semantics and pragmatics. These correspond roughly to grammar, meaning and specific statements made by particular people on particular occasions, whether questions, answers, commands, promises, oaths etc. Carnap first developed formal studies of syntax in *The Logical Syntax of Language* (1934). He then added formal semantics in his *Introduction to Semantics* (1942). Both branches of Carnap’s formal studies abstract from pragmatics, that is, from what people actually say and do by speaking as they do. All of that belongs to pragmatics. Wilfrid Sellars learned the hard way that pragmatics cannot be formalised (Olen 2012, 2016; Westphal 2015e: §6.2).

Carnap’s monumental formalisations of syntax and semantics develop the most sophisticated techniques available for using the ‹formal› mode of speech for philosophical analysis (Carnap 1928b). The strategy is to restate philosophical issues which initially arise in the ‹material› mode of speech, purporting to be about objects, events, persons, processes, principles or values. Formulated in those terms, many philosophical problems resist or defy solution. Reformulating them in the ‹formal› mode of speech, as meta-linguistic statements about sentences rather than substantives; *i.e.*, about nouns, verbs, predicates, linguistic copulae or propositions, rather than about things, properties, persons, actions or their relations – allows philosophers to use the technical resources of formalised syntax and semantics to avoid or to resolve the original object-level, material mode confusions or problems which have plagued philosophy from Parmenides to Putnam.²

² Stated directly, their distinction amounts to this: The ‹material› mode of speech is ordinary, natural language discourse about things, events, persons, processes, principles or
Classical analytic philosophy aspired to conceptual analysis, *i.e.*, to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for the proper use of any interesting though puzzling or controversial term, phrase, concept or principle. However, conceptual analysis is inadequate for understanding science. It is also inadequate for epistemology (Gettier 1963). In part this is because philosophical puzzles or problems typically do not arise in isolation; typically they belong to networks of issues, puzzles and problems. Accordingly, the conceptual analysis of any one key concept rarely suffices, by itself, to resolve any serious philosophical issue. Instead, some network of related terms, principles and uses must be clarified, by developing an improved linguistic framework for the relevant domain of issues or phenomena. Carnap’s use of the formal mode of speech developed conceptual explications into explicitly defined «linguistic frameworks».

Carnap’s semantics are the pinnacle of logical empiricist thought, which remains invaluable today, both for its insights and for its shortcomings. Carnap specified far more carefully than any other empiricist what sorts of semantic meaning can be assigned to high-level theoretical statements within a scientific theory, and what aspect(s) of their semantic content can be confirmed by empirical observations. Carnap recommended the most liberal approach to the semantics of theoretical statements consistent with empiricism about confirmation. His liberality about syntactic forms and semantic content worried his empiricist colleagues,
who feared that Carnap’s semantics condoned all sorts of metaphysical excesses which logical positivism had sought to banish from philosophy. Carnap replied by distinguishing three different questions one may ask about any linguistic framework. In brief, Carnap argued in «Empiricism Semantics and Ontology» (1950a) that significant, meaningful questions about what exists or what occurs and how it occurs can be raised only within some specified linguistic framework. Within that framework, and using the methods of investigation and analysis specified within it, we can determine whether any specified kind of object, event or phenomenon exists or occurs. Accordingly, existence questions raised within any linguistic framework are always empirical questions, not metaphysical questions. Those are the first kind of question.

The second kind of question purports to be a metaphysical question about alleged truths, facts or beings, independently of any linguistic framework. This second kind of question, however, lacks any definite sense (meaning) and also any definite truth-value. Accordingly, purported metaphysical issues or questions are meaningless; commit them to the flames, as Hume (1748: §12) advised!

There is a third kind of question: whether to adopt any specific linguistic framework, or which linguistic framework might work better than another for some purpose. This third kind of question, Carnap argued, is entirely practical and is always a matter of degree and estimate. Consequently, such questions and their answers lack bivalence and so lack any truth value; these questions call for decisions, not for reasons which justify any theoretical or cognitive claim.

3.2 I return to this point about adopting (or rejecting) linguistic frameworks shortly. First a word about his other important development in 1950, when Carnap (1950b: 1–18) explicated his method of philosophical explication, which he had been using since at least 1928. The conceptual «explication» of a term or principle provides a clarified, though partial specification of its meaning or significance, for certain purposes, and seeks to improve upon the original term or phrase within its original or proposed context(s) of use. Explications are thus both revisable and are rooted in actual usage and thus in prior linguistic practices, which are
rooted within whatever practices use the relevant terms or phrases in context. Successful explication aims to better facilitate the practice from which the explicandum derives.

It is striking and significant that Kant drew exactly this same distinction between conceptual analysis and conceptual explication, using these same terms, and for very much the same reasons in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*KdrV*: A727–30/B755–8). Mere analysis of concepts is insufficient for understanding or resolving any substantive issue in philosophy, whether in practical or in theoretical philosophy. All the key concepts required in practical and in theoretical philosophy can at best be explicated, sufficiently for the purposes of a specific inquiry; none of them can be defined by providing necessary and sufficient conditions for their proper use. (This is one main source of the terminological flexibility which vexes many of Kant’s readers.)

This distinction between conceptual analysis and conceptual explication maps neatly onto the distinction between semantic internalism and externalism. According to semantic internalism, any and all conceptual content or linguistic meaning (descriptive content, intension) can be fully specified without reference to anything non-mental, in particular, without reference to any features of one’s physical environment, or to features of one’s merely somatic (bodily) states. In contrast, according to semantic externalism, at least some conceptual content or linguistic meaning (descriptive content, intension) can be fully specified only by reference to non-mental, non-linguistic or non-conceptual phenomena, especially, by reference to objects, events or persons in someone’s physical environment, or perhaps to features of someone’s merely somatic (bodily) states.

In brief, conceptual analysis requires semantic internalism, because only if we can identify by reflection upon our concepts or our meanings their exact content or significance (intension), can we also determine whether any purported «conceptual analysis» is complete, and so provides the necessary and the sufficient conditions for its proper use. Conversely, conceptual explication requires semantic externalism, because only within the original context of the use of a term, phrase or principle can its explication be assessed, as either improving upon or failing to improve
upon the original within its proper context of use. That usage will be, not merely a manner of speaking, but a manner of speaking developed to aid or facilitate some activity, typically some form of inquiry, the context of which in part determines the content or significance (intension) of the original term or phrase, and also of the newly explicated concept. Accordingly, conceptual explications are tied to the context in which the relevant speech-acts occur and have their sense, point and purpose.

3.3 Carnap’s semantic views in 1950 point in two opposite directions: His (1950a) empiricist account of “ontology” as always internal to one or another linguistic framework requires semantic internalism, because the linguistic framework alone specifies the relevant ontology of the relevant context of linguistic use. However, Carnap’s (1950b) account of conceptual explication requires semantic externalism, because only framework independent facts – at an utter minimum, rates at which various mundane regularities occur – can provide any context for assessing whether, how or how well any new conceptual explication improves upon whatever term or phrase it explicates, and so can provide any reasons pro or contra to adopt or reject any specific linguistic framework. Carnap never reconciled these two tendencies. His framework-internal ontology (1950a), however, is untenable for internal reasons, and also for a further reason, widely neglected by his successors. Carnap recognised, indeed he insisted, that his formal syntax and his formal semantics were only two aspects of any complete semantics. The third aspect he called “descriptive semantics”; its task is to identify which observation statements are uttered by natural scientists. In fact, what Carnap calls “descriptive semantics” belongs to the third class of linguistic studies identified by Morris, namely to pragmatics. Without this pragmatic “descriptive semantics”, Carnap’s linguistic frameworks are – as he notes – nothing but uninterpreted semi-axiomatic systems, altogether lacking empirical significance or use. (In this crucial regard, Carnap was not the “formalist” he is so widely reputed to be.) In fact, Carnap’s “linguistic frameworks” are conceptual explications writ large, as formalised fragments of a language

suited to one or another form of empirical inquiry, investigation or experimentation.

Now semantic externalism is fundamental to classical American pragmatism. According to classical American pragmatism, our *pragma* — what we do, how we do it, and what we do it with; in short: our practices and procedures — have philosophical priority over whatever we *say* about our practices, because they have (*inter alia*) semantic priority over what we *say* about our practices.

In contrast, according to neo-pragmatism, what there is, what we do, what we can say, and what we can ascribe to one another as believing are all hostage to one’s preferred, merely conventional meta-language (of whatever kind or level). Neo-pragmatism clings to Carnap’s (1950a) untenable view, according to which ‘ontology’ is hostage to one’s preferred linguistic framework. Neo-pragmatism only appeals to ‘pragmatics’ as the third, poor cousin to formalisable syntax and semantics, as a garbage category for whatever cannot be assimilated to formalisable techniques. To the neo-pragmatists, ‘pragmatism’ is no more than another rather chatty species doing its best to muddle through.

The route back to genuine pragmatic realism is via Carnap’s account of conceptual explication and its semantic externalism. Let me illustrate this contrast with a brief example drawn from Huw Price and discussed by Jonathan Knowles in *Realism, Science & Pragmatism* (p. 204ff), about linguistic reference, that is, about how what we say is or can be *about* anything else we purport to discuss.

3.4 Consider whether linguistic or cognitive reference is a significant, substantial relation between any person and any particulars about which s/he makes a claim or statement. Presumably, such reference relations are proper subject matter for empirical linguistics, cognitive psychology, philosophy of language and epistemology. Accordingly, different theories of reference must be true of actual linguistic reference, however it occurs; yet only one can be true of actual linguistic reference, and different theories of reference must be able to conflict (disagree) with one another. Call actual linguistic reference ‘reference’.

Price (2004, 82–3) asks us to consider two theories of reference,
called \langle T \rangle and \langle Z \rangle. According to

Theory T: (1) \textit{Reference} = \textit{relation} \textit{R}.

In contrast, however, according to

Theory Z: (2) \textit{Reference} = \textit{relation} \textit{R*}.

Hence these two theories of reference appear to conflict about what \textit{reference} is, or how \textit{reference} occurs, or how we \textit{refer} to whatever we discuss. Price argues, however, that according to theories T and Z what actually holds is, respectively, the following: According to

Theory T: (3) \langle \textit{Reference} \rangle stands in relation \textit{R} to \textit{R}.

Whereas, according to

Theory Z: (4) \langle \textit{Reference} \rangle stands in relation \textit{R*} to \textit{R*}.

Claims (3) and (4) do not conflict. Therefore, Price concludes, reference is not a substantial, empirically specifiable relation; there is no such phenomenon as \textit{reference}, there are no facts about what actual linguistic reference is. This is Price’s «deflationary» view of \textit{reference}.

Price’s argument cannot be sound; I do not think it can even be valid. How can \textit{Price} the deflationist about \textit{reference}, formulate statements (3) or (4)? How can the advocates of Theory T or Theory Z affirm either statement (1) or (2)? These statements, and anyone’s capacity to \textit{formulate}, to \textit{assert} or to \textit{deny} them, requires theorists of reference, including Price, to refer meta-linguistically to linguistic formulations of theories of linguistic \textit{reference}. Now if actual linguistic \textit{reference} is supposed to be problematic, why is meta-linguistic reference to any \textit{theory} of reference – especially someone else’s theory of reference – any less problematic? What, exactly, enables \textit{Price} the deflationist about \textit{reference} to refer to anyone else’s theory of \textit{reference}, without using the very resources of linguistic \textit{reference} he purports to deflate? I pose this challenge to such deflationists: to explain cogently how they can refer meta-linguistically to anyone’s theory of \textit{reference}, or to anyone’s theory of \langle \textit{reference} \rangle, without invoking referential resources officially denied by their defla-
tionary view(s) of ‘reference’.

Here we have a meta-linguistic situation exactly parallel to an important point of Carnap’s semantic practice which Quine never understood, and for which Carnap’s own semantic theory could not account. Carnap always used natural languages as informal meta-languages in which to formulate his formalised syntax and his formalised semantics. That is no problem, so long as one understands what one is doing. Carnap himself did not adequately understand what he was doing in this regard, insofar as he sought to treat mere marks as meaningful symbols. For example, \( \langle \land \rangle \) by itself is just an angle, but has no meaning (neither semantic intension nor extension). Within some logical notations, \( \langle \land \rangle \) is used to indicate exclusive disjunction; in others, \( \langle \land \rangle \) is used to indicate addition; in Euclidean geometry it designates an indicated ‘angle’. The reason why semiotics was not the boon to philosophy and to the sciences that Peirce, Charles Morris and others (such as Apel) expected is that marks do no semiotic jobs by themselves; we use marks as signs or symbols. Their intelligent use by us makes signs or symbols out of mere marks, as Sellars rightly pointed out in criticism of Carnap’s formal semantics (Westphal 2015e: §6.4).

To bring this point back to Price’s deflationary view of ‘reference’ (or of ‘reference’): If linguistic reference is only what one or another theory happens to say ‘reference’ is – this is the only sense to be made of Price’s statements (3) and (4) –, then no one can or does refer to anything without first formulating and affirming a theory of reference! And this is paradoxical in the extreme, because affirming any theory of ‘reference’ requires referring to that ‘theory’, which requires being able to refer to that ‘theory’! By Price’s reasoning, no one can refer to one’s own preferred ‘theory of ‘reference’’ without first formulating and affirming one’s own preferred ‘meta-meta-theory of ‘meta-reference’’ – a meta-theoretical ‘theory of ‘reference’’ used for referring to any ‘theory of ‘reference’’, etc. This anti-realist, allegedly deflationary regress is infinite, vicious and absurd. (And it has an exact parallel for sceptical versions of the (solely) ‘intertextual’ views of language popular amongst many post-modernists.)
3.5 I hope this argument from Price may recall its progenitor, Kuhn’s (1976: 101–2) argument for the alleged «incommensurability» of Classical Newtonian Mechanics and Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity, which cannot conflict (he argued) because the term «mass» is not used the same way in both theories. Instead, according to Classical Mechanics, mass is a constant, independent of velocity, whereas according to General Relativity, mass varies with velocity. Both Kuhn’s argument about «mass» and Price’s argument about «reference» require a strong semantic internalism, together with a «descriptions» theory of reference, according to which any term, phrase or proposition refers only and exactly to whatever is described when the content (intension) of that term, phrase or proposition is completely analysed into an explicit description. In fact, both Kuhn’s argument about «mass» and Price’s about «reference» descend directly from Carnap’s (1950a) account of framework-internal truth and ontology. Indeed, Carnap’s (1956) semantics directly prefigures Kuhn’s account of revolutionary theoretical change and consequent theoretical incommensurability in the natural sciences.

4. Recovering the Kantian roots of pragmatic realism

Kant’s philosophy was enormously important in many ways to the Classical American pragmatists, especially to Peirce and to C.I. Lewis (1929). In my own research in epistemology I’ve taken a different route to recovering the Kantian roots of pragmatic realism, by following an important methodological imperative of Hegel’s: to assess a philosophical view so far as possible strictly internally, on grounds provided by that view itself. One result of examining Kant’s Transcendental Idealism in this way is that Hegel is correct: Kant’s Transcendental Idealism is subject to a devastating, strictly internal critique, which shows that Kant’s key arguments for Transcendental Idealism are not merely unsound, but invalid – fallacious – for reasons Kant himself provides within the Transcendental An-
alytic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This internal critique further shows that Hegel is also correct about a second finding: This internal critique of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism shows how to disentangle Kant’s brilliant critique of rational judgment – throughout his Critical corpus – from his idealism, and how to re-ground Kant’s critique of rational judgment on a broadly naturalistic, realistic basis. This finding has a third important implication: It shows how to honour empiricist misgivings about Kant’s own synthetic *a priori* principles (according to which the most fundamental laws of nature are legislated – *i.e.*, generated and instituted – by the structure and functioning of our finite human minds), whilst reconstructing two sound, genuinely transcendental proofs of mental content externalism.

According to mental content internalism, any and all contents of awareness, or any and all ‘mental’ content, can be fully specified without reference to anything non-mental, in particular, without reference to any features of one’s physical environment, or to features of one’s merely somatic (bodily) states. In contrast, according to mental content externalism, at least some ‘mental’ contents can be fully specified only by reference to non-mental phenomena, especially, by reference to objects or events in one’s physical environment, or perhaps to features of one’s merely somatic (bodily) states.

Now the key, entirely justifiable and entirely justified thesis of Kant’s «Refutation of Idealism» is that, for us human beings:

> Inner experience in general is only possible through outer experience in general. (*KdrV*: B278)

The main point of Kant’s proof is this: For any human being, if s/he is so much as conscious of some sensory appearances appearing before, during or after others, then s/he is in fact aware of, and has some knowledge of, at least some perceptible, causally interacting spatio-temporal objects,
events or persons within his or her surroundings (Westphal 2004a: §65). In short, Kant’s sound transcendental analyses prove mental content externalism.

Kant’s transcendental proofs of mental content externalism block the sceptical generalisation from occasional perceptual error or illusion to the possibility of global perceptual scepticism. Kant’s Critical method cautions us throughout to assess the explication of our key concepts, terms, phrases or principles in actual contexts of their possible use, not in merely possible contexts of their imaginary use! In this crucial regard, Kant joins with Classical American Pragmatism in rejecting Cartesianism, in all its internalist varieties, including rather too much of contemporary ‘analytical’ philosophy, and especially neo-pragmatism.

Consider these basic methodological questions:

What, if anything, can guide a proper conceptual analysis or explication?

On what basis can a conceptual analysis or explication be assessed?

Most importantly:

What can limit or counter-act the importation of linguistic or conceptual confusions into a conceptual analysis or explication?

On these important methodological issues Wilfrid Sellars followed the sage advice of Aristotle: Because philosophical issues are so complex, elusive and easily obscured by incautious phrasing, one must consult carefully the opinions of the many and the wise. Sellars (1968, 62, 71, 77) found the wise throughout philosophical history, from the pre-Socratics to the present day, because core issues regarding the logical forms of thought and the connections of thought with things are perennial, arising in distinctive, paradigmatic forms in each era (Sellars 1968, 67–9). One result of Sellars’ expansive research is a detailed catalogue and critical assessment of philosophical locutions, that is, of the ‘ordinary language’ (so to speak) of philosophers. Only by examining these can one find the most suitable, least misleading formulations of issues, specific theses, distinctions and their relations. Thus even when cast in the formal mode of speech, any philosophical use of conceptual analysis or explication
must be systematic as well as historical and textual; indeed an analysis or explication can only be systematic by also being historical and textual. The semantic interconnection amongst philosophical issues, via the semantic relations amongst their central terms, provides a further crucial check against inapt formulations. Philosophy without exacting scrutiny of its history is both blind and empty; likewise history of philosophy without exacting philosophical scrutiny is both blind and empty. Professor Parrini understands this very well; this is the point of his commending Herbart’s (1837: §§1, 4, 6, 7, 30 Anm., 47, 149, 151) sense of conceptual Bearbeitung, which as Herbart’s discussion and his subsequent works make plain, requires taking carefully into account the actual uses of key concepts, phrases and principles, together with their associated terminology and activities within their respective disciplines.⁶

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⁶ One reason for the incisiveness of the first generation of English analytic philosophers is that they had all trained in Classics. Recently I learned from Graham Bird, who had studied under Austin, that Austin advocated wide reading in the field. This surely has much to do with the cogency of his ordinary language philosophising.

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EMPirical REALism WITHOUT TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM
Comment on Kenneth R. Westphal

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Abstract: In dialogue with Kenneth R. Westphal’s position on realism and skepticism I defend an empirical realism which in a positive (though not positivistic) perspective rejects the transcendental components of Kant’s empirical realism. The central ideas of the empirical realism I support are the characterizations of reality and truth as regulative ideals and of knowledge as unifying activity. I justify my conception by a conceptual and pragmatic analysis of the main relevant epistemological notions.

Key Words: Realism, Truth, Relativized A priori, Knowledge, Anti-foundationalism

First and foremost I would like heartily to thank Professor Cinzia Ferrini who had the idea for this meeting and organized it. I am also extremely grateful to Professor Kenneth R. Westphal both for his very generous words about my work and the opportunity that provided me to discuss an epistemological view that I feel is particularly close to mine and from which I learned considerably. Finally, I thank them both for the useful suggestions they offered for the improvement of my text.

1. I share Professor Westphal’s opinion that we still have a strong theoretical, and not just historical, need to deepen the exploration of Kantian philosophy (Westphal 2004a, 268) and I think that Professor Westphal himself significantly contributed to this kind of research. His works, and in particular his 2004 book, *Kant’s Transcendental Proof of Realism*, shed a new light on numerous aspects of Kant’s thought, making a contribution that has already deeply marked the interpretation of texts. At the same time, his way of looking at the ‘Copernican revolution’, along with his book *Hegel’s Epistemological Realism* (1989), has been one of the most powerful stimuli to expose some debatable aspects of today’s
approach to the practice of analytic philosophy and brought a breath of fresh air to the debate about realism. The complex of essays contained in the recent volume he edited, *Realism, Science, and Pragmatism* – the occasion for our meeting – is clear proof of what I just said. In this paper I would like to concentrate on the first issue of the three mentioned in the title of this volume – Realism – and attempt a dialogue with Professor Westphal, whose position I found very helpful to study.

My aim is twofold: first, I will try to show how our perspectives converge on some qualifying theses. Secondly, I want to point out those aspects in which they are in some ways different, starting from the attitude they assume towards Kant – who held that empirical realism and transcendental idealism walk hand in hand. Professor Westphal thinks not only that he himself can maintain a realist position regarding «our empirical knowledge of molar objects and events in space and time» (Westphal 2004a, 3; 2006), but also that he can defend this position via a transcendental proof analogous to the transcendental proof with which Kant intended to confute Descartes’ «problematic» idealism and Berkeley’s «dogmatic» idealism (Kant 1781–1787/1985: 244, B274). For this reason Professor Westphal’s realism aims to be a realism sans phrase (in other words, devoid of any further specification) (Westphal 2004a: 3, 5; 2006: 787 n. 18) with a transcendental proof. I, instead, maintain the idea of a relativized a priori, and thus refuse a strong (Kantian) conception of synthetic a priori judgments and distrust the notion of (transcendental)₁. Nev

₁ Let me bring to mind here the exact (and weighty) words used by Kant to introduce this notion: «I entitle *transcendental* all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori*» (1781–1787/1985: 59, A11f./=B25f.), where the term *a priori* has to be intended as absolutely and not relatively a priori: «In what follows […] – Kant says – we shall understand by *a priori* knowledge, not knowledge independent of this or that experience, but knowledge absolutely independent of all experience» (1781–1787/1985: 43, B2f.). My position is based on the negation of synthetic *a priori* judgments as they are intended by Kant, a negation that I think I have formulated in such a way that it becomes reflexively self-consistent (see below note 2). I admit a relativized *a priori* of an analytic kind and a relativized synthetic *a priori* of a theoretical and constitutive nature as it had been partially seen by Reichenbach in his 1920 book on relativity and a priori knowledge (see Parrini 1976, II/6;
ertheless, I think I can provide some arguments to support a kind of ep-
irical realism capable of taking into account some still valid aspects of
Kant’s thought and giving a new voice to what I called the guiding ideals
of the esprit positif: anti-metaphysical objectivism, moderate epistemic
relativism and rationalism (Parrini 1995/1998). These are the very same
ideals that Logical Empiricists had tried to revive, joining the linguistic
turn of philosophy – now in many ways a bygone trend – and using tools
that later proved to be inadequate, such as the verification theory of
meaning, the linguistic theory of the a priori and the substitution of epist-
temology by the logical analysis of scientific language (a substitution
attempted mainly by Carnap, which Professor Westphal rightly criticized
[2015e: § 6.1]).

So, my empirical realism seeks to be an empirical realism without
transcendental idealism and without Kantian synthetic a priori judg-
ments. Similarly to Professor Westphal’s realism sans phrase, my real

2 Like Logical Empiricists I qualify my conception as empiricist rightly because it does
not recognize the existence of synthetic a priori principles in Kant’s sense (see, for example,
Parrini 2003). Referring to the classification discussed by Professor Westphal in his book
Hegel’s Epistemological Realism (1989, 48–50), I would say that my empiricism is neither
a Concept empiricism, nor a Verification empiricism, nor a Meaning empiricism; but I would
also say that it is neither a Judgment empiricism if with this kind of position we mean the
dogmatic statement that «All judgments are either analytic and a priori or else synthetic and
a posteriori; there are no synthetic a priori judgments» (Westphal 1989: 48). If intended in
this sense, in fact, my empiricism could not satisfy what according to Hegel is «an important
desideratum for any theory of knowledge: any account claimed to be an account of human
knowledge must be able to be known in accordance with its own principles» (Westphal 1989,
ism is argued via an epistemic reflection, but in my case this epistemic reflection is kept distinct from Kant’s transcendental reflection because it cannot put forward the ‘coercive’ claims of a transcendental proof. Actually, I am convinced that both the different kinds of realism and the different types of anti-realism have good arguments on their sides, so that to disentangle the controversy among them requires considering the possibility of reworking some crucial concepts such as ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ (a Bearbeitung in the Herbartian sense [Herbart 1813–1937/1964, in particular: §§ 1, 4, 6, 7]), and that conclusive decision on which position to assume depends upon considerations of global plausibility. This also makes unavoidable specifying the relevant conceptions with some phrase. The very nature of the divergences among these conceptions demands specifying whether what we want to criticize, rebut or accept and defend is a metaphysical realism, a common sense realism, an empirical realism, a semantic realism, a direct realism, a scientific realism, an epistemological realism and so forth, including the possibility of combining more than one option. It is not by chance that qualifications such as these appear in many titles of the essays collected in Realism, Science, and...
The existence of this difference, however, does not preclude that both my empirical realism and Professor Westphal’s realism sans phrase afford vindication of the reality of molar objects falling under our observational possibilities and of the entities posed by the best of our scientific theories (scientific realism). One aspect of Professor Westphal’s work that I appreciate the most is his criticism of van Fraassen’s constructive empiricism (see, in particular, Westphal 2014a; 2016d). To go a bit more in depth, I think it is best to start from our different ways of approaching Kant.

2. Professor Westphal’s book on Kant takes as its starting point Jacobi’s well known objection according to which without the Ding an sich it is not possible to enter Kant’s system and with the Ding an sich it is not possible to stay within it. While Neo-Kantians and the so called epistem-ic interpretations try to neutralize such an objection by conceiving the Ding an sich as some sort of limit idea, or by weakening the distinction between empirical phenomenal objects and Dingen an sich from an ontological-metaphysical to a purely methodological distinction, Professor Westphal objects to these readings without recurring to the complicated device of postulating duplicate entities (empirical-phenomenal objects and Dingen an sich) and affections (transcendental affection and empirical affection). He takes the bull by the horns and tries to show – in particular against Henry H. Allison’s epistemic interpretation (19831/20042) – that it is possible to remove the apparent inconsistency highlighted by Jacobi not only without denying, but even highlighting the metaphysical-ontological presuppositions of the critical-transcendental approach to the problem of knowledge (Westphal 2004a: 4f., 38–41, 116–118).

I must specify that, in spite of my considering as an exaggeration the patchwork theory supported by some scholars, I still have doubts about

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4 The latest work in which I again considered this question is «Esercizi di equilibrio in filosofia» (Parrini forthcoming; here you may also find references to relevant prior works).
the possibility of reaching an interpretation able to account coherently for all the aspects of Kant’s texts, and in particular of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The same unquestionable and crucial acquisitions contained in Professor Westphal’s 2004 book, and the possibility of using them for a realism *sans phrase* instead of a transcendental idealism, lead me to think that already in Kant’s works, in a more or less underground way, we can find the reasons that make a *coercive* solution to the realism/anti-realism contrast almost unfeasible, and that our interpretative difficulties are also the symptom of alternative theoretical possibilities which for various reasons, including his conditioning by the philosophical-scientific context of his time, Kant himself was not able fully to see and explore. Of course, I do not say this to limit the importance of the work carried out by Professor Westphal, who has significantly increased the transparency of many pages of Kant’s text. Even I, who differently from him relate to Kant by developing a systematic reading strongly influenced by Cassirer’s Neo-Kantianism and the epistemic interpretation, do not believe in the least that the conceptual knots that I favor can provide the basis for an exhaustive reconstruction of Kant’s texts, and not even for a more comprehensive and globally adequate reconstruction than the one defended by Professor Westphal.

In order to better highlight the point I am interested in, I will start from a problem that since Herbart’s time has constituted a strong reason to revive the realist instance against the claims of transcendental idealism. I am referring to the problem – raised by Herbart (18131–19374/-1964: §150) – of how it is possible to attain not knowledge in general nor synthetic a priori knowledge, but *determinate knowledge*, the problem, in other words, regarding particular questions and manifest in specific judgments (see Parrini 1994: 213–219). I think that such a problem is a thorn in the side of Kant’s transcendental idealism and so supports some of Professor Westphal’s theses. Kant, in fact, recognizes both that we, being a mixture of passivity and spontaneity, cannot know but by receiving *ab extra* the matter that constitutes the sensible manifold, and that the determinate character of knowledge depends on such a sensible manifold, since only reference to what is given in experience allows us to explain
why in some circumstances we perceive a circle rather than a square, or why the light of the sun in some cases (for example, clay) causes its hardening whereas in others (for example, wax) causes its melting (cf. Kant 1781–1787/1985: 610, A765f./B793f.). All this means that we recognize some form of externalism, in other words: the fact that our knowledge is conditioned by something structured that is external to us (see Parrini 1994, in particular: §§ 5–6; 2015b). It is in this sense, I think, that Professor Westphal showed how some realist «pushes» can already be found in Kant together with the anti-realist ones, and he has exploited at best those aspects of the critical position that can be turned in support of a «realism sans phrase» (for example, its distinction from an idealism that includes also the matter of knowledge).

I shall place instead at the center of attention those aspects of the critical position that are an obstacle to realism, starting from a statement that we find in the «Refutation of Idealism»5. In «Note 3» of the «Refutation», Kant states again that he tried «to prove», against Descartes and Berkeley, «that inner experience in general is possible only through outer experience in general» (Kant 1781–1787/1985: 247, B278f.), in other words «that the existence of outer things is required for the possibility of a determinate consciousness of the self» (Kant 1781–1787/1985: 247, B278). At the same time, though, he feels the need to specify that from his confutation «it does not follow that every intuitive representation of outer things involves the existence of these things, for their representation can very well be the product merely of the imagination (as in dreams and delusions)» (Kant 1781–1787/1985, 247, B276). Kant adds that to ascertain «whether this or that supposed experience be not purely imaginary», we must look both at the «special determinations» of such an experience and to its «congruence with the criteria of all real experience» (Kant 1781–1787/1985: 247, B278f.). For him, in fact, «truth and illusion is not in the object, in so far as it is intuited, but in the judgment about it, … i.e. only in the relation of the object to our understanding»

5 For detailed analysis of the Kantian text in which the conceptual knots I favor for systematic reasons appear, see Cinzia Ferrini’s (2014) essay on the illusions of imagination in Kant’s first Critique.
In «Remark III» of the Prolegomena Kant had already intervened on this same question stating that

the difference between truth and dreaming is not ascertained by the nature of representations which are referred to objects (for they are the same in both cases), but by their connection according to those rules which determine the coherence of the representations in the concept of an object, and by ascertaining whether they can subsist together in experience or not. (Kant 1783/1977: 34; AA 4:290)

As we know, for Kant norms and criteria of any truthful experience precisely consist of those conditions that in «The Postulates of Empirical Thought» are used to characterize the (alethic) modalities of possibility, reality (in the sense of Wirklichkeit) and necessity as pure a priori concepts of the intellect (categories) that «have the peculiarity that, in determining an object, they do not in the least enlarge the concept to which they are attached as predicates. They only express the relation of the concept to the faculty of knowledge» (Kant 1781–1787/1985: 239, A219=B266). In fact Kant defines «wirklich» as what, in addition to agreeing with the «formal conditions of experience» («that is, with the conditions of intuition and of concepts») regarding the category of possibility, «is bound up with the material conditions of experience, that is, with sensation» (Kant 1781–1787/1985: 239, A218=B265f.).

In order not to overlook an essential aspect of transcendental idealism, this characterization of reality must be linked to a passage contained in the first version of the transcendental deduction of categories, in which Kant asks the question about «what we mean by the expression «an object of representations», and more precisely about «what [...] is to be understood when we speak of an object corresponding to, and consequently also distinct from, our knowledge». Kant’s answer is that «this object must be thought only as something in general = x, since outside our knowledge we have nothing which we could set over against this knowledge as corresponding to it». And
since we have to deal only with the manifold of our representations, and
since that \( x \) (the object) which corresponds to them is nothing to us –
being, as it is something that has to be distinct from all our representa-
tions – the unity which the object makes necessary can be nothing else
than the formal unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of
representations. (Kant 1781\textsuperscript{1}–1787\textsuperscript{2}/1985: 134\textit{f.}, A104\textit{f.})

This way of intending the object of knowledge has given rise to very dif-
ferent interpretations including openly phenomenalistic and idealistic
ones. For me there is no doubt that Kant did not intend to state that the
object of knowledge is the product of the cognitive activity of the human
mind. This interpretation is not only incompatible with many aspects of
his thought, but is also contradicted by some explicit statements, first of
all that contained in §14 of the transcendental deduction of categories.
Here he declares that «the representation» determines or constitutes a
priori the object not in the sense of producing it «in so far as \textit{existence} is
concerned, for we are not here speaking of its causality by means of the
will», but in the sense that it makes it possible «to \textit{know} anything \textit{as an object}» (Kant 1781\textsuperscript{1}–1787\textsuperscript{2}/1985: 125\textit{f.}, A92/B125). It is integral to
Kant’s transcendental-epistemic reflection – the importance of which has
been meritoriously highlighted by Professor Westphal (2004a: 16–18) –
that the human intellect is neither an ectypus intellect nor an archetypus
intellect; it is a mixture of passivity and activity. The material of know-
ledge, the sensible manifold, is not a product of the human intellect: it is
received by the intellect via the a priori forms of sensibility and is shaped
by the forms of the intellect to give rise to the object \textit{as} a knowable and
known empirical-phenomenal object. For this reason, Kant says,

though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that
it all arises out of experience. For it may well be that even our empirical
knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and of
what our own faculty of knowledge (sensible impressions serving merely
as the occasion) supplies from itself. (Kant 1781\textsuperscript{1}–1787\textsuperscript{2}/1985: 41\textit{f.},
B1\textit{f.})

For reasons I cannot examine here I think that, also after having excluded
the possibility of interpreting Kant’s idealism in a material sense, this
idealism is still untenable in principle, also for the new and important reasons produced by Professor Westphal (whose considerations can be connected with the developments of evolutionary epistemology\(^6\)). What remains for me, though, is the fact that, in the cited passage about what we must mean by the object of knowledge, Kant clearly states that conceiving the object as a reality *epistemically* totally independent of the cognitive activity seems to frustrate the possibility of any criterion which allows us to evaluate the correctness, adequacy or truth of our cognitive claims as cognitively determinate claims. This is because – as Kant says – «outside our knowledge we have nothing which we could set over against this knowledge as corresponding to it» (Kant 1781\(^1\)–1787\(^2\)/1985: 134f., A104f., emphasis added). As we well know, this is one of the difficulties – for me the first and decisive one – that torment all the forms of metaphysical realism, based as they are on an absolutist conception of the object of knowledge and on a correspondence theory of truth\(^7\).

For all these reasons I see in Kant the forerunner of those conceptions of epistemic relativism that, against metaphysical realism, have highlighted the following three points: (i) our cognitive activity develops within a framework of presuppositions (which are for me not only of a linguistic, but also of a theoretical and methodological nature); (ii) within the complex of our cognitive claims there is something more than what we can justify on the basis of experience alone (epistemological anti-reductionism); and (iii) in principle it is not possible to compare our epistemic-conceptual frameworks with a reality in itself, non-conceptualized, to evaluate their conformity or their correspondence with it.

What I have been saying so far affects the conception of truth that Kant delineates in some short passages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. These passages show that logical-transcendental idealism, although it

\(^6\) See, in particular, Westphal (2004a: 84).

\(^7\) Some authors such as Michael Devitt and John Searle maintain forms of realism not beholden to the correspondence theory of truth. It seems to me, though, that against them we can bring the critical remarks made in an essay included in the book under discussion, *Realism, Science, and Pragmatism*: J. Knowles «Naturalism without Metaphysics» (2014, esp.: 205–207).
rejects the possibility of knowing the Ding an sich or considered in itself, and thus rejects metaphysical realism, does not imply either an epistemological nihilism (according to which an object of knowledge non-metaphysically conceived would be a pure nothing) (see Parrini 2011b: 165f.) or a sort of knock out argument against any form of realism (see Parrini 2001). Kant’s idealism, in some regards like an Aristotelian view, accepts a correspondence conception of truth, though qualifying it as a mere «nominal definition» of truth (Kant 1781\textsuperscript{1}–1787\textsuperscript{2}/1985: 97, A58=B82), and on the criterial level makes the truth of a sentence such as <Snow is white> depend not only on satisfaction of the formal conditions of knowledge, but also its material conditions (Kant 1781\textsuperscript{1}–1787\textsuperscript{2}/1985: 97–99, A57–62=B82–86; see Parrini 1994: 198–203). This means that for Kant too the truth of the judgment <Snow is white> depends on the fact that certain material conditions of knowledge, in other words certain empirical data (the whiteness of the snow), are given, rather than that the existence of such conditions depends on the truth of the cognitive claim that the snow is white. Where Kant departs from the traditional realist view is only when he says that for us discussing of truth and falsity is cognitively possible not with respect to a world of Dingen an sich (or per se considered), but with respect to a world of phenomena epistemically conditioned by our forms of sensibility and intellect (see Parrini 2015b: 44–47)\textsuperscript{8}.

3. Since Kant’s time a lot of water has passed under the bridge. In particular, many epistemologists have refused the Kantian conception of synthetic a priori principles. Cognitive activity, though, and epistemological reflection upon it, continued to show both the aspects that push towards realism and the aspects that push towards anti-realism in a balance of pros and cons that leads me to despair of the possibility of solving the Realismusfrage on a rigorously and exclusively demonstrative level (see

\textsuperscript{8} It seems to me that in his The Revolutionary Kant. A Commentary on the «Critique of Pure Reason» (2006) Graham Bird underestimates the meaning and importance of Kant’s conception of truth. For this and other observations on Bird’s interpretation, see Parrini (2010a: 507, n. 19; 515–517, n. 36).
In this balance the Kantian argument stressed above, that we do not have at our disposal a criterion of truth based on a comparison between the *ordo idearum* and the *ordo rerum*, or better between our cognitive claims and reality in itself, still plays a role that I deem decisive. Please note that by saying «decisive», I do not mean demonstrative. I do not use this argument as a demonstration capable of blocking metaphysical realism. In other words, I do not maintain that, because we cannot access reality in a non-epistemically conditioned way, the notion of reality in itself or absolute reality is a notion devoid of sense, or a contradictory, or a totally void. Supporting this idea (as logical empiricists have often done) would mean committing a *non sequitur* rightly denounced for example by Frederick Will (1979), a philosopher dear to Professor Westphal and by him justly appreciated in his book on Hegel’s epistemological realism (1989: 63ff.). I think, though, that the conflict between the will to maintain the notion of reality in itself and the impossibility of establishing a connection between such a reality and our cognitive claims is – using Professor Westphal’s own expression – «compelling»; and compelling to such a degree that I do not think this conflict can be solved by an epistemological conception capable, at the same time, of overwhelming the skeptic and putting together – as Professor Westphal says in his book on Hegel – «a coherence criterion of truth [...] with a correspondence analysis of truth» (1989: 64).

That is why it seemed to me (and still seems) that an epistemological answer trying to be – as Hegel rightly asked (see Westphal 1989: 16) – reflexively self-consistent can and has to be looked for, in a Herbartian spirit, in a reworking of concepts, or, if we prefer, in their elaboration in the sense of a Carnapian explication. So I tried to find some «explanations» of the notions of truth and reality that, once broken their ties with the ontological-metaphysical presuppositions from which aporias and dyscrasias derive, could be as close as possible to, and coherent with, our cognitive (or doxastic, or epistemic) practices. That’s because, although I appreciate the importance and acumen with which Professor Westphal saved Kant from Jacobi’s objection without abandoning the ontological-metaphysical aspect of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, I think that the
problem of knowledge should be developed via an *epoché* from existential presuppositions and thus continuing on the road marked out not only by Husserl (followed by Carnap⁹), but also by Cassirer. Cassirer, in fact, starting from Kantian thought and Jacobi’s criticism, has supported a statement of this problem that inquires into the conditions of validity of the different types of judgments without previously taking for granted the distinction between «the soul and the things» (Cassirer 1911¹/1922³: 662f.). In other words, without posing preliminary claims of an ontological kind, and thus abandoning the pre-Kantian formulation, which, in order to understand the connection between the (knowing) ego and the (known) things, projected them both onto a «common metaphysical background» (*ibid.*). For Kant the matter of inquiry is «no longer made up of the things, but of the judgments on the things» (*ibid.*): «judgment and object are strictly correlative concepts, so that in the critical sense, the truth [= reality] of the object is always to be grasped and substantiated only through the truth of the judgment» (Cassirer 1918/1981: 285).

4. Here I cannot retrace the reasons that led me, starting from this statement and seeking to avoid the extremes both of metaphysical realism and alethic relativism (see Parrini 1995/1998; 2001; 2002a; 2011), to explicate the notions of truth and reality as regulative ideals that guide our cognitive activity towards syntheses or objectivizing unifications richer and richer in empirical material and more and more compact, simple, harmonious and conceptually and theoretically comprehensive¹⁰. I shall

⁹ For my interpretation of the relationship between Husserl and Carnap, with particular reference to the notion of explicature, the use of *epoché*, and the genesis of the concept of empirical reality in Der logische Aufbau der Welt and in Scheinprobleme in der Philosophie, see Parrini (2012a: 82–95).

¹⁰ In his book on Hegel, Professor Westphal (1989: 245, n. 118) quotes a paper in which Otto Neurath rejects the notion of truth preferring to it the notion of ‹plausibility› because «true and ‹false› are *absolute* terms» that should be avoided (Neurath 1940–41: 138f., emphasis added). In a certain sense, I recover the ‹absolute› value of the notion of truth, but I qualify it as a regulative ideal that is purely formal and empty ‹criterially›. This means that the application of the category of truth is not determined by methodological and/or theoretical principles conceived as the necessary (let alone the necessary and sufficient) conditions
limit myself to highlighting the most significant points of convergence and divergence between my position and Professor Westphal’s.

Professor Westphal’s conception is anti-foundationalist and anti-Cartesian; I too think that the cognitive process, which is paradigmatically evident in scientific activity, cannot count on supporting points, either external or internal, that guarantee its absolute foundation. It rests only on itself: its pivotal elements are some beliefs that it provisionally accepts (for empirical and/or rational reasons) and then it searches for possible areas of empirical intersection between alternative hypotheses and theories evaluating other beliefs. This continuous self-correcting movement, virtually endless, can touch not only the beliefs that have been screened, but also those initially not questioned or even presupposed. As for Professor Westphal, who in his book on Hegel also ties in Peirce’s fallibilism, also in my view the true (intended, though, as a regulative ideal) does not collapse into on the justified. In fact, the function I assign to truth remains that which derives from our realist instinct which implies that even the best justified beliefs can be revised in the light of the new acquisitions of research. In sum, for me too the ´strong´ notion of truth has the functions to keep open the possibility that we can always be for its use. As I too reject metaphysical realism, my conception of truth is not linked to two kinds of absolutism rightly criticized by Neurath: the absolutism of the correspondence theory of truth and the absolutism of the absolutely valid principles of reason and knowledge. Since – for reasons that are ultimately linked to the old neoempiricist criticism of the theory of a priori synthetic judgments – it does not seem possible to tie the unifying effort that constitutes knowledge to any content-determined cognitive norm, the notion of truth as a regulative ideal has to be conceived as an empty category that fills itself with the criteria and contents of judging that emerge, confront themselves and gradually impose themselves in the course of the changing turns of historical events. Knowing then becomes a process that constantly renews itself and finds only relative resting points. These resting points and the evaluation criteria connected to them give a content (specifiable only as they both occur) to the categories of objectivity and truth when such categories are applied to concrete cases and particular judgments. This leaves untouched the unitary ´transcendence´ of the categories of objectivity and truth as ideals of a potentially infinite series of cognitive processes intentionally aimed at their realization. For my interpretation of the transcendence/immanence relation in the cognitive process, see Parrini 1995/1998 («Foreword to the English Edition») and 1999.
wrong, even in the case of beliefs that to our eyes are supported or corroborated by the best reasons we have been able to find. The difference with metaphysical realism, though, lies in the fact that in my conception this openness made possible by keeping the notion of truth is not towards things in themselves or considered in themselves, but is towards experience assumed in its ideal inexhaustibility and interpreted and organized by and in our always modifiable or renewable rational procedures.

The notion of reality, as much as the one of truth, also must be considered as a category to be intended, keeping in mind our concrete and effective cognitive practices, and thus purifying it from the metaphysical encrustations associated with it in its ordinary use, which is ill-considered and philosophically uncritical. In fact, if, taking the hint from a famous saying by Einstein (1936: 313), we look, not at what we say we do when we try to know something, but at what we actually do, we immediately see that in this attempt of ours reality in itself does not intervene in any way. Within our efforts of theoretical-argumentative elaboration, the only other operative role is played by the data of experience which we can exploit or which we can produce via new experiments.

Like the notion of truth, also the notion of empirical reality I defend must be conceived as a regulative ideal. It allows us to explicate non-metaphysically the realist instinct that actually pervades our cognitive efforts, both commonsense and scientific. This realist instinct must be intended, not as the confident though naive intent (destined to fall under the blows of skeptical objection) to catch something of reality in itself, but as the effort that proved to be historically fruitful of approaching more and more an epistemically optimal integration of empirical data and rational components. For this reason I consider objectivity a task that is realized in ever partial and reviewable achievements. In my perspective, the conquest of the truth with a capital \( T \) would be to reach a definitively accomplished integration of the conceptual and the empirical moments. However, this perfect integration can only be intended as another regulative ideal, in principle unreachable, given the inexhaustibility of experience and perhaps also of our inventive capacities (cf. Parrini 2013/forthcoming).
In an analogous way we can explicate the (greater or lesser) feeling of certainty which accompanies our partial, provisional and reviewable cognitive syntheses. This feeling must not be intended as the more or less strong persuasion of having touched reality in itself, or having approached it, but as the more or less sound conviction of having reached beliefs that are unlikely to be affected by the subsequent developments of knowledge and thus have very good titles to posit their candidacy as part, in one way or another, of the «final» beliefs of an ideal and never obtainable «definitive» synthesis between empirical material and rational elements (cf. Parrini 2013/forthcoming).

Within empirical realism as I conceive it, that commonsense dualism (so dear to both Professor Westphal and myself) that recognizes an existence to us as knowing subjects, on the one hand, and the molar objects and events in space and time peculiar to our common experience on the other, can legitimately be considered a framework of reference developed on the basis of experience and raised to the rank of presupposition of our own typical cognitive practices. What empirical realism requires is only that such a dualism is intended not as an ontological-metaphysical dualism (in other words, as true because it conforms to reality in itself), but as a dualism that I would call ontic (see Parrini 2011b: 21f.; 2015b: § 5; 2015c: 69–75). With the expression «ontic» I wish to underline that this framework has asserted itself as a Naturprodukt (in Mach’s words [1886–1911/2008: 41]) capable of accounting in the most epistemically acceptable way for our inner and external experience, in other words of the experience of subjects who live in a world of medium-sized objects, far both from the microcosm of the indefinitely small and the macrocosm of the indefinitely large.

This dualism must be considered true or real, or better, presumably true or real, in the non-metaphysical sense of truth or reality I specified above. It seems to me that such a conception grows stronger when we consider, as Professor Westphal taught us (2014a), that the mere logical possibility that is global perceptual skepticism – the counterpart to foundationalistic philosophies of a Cartesian kind – if evaluated in the light of Newton’s Rule 4 of experimental philosophy and Kant’s (and Hegel’s)
cognitive semantics, is nothing but an idle metaphysical speculation. It must be understood, though, that for an empirical realist who also is a scientific realist, relativity theory and quantum mechanics are limitations which he must accommodate. These two theories show that both the domain of the indefinitely large and some peculiar physical measuring interactions we have in the domain of the indefinitely small require a more complex cognitive relation than the one offered by common sense to describe the ontic (non-ontological) relationship between subject and object of knowledge.

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WILL, F.L.
Some Replies to Remarks & Queries by Professor Parrini, Students & Members of the Audience

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Abstract: Concise replies to remarks and queries by Paolo Parrini, and by students and members of the audience regarding the topics indicated by the following key words.

Key Words: Pragmatic a priori, pragmatic realism, singular cognitive reference, pragmatic maxim, Kant, Hegel, Herbart, Russell, Evans, Parrini, Pihlström, Travis.

1. Introduction

Thank you very much, Professor Parrini, for your stimulating, probing remarks! And my thanks to you, the audience today, for your kind queries. Before addressing the issues you have raised, please first let me say how honoured I am by Professor Parrini’s very generous attention to my research, and very pleased about our many common points of interest and understanding regarding realism, science and pragmatism. I wish space allowed me to explain just how much Herbartian Bearbeitung of fundamental concepts and their use undergird his comments, and is presented in his own splendid research, but here I can only commend his research to your attention, as clearly belonging to the forefront of international research in history and philosophy of science. I have already learnt much from his remarks and his publications, but am by no means finished studying their riches!

It is very gratifying to see how much Professor Parrini’s views and my own converge in many important regards, though with some not insignificant differences. Very understandably, he distrusts «the» notion of «transcendental», and rejects «a strong (Kantian) conception of synthetic
Nevertheless, his relativised *a priori*, which – very significantly – is no merely linguistic *a priori*, concerns synthetic statements or principles. Hence it is Kant’s «strong» conception of synthetic *a priori* principles he rejects. Kant claims to prove «apodictically» (*KdrV*: Bxxii, n.) certain synthetic truths *a priori*. Those proofs require Kant’s Transcendental Idealism. I join Professor Parrini (and Guyer 1987) in rejecting both Transcendental Idealism and with it Kant’s claims to the apodictic certainty of his transcendental proofs. No brief remarks here can show that I have nevertheless identified two sound, genuinely transcendental proofs of mental content externalism within Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, though I may invite Professor Parrini and others please to reconsider the case for these I have presented previously (Westphal 2004–2007). I am glad he notes (2015a: 48) that my views, such as they are, are by design amenable to evolutionary epistemology.

I am grateful for the present occasion to respond to Professor Parrini’s comments (§2), and to questions posed by students and by the audience (§§3–5). I shall reply in a thematic order, indicating as I proceed to which question I reply.

2. *Replies to Professor Parrini*

Professor Parrini (2015a: §2) rightly emphasises Herbart’s concern, *contra* Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, about how it is possible to attain determinate knowledge, regarding particular questions and manifest in specific judgments about particular objects, events persons or phenomena. The concern is not whether Kant neglected our experience or knowledge of particulars, but rather whether Kant’s account of particular cognitive judgments ultimately is consistent with his Transcendental Ide-
alism: briefly, whether Kant can sustain his strict dichotomy between the formal *a priori* transcendental conditions of experience and the matter of experience acquired through sensory affection.

2.1 Regarding our particular knowledge of spatio-temporal individuals, Kant rightly argued against Leibniz in defence of what I call Kant’s Thesis of Singular Cognitive Reference. This Thesis ultimately shows that we have neither knowledge by description nor knowledge by acquaintance as Russell (1911) conceived them. Descriptions can be used to explicate the meaning, classificatory content or intension of concepts, principles, terms, phrases or sentences. However, descriptive content alone does not suffice for semantic reference to any specific particular, because – however detailed or specific, and regardless of any use or mention of ‘the’ or other putative definite referring phrases (such as ‘the one and only’) – *no* description determines whether there is any such particular as it describes, whether there is exactly one such, or whether there are several such particulars. How many, if any, such particulars there may be is in principle *also* a contingent fact about what exists or occurs. Kant’s commonsense example of this, *contra* Leibniz, is of two drops of rain, identical in size, shape and in all other characteristics, which nevertheless are numerically distinct simply insofar as they occupy distinct regions of space (*KdrV*: A262–3/B319–20) – or likewise time – and so consist of distinct portions of the same kind of matter, later discovered to be H$_2$O.

As Charles Travis (2006, 2008, 2013) emphasises, there are two different uses of descriptions which have too often been confused within analytical philosophy, starting with Russell. One use, just mentioned, is to spell out the conceptual content or meaning (intension) of concepts, terms or the like. The other use is to spell out what some particular person says or thinks on some particular occasion. This second use requires locating and designating that person and those particular objects, events or persons (etc.) s/he discusses or considers (thinks about) on that occasion. Leibniz’s commitment to his metaphysical Principle of Plenitude and his account of (alleged) individual essences blunders on Russell’s side; Kant’s Thesis of Singular Cognitive Reference joins ranks with Fre-
ge, Austin, Sellars, Donnelan, Evans, Kaplan, Wettstein and Travis in distinguishing these two uses. One direct implication of Kant’s Thesis is this: Whatever purely linguistic or semantic meaning may be, or however linguistic or semantic reference may occur or be achieved, such meaning or reference are necessary to, but are insufficient for, specifically cognitive reference. To know any particular requires, as Kant cogently argued, localising that particular within space and time.\textsuperscript{13}

Against Quine, Evans (1975) argued that our command, mastery or understanding of the \textit{predicates} of a language requires command, mastery or understanding of the features of those \textit{particulars} which either exhibit or fail to exhibit the feature or characteristic designated by those predicates. Use of any predicate requires being able to discriminate the relevant particulars, or the relevant regions or aspects of particulars, from other contrasting particulars, their regions or their aspects. Consequently, our use of predicates involves ascription of characteristics, and ascription of characteristics requires designating the relevant spatio-temporal region occupied by any characteristic or feature of any particular. Consequently, \textit{<predication>} as a grammatical form does not suffice for \textit{<predication>} as the \textit{ascription} of characteristics to anything, nor to any portion or aspect of anything.

Kant embedded this important cognitive-semantic point within his Critical epistemology; his point holds independently of Transcendental Idealism. In brief, to be even a \textit{candidate} cognitive claim, we must refer our concepts in judgment to some particular(s) we have localised within space and time. Referring our concepts in judgment to some particular(s) is necessary for our judgment to have any truth value, or any value as an approximation. Referring our concepts in judgment to some particular(s) is necessary for our judgment to have any cognitive \textit{justification}, however extensive or (in)sufficient it may be. Referring our concepts in judgment to some particular(s) is necessary for anyone to be able to \textit{assess}

\textsuperscript{13} Kant’s further views about how he can justify the claims made in and by his transcendental analyses and proofs cannot be discussed here; that is the \textit{«epistemic reflection»} to which Parrini (2015a: 47–48) alludes (see Westphal 2004a).
whatever accuracy or cognitive justification our judgment may have. Consequently, no statement is even a candidate cognitive claim unless and until it is referred in judgment to some particular(s) someone has localised within space and time. Consequently, philosophy of language or philosophy of mind (which of course use descriptions to spell out semantic or mental content – intension) may contribute to, or augment, epistemology, but in principle they do not suffice for epistemology, nor can they supplant epistemology, because philosophy of language and philosophy of mind do not account for how we are able to localise particulars within space and time, they do not account for cognitive justification and they do not account for how we are able to assess truth, accuracy or cognitive justification. Consequently, we must distinguish – and also integrate – description, ascription, sufficiently accurate ascription and sufficiently (cognitively) justified accurate ascription. Only sufficiently (cognitively) justified accurate ascription counts as knowledge. (These points hold independently of the scale or the plurality of the individuals putatively known. 14)

Because any sufficiently (cognitively) justified accurate ascription is both a sensory and a conceptual achievement, we human beings can have knowledge neither merely by description nor merely by aconceptual ‹acquaintance›, pace Russell (1911). Because we can only obtain knowledge by correctly ascribing characteristics to particular individuals we have localised within space and time, we human beings are also incapable of any experience-transcendent knowledge of any particulars, whether gods, angels or abstract universals. This anti-metaphysical point holds regardless of the conceptual content used in any (putative) attributions, and it holds regardless of verificationist theories of meaning! Kant is correct, that mere analysis of concepts can only provide analytical knowledge of intension (classificatory content), but no synthetic knowledge of any extant individual(s). ‹Possible worlds› as conceived by contemporary philosophers can in principle be no more than expository de-

14 I stress ‘cognitive’ justification because many philosophers have highlighted other sorts of ‘justification’ in connection with beliefs or claims people make.
vices (also for the further reason that all the modality is assimilated to unanalysed and by these methods unanalysable, entirely stipulative ‘accessibility’ relations between alleged possible worlds). 15

2.2 Professor Parrini rightly calls attention to Kant’s «Postulates of Empirical Thought», in which Kant treats modality merely epistemically (A218–9/B265–6; Parrini 2015a: 46). I cannot examine the point here (see Westphal 2016c), but it is significant that Hegel criticised – rightly, I have argued (Westphal 2015d: §2.5) – Kant’s reduction of modality to merely epistemic modality. Kant’s «Postulates» – and likewise his «Axioms of Intuition», «Anticipations of Perception» and «Analogies of Experience» – provide necessary, but not sufficient conditions for cognitive judgments about particulars. Indeed, pursuing Kant’s principles of causal judgment in the «Analogies» through to their proper conclusions shows that our causal judgments are inherently discriminatory and serve to identify transeunt causal relations amongst perceptible spatio-temporal, causally interacting substances. Thoroughly carried through, Kant’s justification of causal judgments in the «Analogies» corrects his «Postulates» by showing that epistemic modalities are, ultimately, parasitic upon the causal modalities of material nature, and our identification of them.

Now on Kant’s view, for us to surmise, conjecture, perceive, experience or identify any physical particular(s), and especially to identify any of their causal characteristics, requires that our sensations are informative about our surroundings. Our cognitive capacities must enable us to decode and integrate (synthesise) that information so as to perceive our surroundings and – insofar as we are able to do so – to gain empirical knowledge about our surroundings via cognitive judgments. For this to be possible, both our surroundings and our sensory responses to our surroundings must be much more structured than is consistent with Kant’s official division between the «formal» *a priori* transcendental conditions of human experience, and the matter or content of sensation (or likewise: sensory intuitions, appearances or experience) given us *ab extra*.

15 For these reasons, contemporary «analytic metaphysics» is in principle and in practice pre-Critical.
Herbart recognised that this is a fundamental problem for Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, though he did not identify its source or character very precisely. It is significant that Hegel, too, recognised this problem, indeed by 1801 in his *Differenzschrift*. Hegel recognised that, on Kant’s analysis, there must be a sufficient degree of similarities and differences amongst the *content* of the sensory manifold, or likewise amongst the *objects* we experience, such that we are able to recognise and discriminate (classify, characterise) any objects or events within whatever we experience. Hegel further recognised that these features of Kant’s analysis afford a transcendental proof of mental content externalism, indeed, a proof which exposes the key fallacy of Kant’s arguments for Transcendental Idealism (Westphal forthcoming).

It is no small historical irony that in this same year, Krug (1801) objected to Reinhold’s, Fichte’s and Schelling’s views, that they too could not account for our experience or knowledge of particular objects or events in our surroundings. Hegel responded to Krug’s objection in two ways. Against Krug’s naïve realism Hegel defended Kant’s Thesis of Singular Cognitive Reference by strictly internal critique of both aconceptual knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge merely by description (Westphal 2002–03, 2010b). Hegel also emphasised the division of intellectual labours between philosophy and empirical knowledge, whether commonsense or scientific (*Enz.* §250 Remark): the existence of Krug’s pen is a matter of commonsense inquiry, not philosophical proof.

3. *Answer to question 1 (and to 3)*

The first question to me concerns how my version of pragmatic realism compares to Sami Pihlström’s.

3.1 Pihlström’s (1996) first book developed a robustly realist pragmatism. He then shifted his view (Pihlström 1998, 2003, 2014), weakening his realist commitments, largely in consideration of Putnam’s view of the inextricable «entanglement» of facts and values, so that he emphasises, as
a limit on claims to know features of the real world as they are unto themselves, that any such claim can only be made within some conceptual scheme or linguistic framework. In this regard, Pihlström (2012) advocates a relativised synthetic *a priori*, though it appears to be merely a linguistic *a priori*, such as Caruthers’ (1987) or Friedman’s (2001) – with this difference between us: whereas I reject Transcendental Idealism whilst re-founding transcendental analysis and proof, Pihlström so emphasises the context-dependence of any claims about reality as to maintain a naturalised transcendental idealism (*sic*), much in line with Goodman’s (1978) views about how ways of using language are tantamount to ways of making worlds.

Pihlström’s earlier view appears to be more robustly realist insofar as it is at least compatible with, I think it is favourable towards, considerations such as those advanced by C.I. Lewis (1929, chapt. 6, esp.: 172–80): relativity requires relata which have their own characteristics; else they cannot so much as *be* relata. (Utterly characterless individuals can have no relations whatever to anything, nor to anyone, else.) This holds, too, Lewis emphasises, for human experience or human knowledge of the world: Only because the world we inhabit has its contents, characteristics and structures can we inhabit, experience, know and act within or upon it at all. This point is significant, yet it is consistent with a merely linguistic version of the relative *a priori*, insofar as it is consistent with the point Quine and Rorty never tired of stressing, that we could alter our linguistic classifications or designations *ad libitum*, and get our most cherished sentences to come out true, or preserve the truth of any particular sentence we wish.

3.2 There is a further significant point here, remarked by Lewis (1923; 1929, chapt. 8), developed more carefully by Professor Parrini (2009), though heretofore neglected by Quine and by Pihlström (1996, 2012), regarding the character and status of measurement procedures in Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity. With antecedents in Mach’s (1908: 303–33/1919: 256–72) treatment of mass determinations, Einstein

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16 The passages cited from Mach remain unrevised in later editions.
stressed that certain measurement procedures must be established regarding what is to count as simultaneity, or likewise as equal periods of time or as equal lengths or distances. These procedures themselves can be established neither by experiment alone nor by theory alone, because, on the one hand, they are required to conduct any relevant experiments, to make any relevant measurements and to construct and assess any relevant theory, whilst on the other hand, establishing them presupposes but cannot demonstrate that no other phenomena interfere with their establishment or use. Mach misrepresented this latter point (see Laymon 1991: 173–7). That much is consistent with a merely linguistic relativised *a priori*. However, these measurement procedures cannot be set arbitrarily! These measurement procedures can be set by theory together with procedure only if nature cooperates through sufficient, relevant stability. Establishing measurement procedures is tightly constrained by physical phenomena and by any attempts to investigate, measure or explain those phenomena. That is why the relative *a priori*, synthetic and yet revisable though it be, cannot be merely linguistic. This point about measurement procedures requires a robustly realist pragmatic *a priori*, albeit a «relative» rather than an «absolute» *a priori* (as Kant sought to provide with his Transcendental Idealism). Neo-pragmatists – including in this significant regard not only Quine, Kuhn, Putnam and Rorty, but also Sami Pihlström and, I believe, Robert Brandom – are committed by their reliance upon Carnapian meta-linguistic frameworks to a merely linguistic account of any relative *a priori*. The relativised *a priori* cannot be merely linguistic, because our relatively *a priori* principles must be such that they can be used to make sound and proper sense of natural phenomena within the exact sciences, including basic measurement procedures. This point about the relativised *a priori* comports perfectly with Carnap’s (1950b: 1–18) explication of conceptual explication and its inherent semantic externalism. Conversely, this point about the relativised *a priori* belies Carnap’s (1950a) framework-internal realism, and the neo-pragmatist priority of meta-languages over object-level languages and over the natural phenomena scientists explore and explain. Though he did not make this point specifically in connection with
measurement procedures, James understood the general, relevant point about our formulation of quantified natural laws very well:

[...] in the choice of these man-made formulas [viz., quantitative laws of nature] we can not be capricious with impunity any more than we can be capricious on the commonsense practical level. We must find a theory that will work; and that means something extremely difficult; for our theory must mediate between all previous truths and certain new experiences. It must derange common sense and previous belief as little as possible, and it must lead to some sensible terminus or other that can be verified exactly. To ‹work› means both these things; and the squeeze is so tight that there is little loose play for any hypothesis. Our theories are wedged and controlled as nothing else is. (James 1907: 216–7)

As not only a theoretical but also a practicing metrologist, consulting chemical engineer and Head of the US Office of Weights and Measures (Oct. 1884–Feb. 1885), Peirce understood very well the importance and the difficulties involved in detecting and eliminating sources of systematic error from precise measurement procedures; he was the first to devise a procedure to use the wave-length of light as a standard unit of measure, and to use it to determine the standard length of the metre.17 Why would Peirce believe in the existence of real generals? Inter alia because he measured some of them with unprecedented precision by constructing his innovative procedures and apparatus! Similar kinds of measurement considerations led Newton to affirm the universal gravitational force of attraction (Harper 2011; Westphal 2014a).

Regarding the non-linguistic character of the relative synthetic a priori, Professor Parrini (2009) is well ahead of my own researches, and has already gone in the direction for which my own, more epistemological researches are propaedeutic; only now am I returning to issues in history and philosophy of science with which I began, to which Professor Parrini has devoted his remarkable career.

17 Many of the relevant primary sources are contained in volume 4 of the Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition (Peirce 1982–); his contributions to metrology are summarised in Nathan Houser’s Introduction to this volume.
3.3 Brandom’s neo-pragmatism – the topic of Question 3 – requires separate discussion, but the inconsistency of his strongly inferentialist account of meaning (Brandom 1994) with realism was pointed out by Rosenkranz (2004). Although Brandom (2008) significantly revised his semantics, I do not believe he corrected the original problem; see Dohrn (2009), Redding (2015), cf. Schaefer (2011). I add some further observations on these points in Westphal (2015d), esp. §3.4, and detail my critique in Westphal (2016c). Brandom (2015) claims his Modal Expressivisit meta-language is not Carnapian; it is, however, not so distinctive as Brandom maintains, in large part because Brandom neglects Sellars’ use of Carnapian explication and its semantic externalism. Surprisingly, Brandom’s (2015: 186, cf. 213) presentation of Carnap’s semantics is truncated and inaccurate, with the result that he neglects how Sellars recognised and developed the semantic externalism implied by Carnap’s account of conceptual explication (per Westphal 2015a: §3). (On Carnap, Quine and Sellars in these regards, please see Westphal 2015e.)

4. Answer to question 2

The second question to me queries the significance of Hegel’s philosophy for the pragmatic realism I advocate. This has been the topic of three of my books; a fourth is now complete and a fifth (and final) is nearly finished. Let me suggest some of what my epistemological researches provide for pragmatic realism. The interrelations of practice, classification, measurement, experiment and theoretical explanation mentioned above (§3) were succinctly stated by Lewis in these terms:

The determination of reality, the classification of phenomena, and the discovery of law, all grow up together. I will not repeat what has already been said so often about the logical priority of criteria; but it should be observed that this is entirely compatible with the shift of categories and classifications with the widening or human experience. If the criteria of the real are a priori, that is not to say that no conceivable character or experience would lead to alteration of them. (Lewis 1929 [1956: 263])
This interdependence of classification, investigation, revision and renewed investigation is central to Newton’s method of successive approximations and his ideals of explanatory adequacy (Harper 2011); the use of successive approximations to regulate the development of both measurement and exact phenomenological description are also evident throughout Galileo’s and Kepler’s terrestrial and celestial kinematics. This interdependence and mutual regulation appears to many philosophers – rather too easily and rather too often – to be either entirely arbitrary, merely conventional, or else viciously circular. However, as Peirce (1902, chapt. 3: §11), Alston (1989: 319–49) and long before them both: Hegel recognised, not all forms of epistemic circularity are vicious.18

The important links between Hegel’s philosophy and Kant’s are not metaphysical (via Transcendental Idealism), but methodological and epistemological (Westphal 2009; forthcoming). Public discussion and mutual assessment are central to Kant’s Critical methodology and to Kant’s fallibilist account of rational justification in all non-formal domains (O’Neill 1992; Westphal 2016a: chapt. 6). Hegel developed Kant’s suggestions in these regards in a way which solves the Pyrrhonian Dilemma of the Criterion, centrally by explaining how both constructive self-criticism and constructive mutual critical assessment are humanly possible, and why they are constitutive of maximally rational individual

18 Peirce states: «In studying logic, you hope to correct your present ideas of what reasoning is good, what bad. This, of course, must be done by reasoning; and you cannot imagine that it is to be done by your accepting reasonings of mine which do not seem to you to be rational. It must, therefore, be done by means of the bad system of logic which you at present use. Some writers fancy that they see some absurdity in this. They say, “Logic is to determine what is good reasoning. Until this is determined reasoning must not be ventured upon. (They say it would be a “petitio principii” [...] Therefore, the principles of logic must be determined without reasoning, by simple instinctive feeling.” All this is fallacious. [...] Let us rather state the case thus. At present, you are in possession of a logica utens which seems to be unsatisfactory. The question is whether, using that somewhat unsatisfactory logica utens, you can make out wherein it must be modified, and can attain to a better system. This is a truer way of stating the question; and so stated, it appears to present no such insuperable difficulty as is pretended» (Peirce 1902, CP 2:191). My attention to this passage and its significance I owe to F. L. Will (1981 [1997: 89 note]); for discussion of Alston’s views on this topic, see Westphal (1989: 74–84).
judgment and justification (Westphal 2013). Hegel’s solutions to these problems develop and exploit fundamental externalist aspects of mental content, semantic content and cognitive justification. Hegel recognised the decisive significance of Kant’s Thesis of Singular Cognitive Reference, and developed its considerable anti-sceptical and anti-rationalist implications: experience-transcendent metaphysics is impossible, not because it is conceptually vacuous or linguistically meaningless, but because in principle it is pseudo-cognitive (Westphal 2014a). These findings contribute centrally to Hegel’s demonstration that a sober social and historical account of rational justification (in non-formal domains) is consistent with and strongly supports realism about the objects of empirical knowledge (both commonsense and scientific), and strict objectivity about core moral principles – altogether independent of perennial debates about moral realism, moral values or moral motivation. In all of these regards, Hegel’s transformation and development of Kant’s Critical methodology and epistemology – *sans* Transcendental Idealism – undergird and augment Frederick Will’s (1974, 1988, 1997) pragmatic realism, and Will’s analysis of the latent aspects of norms and their roles in our rational governance of our moral and our cognitive practices.

5. **Answer to question 7**

Your final question to us both – a very good one – is: What difference does the pragmatic maxim make to philosophy? The pragmatic maxim has enormous, fundamental implications for philosophy, which again underscore the contrast between the genuine original and contemporary neo-pragmatism – and further underscore the significance of Hegel’s pragmatic realism.

5.1 It is striking that the pragmatic realist implications I have been explicating from Carnap’s (1950b: 1–18) explication of conceptual explication are much more prominent in Herbart’s method, to which Professor Parrini has so kindly and rightly drawn my attention: the *Bearbeitung* of basic concepts and principles within their contexts of use within the vari-
ous relevant disciplines and practices!

Doubtless Herbart would have been surprised to learn that Hegel’s philosophy – all of it – is fundamentally dedicated to Herbartian conceptual **Bearbeitung**, though only one brief example may be mentioned here. Both Herbart (1829: §299) and Hegel (**WdL, GW** 11:398,15–24, 399,30–35) agree that causes and their effects occur concurrently. Herbart states:

> No cause without effect! Thus also none before the effect. Both are absolutely concurrent. This requirement is conceptual; and this is corroborated by ontological examination, which roots all true causality in self-preservation. (Herbart 1829: §299; tr. **KRW**)\(^{19}\)

This brief remark typifies both Herbart’s keen eye for key issues, as well as his less than incisive explication of key concepts. «Self-preservation» (**Selbsterhaltung**) is suitable for biological organisms, but the relevant concept for causality generally is Kant’s term **Beharrlichkeit**: persistence (1st Analogy; B224). On this point, Hegel greatly furthered the **Bearbeitung** of the concepts of ‹substance›, ‹cause›, ‹effect› and ‹material particular› to defend and justify Newton’s causal realism about gravitational force, and realism about distance forces more generally (Westphal 2015f).

5.2 It may seem puzzling that Herbart so often and so avidly examines psychological issues in a work on general metaphysics and fundamentals of natural philosophy, but he brings his concern about the hazards of traditional metaphysics and epistemology nicely to this point:

> Against all possible misinterpretation the best remedy is the proper use of a doctrine. To the disputatious beginner, differential calculus offers material for ever renewed objections, until he learns through its application that by exhibiting his presumptive keen wits he merely betrayed his

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\(^{19}\) «Keine Ursache ohne Wirkung! Also auch keine vor der Wirkung. Beyde sind absolut gleichzeitig. Diese Forderung liegt in den Begriffen; und durch die ontologische Untersuchung, welche alle wahre Causalität auf Selbsterhaltung zurückführt, wird sie bestätigt» (Herbart 1829, §299).
own inflexibility in thinking. (Herbart 1828–29: §266; tr. KRW, cf. §329, idem. 1831: §§159–65).\textsuperscript{20}

Note Herbart’s stress upon «use». Herbart’s recourse to psychology aims to examine and assess our humanly possible uses, misuses and abuses of traditional philosophical terms and concepts, in metaphysics, in epistemology and in psychology itself. Though we may not find Herbart’s psychology convincing, in part because we now have better techniques for examining the use and abuse of philosophical categories and concepts, Herbart deserves credit for investigating vigorously issues about conceptual use and misuse which had become both chronic and confused in Nineteenth Century philosophy – and not only then! He may also be forgiven for not recognising how, nor indeed that, Hegel shared this same concern and aim, though Hegel pursued it with greater acuity, if also lesser expository transparency. Not until recently was it recognised – by Wolff (1986) – that Hegel’s \textit{Science of Logic} contains a detailed critical assessment of Cauchy’s landmark «first reform» of mathematical analysis («calculus»).

In this context Hegel highlights the discovery and analysis of discontinuous functions within both mathematics and physical science. Hegel realised that discontinuous functions and their occurrence in natural phenomena are one more important case \textit{contra} Kant’s Transcendental Idealism and its glib constructivism: discontinuous functions belie – both in theory and in fact – Kant’s contention in the «Anticipations of Perception» (\textit{KdrV}: A166–76/B207–18), that because sensory qualities have intensive magnitudes, and because they can possibly be matched by a gradually increasing degree, or conversely, they can possibly diminish gradually to nothing, that they have (or exhibit) continuous functions. That is a \textit{non-sequitur}, and a striking example of how empirical scientific knowledge can demonstrate required revisions even in transcendental

\textsuperscript{20} «Gegen alle mögliche Misdeutung hilft am besten der richtige Gebrauch einer Lehre. So ist die Differentialrechnung für einen Anfänger, der gern disputirt, ein Stof zu stets erneuerten Einwürfen, bis er aus der Anwendung lernt, dafs er durch die vermeinten Proben seines Scharfsinns nur seine Ungelenkigkeit im Denken verrieth» (Herbart 1828–29: §266).
5.3 Such examples are central to Hegel’s development of Kant’s Critical methodology into the first and still one of the most adequate versions of pragmatic realism. The picture of Hegel as a mad rationalist seeking to deduce everything unilaterally from nothing whatsoever is a contrivance of the lecture halls – too many of which were initially populated by Hegel’s foes and would-be critics. Instead, Hegel’s *Science of Logic* and his *Philosophical Encyclopaedia* – including centrally his «Philosophy of Nature» – reclaim and revamp Aristotle’s *meta ta physica* on the basis of Kant’s Critical methodology and epistemology, together with comprehensive, detailed examination of the natural and social sciences (political economy) of his day (Ferrini 1995, 2009; Moretto 2004; Renault 2001; Waszek 1988; Westphal 2015c, 2015d, forthcoming; Wolff 1986).

5.4 Peirce is often said to have defined «truth» as the ultimate agreement reached by scientific inquiry (in his review of Fraser’s edition of Berkeley’s works; *Writings* 2: 462–487, esp. 2: 468). Peirce’s statement is no definition of truth; it is an idealisation of what may ultimately be found to be true, insofar as more discerning and capable minds succeed at identifying and making generally known the various characteristics of nature. This is, in Kant’s sense, a *focus imaginarius* (*KdrV*: B672); surely no more than that. However, we have come to appreciate that «the sciences» are heterogenous, and their findings do not add up into some one single, total description of nature and its history: not least, because many sciences examine and explain only aspects of recurrent natural phenomena, whilst disregarding the complexes and the complex events they collectively happen to generate in the course of time and natural history (see esp. Wimsatt 2007; Chalmers 2009). Fortunately, actual knowledge of nature does not require omniscience; we limited human beings can attain actual knowledge of many important and pervasive aspects of nature. Fitting together these aspects of nature, and these aspects of our knowledge of nature, requires further developing our multi-disciplinary capacities and abilities – which of course requires developing our *disciplinary* expertise. So doing would be realistically pragmatic, and pragmatically wise: not least because so doing would enable us to appreciate how the
pragmatic maxim underscores the fact that the pragmatic, relative *a priori* cannot be merely linguistic.\textsuperscript{21} Professor Parrini deserves credit and our gratitude for highlighting this elementary, enormously significant fact. If Professor Parrini’s empirical realism is somewhat more cautious than my robust pragmatic realism, by so stressing why the relative a priori cannot be merely linguistic (nor meta-linguistic), his empirical realism is more robust than Pihlström’s naturalised transcendental idealism *cum* pragmatic realism (whose views I mention again since they were queried by the audience).

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SOME REPLIES TO QUESTIONSPOSED BY STUDENTS

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Abstract: Answering to the questions posed by students, I clarify my position on four main topics: (i) the pragmatic maxim; (ii) the relation between my conception of truth on one hand, and epistemic conceptions of truth and the idea of the convergence of our cognitive efforts on the other; (iii) the skeptical challenge; (iv) the relationship between science and philosophy.

Key Words: Skepticism, Transcendental Proofs, Truth, Pragmatism, Science, Philosophy

1. Answer to question 7

This question – addressed both to me and Professor Westphal – concerns the difference that the pragmatic maxim makes to philosophy.

The pragmatic maxim came into being in answer to the question of how it is possible to make our ideas clear; it differs from other answers to that question because it invites us to look at the practical-applicative components of our intellectual constructs. It was formulated by Charles Sanders Peirce and adopted and defended in different ways by William James and John Dewey. A vast literature has been published on the topic of both an interpretative and generally theoretical kind, regarding its correct formulation, the way of intending it, its area of application and its justification.

On the general level I have nothing to add to the answer that Professor Westphal (2015b: §5) gave to this very same question. I would only like to underline the great importance of the distinction he made between neo-pragmatists such as Quine and more authentic and «substantial» pragmatists who, like Wilfrid Sellars, moved along the lines of the «fathers»

1 I present my answers in order facilitating unified treatment. References cited in these Replies are listed in the bibliography to my main contribution.
of the pragmatist movement. Such a distinction is important not only from the perspective of historical reconstruction but also from the theoretical point of view, because authentic pragmatists had the merit of bringing to the fore the necessity of making reference to the *pragma* and the externalism this involves in reaching clarification of philosophical questions. This holds true, in particular, for two aspects of the pragmatic maxim I would like to briefly consider now: its critical value and its usefulness in light of an explicative reconstruction of our concepts.

Concerning the first aspect, the pragmatic maxim reinforces the distrust of metaphysical and ontological speculations developed on a markedly aprioristic basis, neglecting the dimension of experience and cognitive practices. In this sense it proved to be a useful critical tool in the hands of philosophies of an empiricist, positivist and scientific inspiration, finding convergence with Kantian criticism of traditional metaphysical systems. In this regard I would like to pay homage to the philosophical tradition of my country by reminding the readers that the pragmatic maxim was adopted and analyzed by two Italian pragmatists, Giovanni Vailati and Mario Calderoni. These philosophers (both, unfortunately, prematurely deceased) had the merit of seeing and discussing – well ahead of Quine – the relationship between the conception of meaning based on the pragmatist criterion and Pierre Duhem’s criticism of the possibility of crucial experiments (either verifying or falsifying), criticism that led to the development of the holistic conception of experimental control (see Vailati 1905/1972: 220–222; Calderoni 1924: 260ff.).

Calderoni also realised how the defense and the use of the pragmatic maxim in an anti-metaphysical function could draw some advantages from the attention to the so-called procedural aspects of philosophical discussion. From this perspective such a maxim says only that the onus of proving that a certain assertion has some meaning or how it acquires one befalls to the person enunciating it and not to the person who hears it being enunciated. This, which may seem of little importance, has instead a great importance, similar to the importance of some procedural rules that may appear to be only a negligible
pedantry, but are the ones without which the possibility of knowing and punishing a crime would vanish. (Calderoni 1924: 263–264)

This attention to the procedures – Calderoni continues – is particularly relevant in the case of philosophy:

as we can say that the refusal to declare the sense of the sentences used under the pretense that it is evident and intuitive is the constitutive, constant methodical device of a good half of past and present philosophical schools. (Calderoni 1924: 264f.)

As far as the second aspect is concerned, the pragmatic maxim has the merit of leading to the emergence of the importance of *pragma* in order to reach an explicative reconstruction of notions that play a crucial role in science and philosophy. For example, it is a wide-spread conviction that Einstein’s adoption of an attitude very similar to the one expressed by the pragmatist criterion allowed him to sharpen the operational-verificational analysis of simultaneity, and so to formulate the special theory of relativity with the consequent setting aside the notions of absolute time and space. What is less known is the deep influence that Vailati and Calderoni’s ideas exercised on the Italian mathematician Bruno de Finetti in elaborating his subjectivistic conception of probability (see Parrini, 2011a).

Coming, finally, to my philosophical position, it also rests, among other elements, on the conviction that, after the numerous objections addressed to the neo-positivist verification principle, a critical attitude towards metaphysics can be taken up only moving along the track marked by Kant, in other words taking as a starting point a general theory of knowledge. I think, though, that also to justify a general theory of knowledge it is fundamental to see how effectively we operate when we are engaged in the cognitive activity in any field of human knowledge, from the scientific to the historical and the legal one. In order to understand what knowledge is, we need to draw not only upon the analysis of the main epistemological concepts considered in abstract, but also upon the analysis of what we really do when we try to know something. On this point I found my position near not only to one famous Einstein statement
about physics and the physicists (1936), but also to Professor Westphal’s position. In fact, Professor Westphal interprets and revalues the essential aspects of original pragmatism, placing at the center of attention the dimension of «what we do, how we do it, and what we do it with; in short: our practices and procedures» (see Westphal 2015e: §3.3). I also believe that a theory of knowledge so devised can welcome Kant and Hegel’s cognitive semantics, rightly rehabilitated by Professor Westphal. This reinforces my critical attitude toward metaphysics and today’s possible worlds semantics, regarding which I fully share what Professor Westphal says at the end of § 2.2 of his answer to my paper (Westphal 2015b).

2. Answer to question 4

I am asked to specify the relationship between my positive philosophy and Peirce’s characterization of truth in terms of the indefinitely long run convergence of the scientific community’s opinion towards a dynamic (evolutionary) reality that constrains inquiry.

In § 5.4 of Answer to Question 7 Professor Westphal (2015b) rightly observes that Peirce’s statement should not be intended as a «definition of truth», but as «an idealization of what may ultimately be found to be true». With this premise, I would like to specify that the central importance I ascribe to pragma is one of the main reasons for my strong distrust not only of Kant’s notion of transcendental, intended in the strong and genuine sense in which it is defined in the Critique of Pure Reason (see Parrini 2015a: n. 1), but also of the use of the notion of convergence to characterize the aim and development of cognitive activity, especially as realized in scientific research.

Differently from what some have suggested, my conception of truth is not to be understood as an epistemic conception of truth. For example, we must not compare it, let alone confuse it, with the doctrine of truth as «an idealization of rational acceptability» theorized by Hilary Putnam in a particular phase of his thought (Putnam 1981: 55). For me truth is … truth, and has all that strength familiar also (and I would add especially)
to those who try to manipulate it. What do I mean by this? I mean that for my notion of truth, what Kant said about the notion of *Wirklichkeit* holds true (1781–1787/1985: 113–115, A79–83, B105–109, 239, A218=B265f.), in other words: reality is a category and therefore a primitive indefinable concept.

Obviously considering reality a primitive indefinable concept is not tantamount to denying that this concept has a content of its own that distinguishes it from other primitive concepts such as that of ‘possibility’ or of ‘substance’; it only means that the concept of reality, on a par with the other primitive concepts, cannot be characterized on the basis of the complex of criteria that usually guide us in its application, in other words: it is empty ‘criterially’ (see Parrini 2015a: n. 10). In fact for Kant the postulates of empirical thought in general are not definitions of the modal notions of reality, possibility and necessity, but principles that license, govern and limit their use within the boundaries of experience. In the case of the category of reality, this means that in Kant’s conception the application of such a concept is constrained by the constitutive components of phenomenal objects, in other words by the formal and the material components of our knowledge. These two kinds of components, and not reality, are the constraints on inquiry. What we consider real is the result of the interaction between them. Similarly, for my conception (admittedly inspired by Kant’s), the epistemic criteria that usually guide the use of the notion of truth (for example, the reference to the data of experience, recourse to presuppositions of a theoretical nature, and methodological rules such as those of simplicity, elegance, compactness, and so forth) must not be considered as defining marks of such a notion, but as a plastic and historically variable set of values and epistemic principles that discipline its use in an orienting and fallible way, conditioning our always revisable attributions of truth. For me reason and rationality have an open texture; and we must recognize the same open texture to the set of our guiding criteria of truth (see Parrini 1995/1998: VII/2; see also Parrini 2015a: n. 10).

That is why saying, as I do, that truth is only and simply truth entails that it cannot be dealt with epistemically, not even according to modali-
ties that allow (at least in the intentions of proponents) to maintain the
distinction between <deeming true> and <being true>. For me truth pos-
sesses the same strength that it possesses for the metaphysical realist,
although it does not indicate, as holds for classic metaphysical realism,
some kind of <mysterious> form of correspondence between our cognitive
claims and reality in itself. Similarly to goodness and beauty, truth is a
value, a regulative ideal that sustains and inspires the synthesis of today
and future experiences via concepts, theories and methodological rules
submitted to a continual process of adjusting and improvement. In fact,
our usual and intersubjectively testable applications of this category
seem to be destined to always remain tentative, revisable, and irremedia-
bly closed within the circle (linguistically, theoretically, and method-
dologically structured) of some experiences <motivating> other experi-
ences, without ever being able to attain a reality considered in itself.

In my conception of truth there is no place for the idea of a conver-
gence (more or less gradual) of past, present, and future cognitive syn-
thesis. In fact I not only reject the forms of metaphysical realism grouped
under the name of <convergent realism> and the forms of absolute ideal-
ism similar to Hegel’s, but also the forms of logical-formal idealism in
line with Cassirer’s conception of a progressive convergence of the cog-
nitive process towards the individuation of the «ultimate logical invari-
ants» of experience (Cassirer 1910/1953: 269; emphasis in the German
dition: 357). I do not even favor Peirce’s characterization of truth in
terms of the indefinitely long run convergence of the scientific commu-
nity’s opinion towards a dynamic reality that constraints inquiry. What I
deem real (in an empirical sense) is, as I was saying, the fruit of a synthe-
sis of the material and formal components of knowledge, where to such a
distinction between formal and material we need to ascribe not an abso-
lute value, but a purely relative value as dependent on the structure of the
context of epistemic justification within which we move (as happens in
the case of the a priori/a posteriori and analytic/synthetic distinctions).
Therefore what we consider as real, in the sense of empirically real, is
not a constraint of inquiry; the (empirically) real is something constituted
and the constraints of research are instead the formal and material
components, especially the component we commonly call experience, in other words that complex of empirical data that in the various contexts of inquiry, until one has proof to the contrary, one tends to consider unproblematic.

I would like to add that since 1976, when in *Linguaggio e teoria. Due saggi di analisi filosofica* I proposed the idea of a contextualised or relativized *a priori* – insisting already then on the necessity of a ‹double› relativized a priori: the analytic-linguistic one and the genuinely constitutive one of a synthetic-theoretical nature (see Parrini 2015a: n. 1) – I was very careful not to advance any pretense to thus resolve the problems of incommensurability raised by Thomas S. Kuhn and Paul K. Feyerabend. Differently from Michael Friedman – who many years later also advocated the idea of a relativized *a priori* (though without distinguishing between those two kinds of a priori and recognizing the necessity of both) – I do not think that saving the rationality of science requires adapting Peirce’s idea and considering «our present scientific community … as an approximation to a final, ideal community of inquiry … that has achieved a universal, trans-historical communicative rationality on the basis of the fully general and adequate constitutive principles reached in the ideal limit of scientific progress» (Friedman 2001: 73).

Positions such as Friedman’s (just quoted) remain entrapped in a conception (the so-called conception of a ‹unique grand narrative›) that neglects some valid acquisitions made by postmodernist experience. Moreover, such a conception is not easily put into practice, in view of the considerable problems met by the notions of continuity, convergence, and also (quoting the expression used by young Reichenbach) of *stetige Erweiterung*\(^2\) when trying to apply them to the historical transformations of knowledge. I think it is possible to defend the rationality of our cognitive efforts (in particular, and mainly, those that find their accomplishment in scientific achievements) without relying upon the undoubtedly ‹heavy› idea of an intellectual process that proceeds *de claritate in claritatem* and neglects the actual, torturous development of knowledge.

\(^2\) See the German edition of Reichenbach (1920/1965: 77).
To preserve the value of rationality for our claims of truth, or of approximations to truth, it is enough to individuate and maintain the purely value-laden and regulative dimension of the idea of truth as a tension towards the highest form of systematization and conceptual articulation of experience – without hiding from ourselves the possibility that, in some cases, also our best efforts towards comprehensive cognitive synthesis must stop at levels of integration that are not altogether satisfying (see Parrini 1995/1998: 143–159).

3. **Answer to question 6**

The question posed by Nicola Freschi asks me to specify the relationship between my positive philosophy and skepticism.

First of all I wish to say that also regarding the problem of skepticism my conception tried to avoid any compromise with the idea of the convergence of our cognitive efforts.

A particularly strong version of the skeptical objection, very close to the one found in this question, has been highlighted with particular clarity by Professor Westphal in a passage of his book on Hegel’s epistemological realism where he specifies that

Sextus has fingered a real difficulty for any theory undertaking the establishment of the resemblance or representational reliability of the senses, namely, proving that sensory states are reliable when there can be no independent access to the relation between those states and their putative objects. (1989: 13)

In order to deal with skepticism with adequate accuracy, I would need to revise the full complex of arguments and logical-conceptual analyses I developed in *Knowledge and Reality. An Essay in Positive Philosophy* (1995/1998) and later in the works connected to this book which provided the material for two other books: *Sapere e interpretare. Per una filosofia e un’oggettività senza fondamenti* (Parrini 2002) and *Il valore della verità* (Parrini 2011). This is evidently impossible. I can indicate, though, two key aspects of my «positive philosophy» that are linked with
the theme of skepticism. It seems to me that they can draw strength from some ideas that Professor Westphal had the merit of re-proposing, making relevant and re-developing.

The first such aspect is this. I am convinced that if we place ourselves in the absolutistic point of view typical of metaphysical realism, it is impossible to overcome the skeptical objection, including global perceptual skepticism. If we take as our starting point the idea that philosophy has to explain how it is possible for knowing subjects endowed with our perceptive and intellectual skills to attain a knowledge capable of giving us (albeit in hypothetical and conjectural terms) a representation of reality in itself (Kant’s *Ding an sich*), then skepticism is inevitable and I do not think that there are arguments (including transcendental arguments) capable of facing and neutralizing it. Like my Professor Giulio Preti, I believe that metaphysical realism and skepticism are two faces of the same coin; actually, skepticism should be considered as a kind of immanent or inner criticism of absolutism – but this for me is *not* to be considered as a proof of its logical inconsistency; see Parrini (2004, esp.: 189–199).

If instead we take as our starting point the idea that knowledge is a fact and not a problem, in other words, that in spite of the skeptic’s efforts, he fails to convince us that knowing is impossible because this clashes with our experience of being able to develop an activity of a cognitive kind, then the problem we face is one of elaborating a concept or conception of knowledge that can justify, or give account of, our conviction. To achieve such an aim it is not enough to take into consideration what emerges from analyses of the notion of knowledge considered *in abstracto*, such as those resting on truth considered as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* (the putting into practice of which is precluded by skepticism) or those based on characterizing knowledge as *true justified belief* (a characterization questioned by Gettier’s well known paradox). It is necessary to integrate the analysis of the abstract concept of knowledge with the analysis of our actual cognitive practices.

The difficulty that emerges at this point is that the results of the analysis of the abstract concepts and the results of the analysis of our cogni-
tive *pragma* are not completely congruous with each other\(^3\). So, if we want to reach a philosophically coherent notion of knowledge as responsive as possible to both our abstract concepts and to our effective practices, we must move along the line of what Herbart called *<reworking of concepts>* (*Bearbeitung der Begriffen*), and Carnap called *<explication>* of concepts. Only in this way can we reach some epistemological notions of knowledge, truth, and reality that are both self-reflexively coherent and capable of avoiding skepticism. Hence my proposal to intend knowledge as an integrational activity or a rational synthesis of the empirical material, a proposal which finds its accomplishment in a conception of truth as regulative ideal and in a (correlated) conception of reality as empirical reality\(^4\).

Coming to the second aspect, already in *Knowledge and Reality* (1995/1998) I tried to show that my perspective – which aims at keeping away from the metaphysical traits still present in Kant and in Hegel and is rightly called *<positive>* for this reason – allows us to make use of some arguments that hit both skepticism and that Cartesian approach criticized by Professor Westphal too. Modern science in fact does not try to overcome skeptical doubts of a global nature (for example, global perceptual skepticism or hyperbolic Cartesian doubts) and to certify its own legitimacy by searching for indubitable certainties such as those Descartes sought. Modern science overcomes global skepticism by setting it aside and implicitly showing its irrelevance by adequately delimiting the range of its own statements. The generalized skeptical stance depends upon the *generic possibility* of making mistakes or of being deceived, which can be invoked in any circumstance. This possibility «relies on a general, always-available doubt, independent of any specific mode of instantiation or mechanism of operation» (Fine & Forbes 1986: 238). The scientific method instead (in some respects a refining of procedures

\(^3\) In this connection it would be opportune to quote and look in depth into what I called *Duhem’s Pascalian dilemma*: «We have an impotence to prove, which cannot be conquered by any dogmatism; we have an idea of truth which cannot be conquered by any Pyrrhonian skepticism» (quoted from Duhem 1904–06\(^1\)–1914\(^2\)/1962: 27).

\(^4\) See my answer to Question 4 and Parrini (2015a: n. 10).
we normally use in everyday life) consists in: (a) admitting the possibility of global skeptical doubts; (b) seeing whether in the different contexts «it can be articulated (i.e., made specific, concrete, and testable)» (ibid.); (c) if that is not possible, it is legitimate to bracket it off «as a mere possibility and proceed» with our work, «returning periodically» to (b) (ibid.). Conforming itself to such a method, my positive philosophy states that «the possibility of doubt arising is not itself a reason to doubt of any particular proposition; more exactly, it is not a reason to abstain from using the best beliefs we have – those which have been found to be successful and free from specific doubt – to build on» (Shapere 1984: xxvi; see Parrini 1995/1998: 194f.).

Nevertheless, the possibility of using successfully the above specified method depends upon having provisionally accepted a rational proposal of explicative reconstruction – rational in the sense that it is based on analyses of concepts and discursive arguments – characterized by these two qualifications: (1) from the substantive point of view it requires us to qualify the reality which is the object of our cognitive claims as empirical reality (and not as metaphysical reality); (2) from the methodological point of view it requires evaluation for its global merits, in other words as an attempt to give an account of the complex of our beliefs, convictions, and experiences in a way we deem optimal with respect to other equally global conceptions (for example, the realism based on the best explanation or Bas van Fraassen’ constructive empiricism) – without denying, of course, that this evaluation too cannot rely on demonstratively conclusive arguments and is therefore bound to remain, like the rest of our knowledge, hypothetical, conjectural, and revisable in the light of new possible data.

As I said in my Comment, «Empirical Realism without Transcendental Idealism» (Parrini 2015a), both these points (1) and (2) (empirical realism and misgivings about the possibility of coercive arguments of a transcendental kind) mark the difference between Professor Westphal’s position and my own. In spite of this, I share the conclusion of the arguments he developed in his important work on Kant (the existence «of molar objects and events in space and time» [2004: 3]) and I drew from his
perceptive treatment precious elements to better define my own conception.

Two points in Professor Westphal’s analysis I found particularly enlightening and congenial to me:

(W₁) The high value he sets on Kant’s epistemic-transcendental reflection, a reflection that I prefer to call epistemic-presuppositional due to my misgivings about the transcendental. This is the specific area of philosophical research and epistemological elaboration and for me it distinguishes itself from both the formal domains of logic and mathematics and those of empirical sciences.

(W₂) His rich articulation of the fact that at the very level of epistemic reflection we must confront skepticism in general and global perceptual skepticism in particular. Professor Westphal, on the basis of his deep and innovative reading of Kant and Hegel, brought to light how we can neutralise global perceptual skepticism (and with it the Cartesian epistemological approach) by showing that it is linked to an idea of absolutely founded or justified knowledge that has a sense for the formal dominions of logics and mathematics, but is in principle inappropriate to the non-formal domains of empirical knowledge, and therefore for factual knowledge both scientific and commonsense. In other words: skepticism needs to be refuted not so much showing logically its falsity or contradictory nature, but sideling it by showing that the standards of knowledge on the basis of which it pretends to judge the validity of our empirical-factual cognitive claims are in principle inappropriate.

I think, though, that epistemic reflection is neither a formal domain such as those of logic and mathematics, nor a factual dominion such as those of the empirical sciences and commonsense. So, whereas I agree with Professor Westphal that it is out of place to invoke global perceptual skepticism to shed doubts on our empirical forms of knowledge, I do not see as illicit or inappropriate recurring to its mere logical possibility to show: (i) the cognitive impracticability of the notion of reality in itself or
metaphysical reality, and (ii) the advantages of a notion of empirical reality that conforms to an idea of knowledge as synthesis, or unification, of the sensible manifold and to an idea of truth as regulative ideal. In Kantian terms I would say that at the level of epistemic reflection we have to deal with both the components regarding the logical possibility of concepts (in our case, the concepts of reality and truth) and the components regarding their real possibility. Therefore epistemic reflection can move – and actually must move – on both these fronts. In the case of the notion of reality it seems to me that its metaphysical connotations clash directly with the Kantian words I quoted in my paper (2015a: § 2) on what is «to us» an object of knowledge if we do not want such an object to reduce to a mere «nothing» (Kant 1781–1787/1985: 134f., A104f.). Hence the necessity of a conceptual reworking that leads us to intend reality as empirical reality, the only one we humans can attain knowledge of and with respect to which both the skeptical doubts of a global nature and the foundational requests of a Cartesian kind sound inappropriate.

4. Answer to question 5

I have been asked to clarify my opinion on the relationship between philosophy and science.

I think that what I said in the preceding answers has already shown the great importance that I attribute to this topic. It is a recurrent theme of my philosophical reflection, to which I also dedicated some specific works (see, for example, Parrini 2012b).

History itself shows that the development of scientific thought and the development of philosophical thought strongly influenced each other. Science in its historical course both influenced and modified some classic themes of philosophical research (for example, the problem of a priori knowledge) to the point that sometimes it appropriated to itself topics previously considered as exclusively pertaining to philosophy (for example, the nature of space and time, or the relations between body and mind); on the other side, the developments of philosophy sometimes
deeply influenced the birth of highly innovative scientific theories, if not "revolutionary" (think of the influence of Herbart’s ideas on Riemann and the formation of non-Euclidean geometries, or the weight of Hume’s analysis of causality on Einstein in conceiving of the Special Theory of Relativity). Also today many topics are dealt with by an intense and fruitful interchange between philosophy and science (for example, the body/mind question, the relation between scientific theories, the problem of reductionism and others). Therefore I still ascribe a general validity to what Einstein once said regarding a particular branch of philosophy, epistemology:

The reciprocal relationship of epistemology and science is of a noteworthy kind. They are dependent upon each other. Epistemology without contact with science becomes an empty scheme. Science without epistemology is – insofar as it is thinkable at all – primitive and muddled. (Einstein 1949\textsuperscript{1}/1951\textsuperscript{2}: 683f.)

Nevertheless, when we rightly recognize the existence of structural connections between sciences and philosophical researches, we can also understand the rise of even harsh tensions between them. These tensions are felt with particular intensity in a country like Italy that, starting from the effects of the "Galileo case", has not yet developed a strong and widespread epistemological culture (think, for example, of the contrast between the mathematician Federigo Enriques on the one side and the philosophers Croce and Gentile on the other, which ended, unfortunately, with Enriques’s defeat [see Parrini 2004]). Looking especially at the Italian case and simplifying a little, I think that one of the main reasons of "misunderstanding" between the followers of the two disciplines derives from the fact that many scientists judge philosophy without knowing it enough, and, on the other hand many philosophers love pronouncing on a science (mainly perceived as an enemy) of which they possess often a generic image not to say imprecise and sometimes even pathetic.

Moreover, we are not always fully aware that scientists and philosophers, although they can have something or a lot in common, always proceed with their own methodologies and interests which differ greatly. For
a philosopher, what matters the most is the analysis of concepts and the search for «globally comprehensive» perspectives. On the other hand, for a scientist what matters the most is the «growth» of his discipline. So a mathematician has at heart, first and foremost, the development of mathematics, independently of any potential ontological commitment to abstract entities or, perhaps, logical contradictions that may derive from excessive Platonism (at least to the extent that such contradictions do not hinder his work in the field). If we then take a follower of this or that empirical science, what matters most for him are the experiential data, logically and mathematically founded proofs, and the careful screening of circumscribed, or circumscribable, conjectures.

Also on this point Einstein’s words are extremely enlightening. Although underlining the importance of epistemology for science and of science for epistemology, he has also observed that

no sooner has the epistemologist, who is seeking a clear system, fought his way through to such a system, than he is inclined to interpret the thought-content of science in the sense of his system and to reject whatever does not fit into his system. The scientist, however, cannot afford to carry his striving for epistemological systematic that far. He accepts gratefully the epistemological conceptual analysis; but the external conditions, which are set for him by the facts of experience, do not permit him to let himself be too much restricted in the construction of his conceptual world by the adherence to an epistemological system. He therefore must appear to the systematic epistemologist as a type of unscrupulous opportunist: he appears as realist insofar as he seeks to describe a world independent of the acts of perception; as idealist insofar as he looks upon the concepts and theories as the free inventions of the human spirit (not logically derivable from what is empirically given); as positivist insofar as he considers his concepts and theories justified only to the extent to which they furnish a logical representation of relations among sensory experiences. He may even appear as Platonist or Pythagorean insofar as he considers the viewpoint of logical simplicity as an indispensable and effective tool of his research. (Einstein 1949/1951²: 684)

I see a good deal of truth in these few sentences that in some ways anticipate Feyerabend’s methodological anarchism. For this very reason when
we venture into problematic areas of interest to both science and philosophy, we should be very careful not to set off on the wrong foot. For a start, philosophers should beware not to give evaluations of scientific work on the basis of their needs for an exhaustive system. Expressing evaluations of this kind means doing a bad turn to both disciplines. Philosophy, in fact, will constantly be put at risk of resounding scientific refutations; science will find itself judged on the basis of normative requirements that – if taken seriously – cannot but lead to absurd limitations to the directions that science can follow. On the other hand, it is equally important that scientists do not recognize as legitimate only those reflections in epistemology and in philosophy of science that deal with specific problems and can contribute to their scientific solution. Scientists, in other words, should be able to accept the fact that philosophy aims at clarification and reconstruction that are its own purposes. Just think of the problems connected to skeptical instances that, as we saw, are one of the main reasons of being for the philosophy of knowledge, but are certainly of no primary interest for the development of particular sciences.

I would like to add something on the theme of scientific specialism and nowadays also of philosophical specialism. This, though, would make this answer far too lengthy. Therefore I prefer simply to refer the audience to the essay of mine mentioned at the beginning of this answer.
CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES
ACCIDENTE E PLASTICITÀ.
PENSARE FILOSOFICAMENTE L’INVECCHIAMENTO

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Abstract: The rethinking of the concept of plasticity by French philosopher Catherine Malabou requires a revision of the matter of the accident. Thanks to a unique mixture of Philosophy, Neuroscience, and Psychoanalysis and through the study of new forms of contemporary traumatisms, Malabou was able to unveil an original perspective on the accident. Within this paper I will focus on this concept in the attempt of showing how this new characterization of the accident will lead the fundamental philosophical foundations (accident, destruction, metamorphosis) to reconsider the contemporary form of old age.

Key Words: accident, ageing, Malabou, Marion, plasticity.

1. Introduzione

Il pensare filosoficamente l’invecchiamento a cui fa riferimento il sottotitolo dell’articolo non rientra nell’opera di descrizione e spiegazione della vecchiaia che si sta attuando nella medicina, nella psicologia e nelle neuroscienze. Non si tratta infatti di un lavoro di produzione di una conoscenza tesa ad indicare chi è l’anziano oggi, come ritardare i deficit cognitivi, come affrontare o assistere certe forme patologiche della vecchiaia. Non vuole nemmeno essere un tentativo di aggiornare il dizionario dei termini filosofici con nuovi significati dati dalle forme dell’invecchiamento contemporaneo. In altre parole, non intendo delineare una filosofia impegnata nell’affinamento di strumenti concettuali con cui decifrare il mistero, l’enigma della vecchiaia. Piuttosto ciò che tenterò è l’aprire la possibilità per uno sguardo che di fronte al fenomeno dell’invecchiamento permetta il riconoscimento non tanto della vecchiaia o del vecchio in quanto tali ma di ciò che si rende manifesto in queste particolari forme esistenziali del fantastico.¹

¹ La concezione del fantastico a cui faccio riferimento richiede sicuramente una trattazione specifica che il presente articolo, dedicato al rapporto tra accidente e plasticità, non permette. Mi limito pertanto ad indicare che con questo termine non intendo il totalmente altro dell’immaginario comune (draghi, folletti, orchi) ma quel qualcosa di estraneo nel medesimo e che per questo permette al medesimo di cambiare, di divenire altro da sé. Mi riferisco in particolare alla definizione di fantastico proposta da Caillouës (2004) e Malabou (2004).
Ritengo che un primo passo per attuare questa apertura può essere effettuato grazie al lavoro compiuto da Catherine Malabou sul concetto di plasticità, il suo legame con l’accidente e quelle che la filosofa chiama le nuove forme di traumatismo contemporaneo.

Con il presente articolo intendo presentare tale concezione nella convinzione che la riflessione della filosofa francese sia in grado di porre i concetti fondamentali con cui poter pensare filosoficamente l’invecchiamento contemporaneo. Nella prima parte mi soffermerò sulla trattazione dell’accidente in Aristotele e sull’interpretazione di questa secondo la prospettiva fenomenologica di Jean-Luc Marion. La seconda parte intende introdurre parte del pensiero di Catherine Malabou approfondendo la sua concezione di accidente e l’originale proposta di una plasticità distruttrice. Nella conclusione cercherò di delineare la posta in gioco nella questione contemporanea dell’invecchiamento.

2. L’imprevedibile accadere del fenomeno

Accidente deriva dal latino *accidènte*, participio passato di *accĭdere* «cadere addosso» e indica comunemente un evento fortuito e inaspettato che per lo più ha esiti infausti e negativi. Infatti sono considerati generalmente accidenti, malattie, morti improvvisse e gravi incidenti, cioè, tutti quegli accadimenti che impongono, dall’esterno, a chi o a cosa li subisce un imprevedibile, immotivato, cambiamento radicale.

L’origine di questa concezione può essere individuata nella trattazione dell’accidentale svolta da Aristotele nel libro V, capitolo 30, della *Metafisica* (si veda 2000: 263-265). In questo scritto l’accidente viene definito secondo due significati fondamentali. La prima accezione è quella di un attributo non necessario della sostanza che si determina in un dato tempo e luogo senza una causa determinata e che viene prodotto non dalla sostanza stessa ma da altro, da qualcosa di esterno. Il secondo significato invece fa riferimento agli accidenti

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2 Concetto cardine della metafisica aristotelica con cui si intende l’essenza immutabile ed eterna che costituisce la struttura necessaria dell’essere.

3 Aristotele ne propone tre figure: lo scavare una fossa per piantare un albero e trovare un tesoro; questo è un fatto casuale, infatti non segue sempre necessariamente che dallo scavare una buca venga trovato un tesoro. La seconda figura si riferisce al fatto che un musicista può essere bianco ma questo non è sempre vero; questa figura mostra come l’accidente emerga dall’assenza di un legame sostanziale (eterno e immutabile) fra l’attributo di musicista e bianco. La terza figura, il giungere ad Egina, senza essere partiti con l’intento di giungere in tal luogo ma perché obbligati dalla tempesta o dai pirati; questo caso mostra la provenienza esterna dell’accidente, infatti l’intenzione originaria del viaggiatore muta a causa di una forza estranea a essa. Aristotele nega la possibilità che ci possa essere scienza di questi accidenti per la loro determinazione nel tempo e nello spazio (non sono eterni) e per l’impossibilità di individuare un nesso causale fra essi e la sostanza.
che sono attributi della sostanza di per sé ma non rientrano nella sostanza stessa.\footnote{Aristotele propone l’esempio della proprietà di un triangolo di avere la somma degli angoli uguali a due retti. Questo accadente non appartiene casualmente al triangolo ma è un attributo determinato dall’essenza stessa della forma geometrica. Tali accidenti, appartenendo alla sostanza, sono eterni e proprio per questo secondo Aristotele possono appartenere alla scienza.}

Un’importante interpretazione dell’accidente aristotelico si trova nel libro III dell’opera di Jean-Luc Marion Dato che, Saggio per una fenomenologia della donazione (si veda Marion 2001: 146-219). In questo libro dal titolo Il dato: Determinazioni, Marion procede con l’individuazione delle determinazioni del fenomeno che permettono di considerare la fenomenalità in termini di donazione. La difficoltà di questa operazione sta nel tentativo di non cadere nell’inevitabile rimando a una trascendenza del dono e di individuare fenomenologicamente il carattere di donazione come intrinseco modo di darsi del fenomeno.

Le determinazioni proposte sono cinque. L’anamorfosi che indica il modo attraverso cui il fenomeno si rende visibile; come certe figure nei dipinti, esso sorge da una forma invisibile che può essere colta solamente da una precisa linea prospettica. L’irruzione come modo di darsi imprevisto del fenomeno secondo una contingenza fenomenologica necessaria. Il fatto compiuto che indica come il fenomeno si doni già finito al soggetto che lo riceve, in altre parole, esso non può essere altro da ciò che è. L’incidente definisce il momento della manifestazione che, come un’esposizione improvvisa, appare alla coscienza. Infine l’evento che determina il donarsi del fenomeno come forma compiuta che irrompe improvvisamente senza causa, come assoluta novità.

Di particolare interesse per la presente trattazione è il paragrafo 16 dedicato all’incidente (Marion 2001: 185-196). Questa determinazione si pone in stretta relazione con l’accidente aristotelico e, come verrà ipotizzato, con la concezione di Catherine Malabou.

Come già accennato, il processo attraverso cui il fenomeno giunge alla visibilità si compie come un’irruzione, un’esplosione sullo schermo della coscienza che lo riceve. Proprio questo modo di donarsi del fenomeno può essere pensato come un incidente, cioè un evento che sopraggiunge senza che qualcosa possa preannunciarlo. Si tratta di «un sorgere senza genealogia» (Marion 2001: 185) che però non per questo scade a mera illusione o falsità. Come fa notare Marion, già in Aristotele «[l’]accidente significa ciò che appartiene ad una cosa e che può essere affermato con verità della cosa» (Aristotele 2000: 263). Infatti, se l’accidente inerisce alla sostanza, manifestandosi, ne svela qualcosa, ma per Aristotele ciò non è sufficiente: l’indeterminatezza dell’accidente, l’impossibilità che si possa dare scienza di esso per la mancanza di causa che lo rendano prevedibile, lo fa scadere a mero fenomeno. Proprio su questo punto «si vede chiaramente ciò che distingue
metafisica e fenomenologia: la prima svaluta la fenomenalità […] perché essa si libera della causa, operaia dell’intelligibilità oggettivante […] di contro, la seconda accetta ogni fenomenalità, purché solamente essa appaia, anche senza ragione né oggettualità» (Marion 2001: 187).

Nonostante queste importanti differenze le figure formulate da Aristotele come esempi d’accidente descrivono perfettamente, secondo Marion, i caratteri dell’incidente.5

La prima figura, trovare un tesoro scavando nel proprio giardino, descrive l’accadere puramente fortuito dell’accidente. A differenza di Aristotele che utilizza questo esempio per dimostrare la mancanza di causa, Marion lo interpreta, in senso fenomenologico, come dimostrazione dell’eccesso di fenomenalità dell’incidente. La seconda figura, come arrivare a Egina, presi dai pirati o dalla tempesta, mentre si voleva raggiungere il Pireo, mostra come una causa reale e sufficiente abbia causato uno scarto nell’intenzione del soggetto. Marion prende in considerazione la possibilità che il viaggiatore avesse avuto l’intenzione di andare a Egina, in questo caso l’intenzione non viene a mancare ma subisce uno svilamento che la separa da se stessa, diviene altra da sé. Solo in questo caso si può intendere l’incidente come co-incidenza.

La terza figura, la proprietà del triangolo di avere la somma degli angoli uguale a due retti, è legata al secondo significato di accidente e, secondo Marion (2001: 190), lo pone in luce in quanto tale. La proprietà e il triangolo rimangono in una relazione di appartenenza per sé e con una dimostrazione è possibile dedurre tale proprietà sempre e necessariamente dalla figura di qualunque triangolo. Questa caratterizzazione può apparire contraddittoria. Come è possibile che un attributo vero di per sé, matematicamente dedotto, valido eternamente possa essere considerato come un accidente? Marion dichiara che «una sola risposta è possibile: l’incidente non si definisce innanzitutto, anzi, del tutto, attraverso certi tratti già annessi, ma attraverso un altro carattere, che li rende a volte possibili, ma li precede e a volte ne dispensa» (Marion 2001: 190). Questo carattere fondamentale è la distinzione tra accidente e sostanza. La conseguenza fenomenologica di questa separazione è che l’accidente può essere considerato non come qualcosa che si aggiunge alla sostanza ma come qualcosa in cui la sostanza può venire a coincidere quando esso si rende visibile. L’accidente sta al di là della sostanza, esso si manifesta da se stesso irrompendo improvvisamente dall’esterno. La massima formulazione di tale caratterizzazione si ha, secondo Marion, nel carattere di adveniens extra individuato in Tommaso d’Aquino:6 «Infatti tutto ciò che non è “proprio” del

5 Marion non tratta la figura del musico bianco.
6 Nella dottrina tomista si attua una radicale distinzione tra l’essere di Dio e quello delle cose create. Ciò si fonda sull’idea che nelle cose finite, essenza ed esistenza siano separate e che esse possano esistere solamente perché ciò giunge loro dall’esterno, in altre parole l’essere delle cose proviene accidentalmente dall’essere necessario, immutabile ed eterno di Dio
Isettà / Accidente e plasticità. Pensare filosoficamente l’invecchiamento

coritto dell’essenza o della quiddità, è proveniente dal di fuori e si compone con l’essenza […]» (d’Aquino 1989: 39). Si pone così la possibilità di pensare l’accidente senza sostanza, come non-essenza. La conclusione paradossale a cui giunge Marion è che, quando l’accidente accade come incidente irrompendo come attributo di un ente finito, è l’essere stesso che agisce secondo le caratteristiche dell’incidente. Da ciò si può dedurre che

appena si impone la sua figura all’essere stesso (anch’esso adveniens), l’incidente diventa la norma ultima di tutto il dominio di cui non avrebbe dovuto occupare che i margini; l’essere deve oramai pensarsi a partire dalla determinazione dell’incidente, lungi dal pensare che l’incidente si svaluti onticamente in accidente marginale. L’eccezione si fa legge […]. (Marion 2001: 193)

Con Marion l’accidente acquisisce un primato fenomenologico sulla sostanza.

L’attenzione dedicata a questa concezione è motivata dal legame, non del tutto esplicito, tra l’incidente di Marion e l’accidente di Malabou. Questo appare fondato in particolare facendo riferimento a quanto la filosofa francese scrive all’inizio della sua opera Ontologie de l’accident (Malabou 2009). Come si vedrà nel paragrafo successivo, Malabou individua i modi di manifestarsi dell’accidente nelle forme di quelli che la filosofa chiama traumatismi contemporanei (traumatizzati di guerra, malati d’Alzheimer ecc.). Per la filosofa francese «[q]uesti modi d’essere senza genealogia non hanno nulla a che vedere con il tutt’altro delle etiche mistiche del XX sec. Il Tutt’Altro di cui parlo rimane sempre estraneo all’Altro» (Malabou 2009: 10, trad. mia). A differenza del carattere adveniens extra avanzato da Marion, per Malabou il totalmente altro dimora già nel soggetto, in altre parole l’accidente non proviene dall’esterno ma è parte integrante del processo di formazione del soggetto stesso. D’altra parte l’accidente di Malabou appare in linea con le caratteristiche delle determinazioni avanzate da Marion, come dimostra questo riferimento alla fenomenologia:

Fenomenologia, per l’appunto. Qualche cosa si mostra all’occasione del danno, della frattura, qualche cosa a cui la plasticità normale, creatrice, non dà accesso né corpo: la diserzione della soggettività, l’allontanamento dell’individuo che si trasforma in un estraneo, non riconosce più nessuno, non riconosce più se stesso, non ricorda più. Tali modi d’essere impongono così la loro nuova forma sulla vecchia, senza mediazione né transizione né colla né compatibilità, oggi contro ieri, a freddo, a crudo. (Malabou 2009: 13, trad. mia)
3. **Catherine Malabou e la plasticità distruttrice**

Catherine Malabou è una filosofa francese che attualmente insegna presso il dipartimento di filosofia dell’università di Kingston in Inghilterra. Al centro della sua filosofia c’è il concetto di plasticità. Questo è un termine che nasce all’interno del dominio dell’estetica e con il quale si intende la capacità di un oggetto di *ricevere forma* e di *donare forma*. Si pensi per esempio all'attività dello scultore e alle caratteristiche del marmo modellato. A esso la filosofa si dedica fin dalla dissertazione di dottorato elaborata sotto la supervisione di Jacques Derrida e Jean-Luc Marion presso *L’École des hautes études en sciences sociales*.

Secondo Catherine Malabou siamo in un’epoca in cui si moltiplicano i sintomi di un mutamento delle categorie concettuali che permettevano la comprensione e il modellamento del mondo e dell’uomo ed è da questa metamorfosi dei fondamenti che si eleva la richiesta della plasticità d’essere riconosciuta come la nuova forma in grado di sostenere il cambiamento in atto.

Tuttavia, uno sguardo più attento, un orecchio più fine scoprono senza sforzo, in un numero crescente di discorsi, la presenza *pressante* della plasticità che, ben lontana dall’avere detto tutto, chiede insistentemente la parola. In filosofia, nell’arte (alcuni artisti oggi rivendicano esplicitamente lo statuto di “plastici”), in genetica, in neurobiologia, in etnologia o in psicoanalisi, la plasticità appare come uno schema operatore dall’importanza sempre più pregnante. (Malabou 2000: 7, trad. mia)

7 Mi permetto di cogliere quest’immagine e di allontanarmi brevemente dal tema dell’articolo per introdurre l’importante differenza tra plasticità e elasticità a cui fa riferimento Malabou nelle sue opere. Ciò mi darà la possibilità di accennare al carattere etico e politico del pensiero della filosofa francese. Il colpo di scalpello dello scultore è definitivo, non è possibile riportare il blocco di marmo alla forma precedente, mentre se deformiamo un elastico, rilasciandolo, tornerà alla forma originaria. La portata filosofica, e non solo, di questa differenza appare chiaramente in questa considerazione della filosofa francese: “cosa fare affinché la coscienza del cervello non coincida unicamente e semplicemente con lo spirito del capitalismo? Formuliamo la seguente tesi: attualmente la plasticità non svela pienamente il suo significato più profondo e si tende a sostituirla costantemente con il termine in apparenza più vicino al suo significato: flessibilità. La differenza tra i due termini sembrerebbe insignificante. Perciò la *flessibilità è la metamorfosi ideologica della plasticità*. Al tempo stesso la sua maschera, la sua deviazione e la sua confisca” Il richiamo alla flessibilità lavorativa, alla capacità di adattamento, a cui l’individuo contemporaneo è portato a confrontarsi costantemente è evidente. «Il problema è che questi significati riprendono soltanto una delle accezioni della plasticità: quella riguardante la ricezione di forma. Essere flessibile, ricevere una forma o imprimerla, essere in grado di piegarsi, *prendere una piega, non darla*. Essere docile, non irruento. In effetti alla flessibilità manca il significato di dare una forma, la capacità di creare, di inventare o di cancellare una impronta, l’abilità di fornire uno stile. La flessibilità è la plasticità meno il suo genio. Gli uomini fanno il loro cervello e non sanno di farlo. Il nostro cervello è un’opera e non lo sappiamo. La causa di ciò è che per la maggior parte del tempo la flessibilità si sovraimpone alla plasticità» (Malabou 2007b: 21).

L'elaborazione di tale concetto si sviluppa attraverso la prospettiva del materialismo dialettico di matrice marxista. Marx criticò la dialettica hegeliana accusandola d’essere coscienza e di rimanere interna a se stessa senza attingere alla realtà, all’oggetto, alla natura. Da questa posizione critica si impose l’esigenza di spostare la dialettica dall’astrazione alla realtà, dal mondo della coscienza al mondo aperto della natura e della storia e sarà con Friedrich Engels (1971) che tale concezione verrà sviluppata all’interno delle scienze naturali.

Engels riconosce nei fenomeni naturali un carattere dialettico espressione di un continuo processo di trasformazione che non può essere rinchiuso in gabbie concettuali imposte dal pensiero teorico. Ne emerge una concezione della dialettica come sintesi delle opposizioni, sempre relative e parziali, realizzate nel divenire della natura stessa. Lo sguardo dello scienziato e del filosofo viene privato del potere di comprendere in modo assoluto la natura e, nella loro parzialità, diviene necessario all’interno del processo conoscitivo stesso un movimento dialettico. Da un lato lo studio della natura e l’evoluzione delle tecniche che ne permettono l’analisi e dall’altro la conseguente trasformazione dei concetti a essa legati. Ma perché Malabou ritiene che ci sia ora la necessità di tornare a dibattere su questo tipo di materialismo?

È proprio la plasticità che ci invita a fare questo. È molto inquietante che a questo termine sia ormai stato conferito un doppio statuto: da un parte quello d’una entità metafisica – vecchia quanto la storia della filosofia e rappresentante, dopo Hegel, una qualità essenziale del pensiero –, dall’altra parte quella d’un concetto scientifico che permette di descrivere l’organizzazione materiale del pensiero. Mi riferisco qui ovviamente al significato tecnico che la plasticità ha acquisito nel campo delle neuroscienze. Quella che è chiamata oggi “plasticità del cervello”, è lontana dall’essere una semplice metafora e permette di caratterizzare, in un senso molto preciso, il funzionamento neuronale. (Malabou 2000: 11, trad. mia)

Ma che cosa si intende con «plasticità del cervello»? Dopo la fine del XIX secolo si è scoperto che i neuroni non sono in continuità fra loro e che la comunicazione fra essi avviene attraverso una fessura, chiamata sinapsi, che li separa. La plasticità neuronale indica proprio la capacità che hanno le sinapsi di modulare l’efficacia della loro trasmissione. Questa scoperta ha comportato un radicale ripensamento della concezione del cervello: da organo solido,
immutabile, gerarchicamente organizzato si è passati all’idea di un cervello che muta nel tempo, auto organizzato in comunità di neuroni connessi tra loro come una rete, influenzato dall’esperienza, dall’apprendimento, da eventi accidentali a cui è sottoposto (si vedano Magistretti e Ansermet 2008; Malabou 2007b).

Quest’ultima possibilità permette di introdurre forse l’aspetto più originale della caratterizzazione della plasticità proposta da Malabou. Al significato tradizionale di plasticità, che possiamo identificare con il sorgere della forma (il donare e il ricevere), la filosofa francese aggiunge il suo opposto: l’annientamento di tutte le forme, caratteristica quest’ultima dell’esplosivo denominato plastico. Dallo sviluppo di questo secondo significato deriva quella che Catherine Malabou chiama plasticità distruttrice.

Nelle scienze, in medicina, nell’arte, nell’ambito della formazione, l’uso che si fa del termine “plasticità” è sempre positivo. Questo termine rappresenta un equilibrio tra il ricevere e il donare forma. La plasticità è concepita come una sorta di lavoro sculturale naturale che forma la nostra identità, che a sua volta si modella con l’esperienza e fa di noi il soggetto d’una storia, d’una storia specifica, riconoscibile, identificabile, con i suoi eventi, i suoi spazi vuoti, il suo futuro. Non verrebbe in mente a nessuno, per esempio, di intendere nella formula “plasticità cerebrale” il lavoro del negativo della distruzione (quella distruzione che opera in caso di lesioni cerebrali e di traumi vari). La deformazione delle connessioni neuronalì o l’interruzione dei collegamenti cerebrali non sono considerate come casi di plasticità in neurologia. (Malabou 2009: 10-11, trad. mia)

Nel lavoro teorico compiuto da Malabou l’attenzione a queste “distruzioni” è tutt’altro che marginale e permette di attuare il riconoscimento di quelle forme che, nella concezione tradizionale, vengono identificate come deformazione, scarto, degenerazione della norma del formare plastico. Queste forme sono quelle che Catherine Malabou chiama «i nuovi feriti», ovvero, tutte quelle forme di traumatismo emerse nell’ultimo secolo che possono essere esemplificate con la malattia di Alzheimer.

La filosofa francese ne parla direttamente nel suo libro Les nouveaux blessés, de Freud à la neurologie, penser les traumatismes contemporains (Malabou 2007a). In quest’opera viene evidenziato come la teoria psicoanalitica non sia in grado di affrontare in modo adeguato i nuovi tipi di traumatismo, c’è qualcosa di nuovo in essi che rende necessario un ripensamento.

La malattia di Alzheimer, come tante altre patologie, non è solamente una malattia neurodegenerativa ma un vero e proprio attentato della psiche, poiché colpisce l’identità del soggetto e sconvolge la sua economia affettiva. È possibile che queste malattie abbiano portato finalmente allo scoperto un tipo di lesione che la psicoanalisi non ha mai preso in considerazione? È possibile che si manifestino, a posteriori, ulteriori nuove sofferenze? È
possibile che la psicopatologia si trovi alla presenza di nuovi feriti? (Malabou 2007a: 12, trad. mia)

Riassumendo si può affermare che l’operazione intrapresa da Malabou permette di interpretare filosoficamente i concetti fondamentali (accidente, distruzione, metamorfosi) emersi da queste nuove forme mantenendo stretti rapporti con i saperi prodotti dalle scienze. La conseguenza di una tale prospettiva è il far entrare con pari diritto nella concezione della plasticità il ricevere, il donare e la distruzione, comportando così il riconoscimento di tutto ciò che trova nel lavoro del negativo il suo principio.

3.1 L’ontologia dell’accidente

È possibile dire “no”? Un “no” secco che non si possa riconvertire in “sì”? Queste domande determinano la necessità di un’ontologia dell’accidente. (Malabou 2009: 71, trad. mia)

Si può aver già intuito come l’accidente sia profondamente legato alla plasticità distruttrice. A riguardo nel 2009 Malabou ha pubblicato l’opera L’ontologie de l’accident, Essai sur la plasticité destructrice. Coerente con il suo percorso, in quest’opera la riflessione filosofica di Malabou viene sviluppata attraverso il continuo confronto con i saperi psicoanalitici, neuroscientifici e letterari. Infatti vengono considerate figure pe[r eccellenza dell’accidente il trauma, le neurodegenerazioni, le «forme letterarie della neuropatologia» (Malabou 2007a: 102, trad. mia), la morte e la vecchiaia.

Nelle opere precedenti (Malabou 1994; 2004) il lavoro teorico della filosofa le ha permesso di esplicitare i fondamenti ontologici di un movimento plastico, in costante mutazione, ma che allo stesso tempo permette di essere riconosciuto in qualcosa (un’identità, una forma, una stabilità) e caratterizzato, inoltre, dalla possibilità di una radicale metamorfosi distruttiva, formatrice di una novità totalmente altra.

L’intenzione a fondamento di tale operazione è quello di superare il significato tradizionale di cambiamento. Come scrive Malabou,

è necessario sottolineare che, nell’immaginario occidentale, la metamorfosi è raramente presentata come una reale e totale deviazione dell’essere […] Più precisamente, è solo la forma esteriore dell’essere che cambia, mai la sua natura. L’essere rimane quello che è all’interno del suo cambiamento. Il presupposto sostanzialista è il compagno di viaggio della metamorfosi occidentale. La forma si trasforma, la sostanza rimane. (Malabou 2009: 15, trad. mia)

Si può comprendere ora l’importanza dell’accidente in questa prospettiva. Non più marginale, esso diviene parte integrante nel processo di metamorfosi fondato
sulla plasticità distruttrice che «rende possibile l’apparizione o la formazione dell’alterità laddove l’altro manca del tutto» con la conseguenza che «il solo altro che esiste è l’essere altro rispetto a se stesso» (Malabou 2009: 18, trad. mia). Da qui l’interesse di Malabou verso quelle forme contemporanee che rendono manifesta una soggettività plastica in cui l’accidente è già nel soggetto e si manifesta proprio nella possibilità che esso ha di diventare totalmente altro da se stesso. Esse dimostrano come non è più possibile limitare l’idea di esistenza a un progressivo mutamento che ha lo scopo di formare e mantenere un’identità che permetta a ogni singolo uomo di riconoscersi e d’essere riconosciuto. Questa concezione lascia nell’ombra il potere distruttivo della plasticità che, come dimostrato dai traumatismi contemporanei, ci pone di fronte a individui che non sono più ciò che erano, «un essere nuovo viene al mondo una seconda volta, nato da un taglio profondo che si è aperto nella sua biografia» (Malabou 2009: 10, trad. mia).

Tradizionalmente i traumi subiti dal soggetto vengono considerati esterni al soggetto stesso, causati da situazioni accidentali che minano l’esistenza dell’individuo in modo totalmente imprevedibile, ma quanto emerso dalla plasticità distruttrice va in tutt’altra direzione: come già accennato la distruzione è parte integrante del processo di formazione cerebrale. Proprio questa radicale differenza con la tradizione impone alla filosofa francese di intraprendere l’impresa di pensare l’ontologia dell’accidente. Un lavoro certamente difficile che impone la necessità di andare oltre una logica fondata sulla possibilità di anticipare ciò che sarà, ovvero, sulla costruzione di una legge stabile e prevedibile. L’identità stessa viene rivista: non più punto d’equilibrio di un io permanente, ma entità mutevole, trasformabile anche in un’alterità nuova. Questa radicale metamorfosi del corpo e degli affetti appare come la possibilità della morte prima della morte.

Il corpo può morire senza realmente essere morto. Si può verificare una mutazione distruttrice che non è la trasformazione del corpo in cadavere, ma la trasformazione del corpo in un altro corpo nello stesso corpo, a causa di un incidente, di una lesione, di un danno o una catastrofe. (Malabou 2009: 36, trad. mia)

C’è un momento esistenziale che si avvicina molto a queste considerazioni: la vecchiaia. Le problematiche che sorgono in questo periodo della vita sono tendenzialmente ricondotte a una perdita di plasticità, ma, critica Malabou (2009), raramente viene presa in considerazione la possibilità che un’altra plasticità prenda il posto di quella avuta fino a quel momento. Si tratta del difficile rapporto tra malattia e invecchiamento, vecchiaia e follia. Da un lato si situa una concezione della vecchiaia come lento declino fino alla morte, dall’altro l’idea di un cambiamento radicale, un evento che rompe lo schema
abituale (si veda Malabou 2006).\textsuperscript{8} Ecco l’emergere dell’accidente come potenziale ontologico formatore di una nuova identità, una nuova esistenza.

Questo modo è ulteriormente dimostrato dalla difficoltà di diagnosi nelle forme neurodegenerative dell’invecchiamento. La molteplicità variabile di sintomi, l’oscillazione quotidiana degli stati emotivi e delle capacità cognitive rende l’anziano di difficile assoggettamento a forme standard (statistiche) di classificazione e trattamento medico. Ed è proprio per questo che la vecchiaia si pone come una delle forme più caratteristiche del potenziale del negativo. Essa è la dimostrazione che è possibile una negazione assoluta, a differenza di Hegel che ritiene che il negativo si superi nel movimento dialettico in un’ulteriore affermazione o come una certa interpretazione della negazione freudiana che negando la negazione la trasforma in affermazione (si veda Freud 1979).

La plasticità distruttrice comporta qualcos’altro, è una forma negativa che dispiega la sua opera a partire dall’esaurimento delle possibilità, mentre tutta la sua virtualità se ne è andata da molto tempo, mentre il bambino, nell’adulto, è cancellato, mentre la coesione è distrutta, lo spirito di famiglia svanito, l’amicizia perduta, i legami scomparsi, nella freddezza sempre più intensa di una vita desertica. (Malabou 2009: 83, trad. mia)

4. **Conclusione**

Dati demografici ed epidemiologici mostrano come l’invecchiamento della popolazione e le patologie legate a esso si impongono come una delle problematiche più urgenti nel mondo occidentale contemporaneo. La peculiarità di questa situazione non si limita solamente, come fa notare Giuseppe A. Micheli, in un allungamento della prospettiva di vita che posticipa l’ingresso nella terza età «perché una soglia di entrata nella vecchiaia continua ad esserci, come continua a sussistere una condizione biologica ed esistenziale della vecchiaia. Sono appunto i meccanismi di accelerazione del decadimento e della discronia tra età biologica, funzionale e sociale, i processi di deriva della popolazione anziana del nuovo secolo» (Micheli 2004: 14). Infatti il progressivo

\textsuperscript{8} Alcune considerazioni di Simone De Beauvoir tratte dall’opera *La terza età* (2002) possono essere d’aiuto per comprendere queste due concezioni: «La vecchiaia è un destino, e quando s’impadronisce della nostra vita ci lascia stupefatti. “Che è successo? La vita, e sono vecchio” scrive Aragon. Che il passare del tempo universale abbia portato ad una metamorfosi personale è una cosa che ci sconcerta» e poco più sotto sulla differenza tra malattia e vecchiaia «(la malattia) ci avverte della sua presenza […] la malattia esiste con più evidenza per il soggetto che la subisce che non per coloro che lo circondano, che spesso ne misconoscono l’importanza; la vecchiaia appare agli altri più chiaramente che non al soggetto stesso; è un nuovo stato di equilibrio biologico; se l’adattamento si opera senza urti, l’individuo invecchiando non se ne accorge. Gli artifici, le abitudini, permettono di attenutare per molto tempo le deficienze psicomotorie. Anche se il corpo ce ne dà dei segni, sono segni ambigui» (De Beauvoir 2002: 263-264).
aumento dell’aspettativa di vita ha permesso la manifestazione di nuove forme, nuovi linguaggi e dinamiche della soggettività. Tuttavia la produzione di conoscenza che riguarda l’invecchiamento rimane sostanzialmente prerogativa della ricerca medica, psicologica e neuroscientifica. Per questo motivo ritengo che la filosofia dovrebbe iniziare a rivolgere il proprio sguardo critico verso questa forma esistenziale, non solo per l’urgenza impostata ma anche per le importanti implicazioni teoretiche sollevate da essa.

Il lavoro sull’accidente avanzato da Malabou si pone proprio in questa direzione, permettendo di riconoscere la formatività propria del lavoro del negativo. Forma di difficile comprensione quando si manifesta in chi si trova di fronte una persona che non è più colui che un tempo era marito o moglie, madre o padre. Una catastrofe che tocca irrimediabilmente l’abitudine affettiva e quotidiana che giorno dopo giorno sgretola ogni certezza e fa sorgere solamente inquietudine e sofferenza. Sembra che non sia più la morte a far paura, ormai è lo spettro della brutta vecchiaia che si trascina da una stanza all’altra della casa a incombere sulle coscienze dei figli. L’esigenza di darle un nome, di classificarla e di prevederla per renderla quantomeno accettabile si rende una necessità. Ed ecco che i sistemi valutativi e le classificazioni della psicologia, della geriatria diventano l’unica via con cui poter comprendere quel vecchio famigliare che non ci/si riconosce più. Un mutamento che trova la sua origine già nel corso dell’Ottocento come fa notare Simone de Beauvoir in un passaggio della sua opera dedicata alla vecchiaia.

Nell’Ottocento l’Europa si trasforma: i cambiamenti che vi si verificano hanno una considerevole influenza sulla condizione dei vecchi e sull’idea che la società si fa della vecchiaia. Il primo fatto da notare è che in tutti i paesi si produce una straordinaria spinta demografica; la popolazione europea che nel 1800 contava 187 milioni di persone, passa a 266 milioni nel 1850, e a 300 milioni nel 1870. Ne risulta che, almeno, in certe classi sociali, il numero dei vecchi aumenta. Quest’aumento, legato ai progressi della scienza, fa sì che i miti concernenti la vecchiaia vengano sostituiti da vera conoscenza, il che permette alla medicina di curare e di guarire persone anziane. (De Beauvoir 2002: 182)

Da un lato questa vera conoscenza permette di costruire una struttura sanitaria adeguata alle esigenze mediche del paziente,9 dall’altro porta il rischio che i famigliari, nella difficoltà di comprendere e cercando certezze, arrivino a

9 Come sottolineato nell’introduzione a I grandi vecchi: «Il tempo che viviamo è caratterizzato dalle malattie cronico-degenerative: si parla di transizione epidemiologica che necessita altresì cambiamenti nell’organizzazione delle cure soprattutto extraospedaliere e nei loro obiettivi, così come l’integrazione delle conoscenze gerontologiche e geriatriche nelle tante discipline che si occupano dell’assistenza alle persone più vecchie, per far sì che le prestazioni siano adeguate ai bisogni» (Senin, Bartorelli e Salvioli 2013: 23).
guardare il parente che hanno di fronte attraverso le sole griglie della scienza. Caduto il mito del vecchio saggio non ne è rimasto che il corpo indecifrabile a cui appendere diagnosi e sentenze.

Evidentemente ciò non può essere sufficiente. Come afferma con forza e a più riprese in tutta la sua opera Simone de Beauvoir, «la vecchiaia non può essere compresa se non nella sua totalità; non è soltanto un fatto biologico, ma un fatto culturale» (De Beauvoir 2002: 21). Limitare le considerazioni sull’anziano a quello medico, psicologico e neuroscientifico significa rimanere in una sostanziale cecità nei confronti della forza formatrice dell’accidente che non agisce solamente sulle esistenze dei singoli ma sulla totalità del sistema in cui siamo inseriti. Questo legame lo aveva già notato Michel Foucault che nel corso dedicato alla nascita della biopolitica accosta accidente e vecchiaia.

Bisogna che gli accidenti individuali – tutto ciò che nel corso della vita può capitare a chiunque, come ad esempio la malattia, o quella condizione che accade in ogni caso, qual è la vecchiaia – non costituiscano un pericolo, né per gli individui né per la società. In breve, a tutti questi imperativi, che consistono nel vigilare affinché la meccanica degli interessi non sia fonte di pericoli, né per gli individui né per la collettività, devono corrispondere delle strategie di sicurezza che sono, in certo qual modo, il rovescio e la condizione stessa del liberalismo. (Foucault 2007: 67)

La consapevolezza che anche noi saremo quel vecchio che abbiamo di fronte incute timore e richiede una certa sicurezza, che apre ad un nuovo mercato, pensiamo per esempio al sistema assistenziale (case di riposo, badanti ecc.) e a quello della ricerca farmacologica.

Emerge così una complessità che non si risolve in una univoca prospettiva o nella formazione di discorsi multidisciplinari. Il faticoso compito di tessere una rete tra i diversi campi in gioco (medicina, neuroscienze, economia, politica, sanità ecc.) con lo scopo di dare voce alla vecchiaia senza ridurla a uno statico oggetto da assoggettare è compito della filosofia e credo che la possibilità aperta da Malabou di poter riconoscere e dare un fondamento a queste nuove forme dell’accidente permette di muovere un primo passo verso questa direzione.

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