

## **GOOD POINTS, PAOLO CASALEGNO'S CRITICISM OF SOME ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHERS**

[Milano 11-12 April 2011]

**Diana Mazzarella and Carlo Monti**

On the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, a conference in memory and in honor of Paolo Casalegno (1952-2009) took place at the University of Milan. Paolo Casalegno was one of the wittiest Italian analytic philosophers and he primarily worked within the areas of philosophy of language and epistemology. His theoretical reflection played an important role in international debates about central philosophical topics, such as truth, meaning and knowledge. It is sufficient to take a look at the invited speakers to gain an insight into Casalegno's wide and deep philosophical contributions. The speakers' list deserves a great interest, including philosophers such as Diego Marconi, Paul Boghossian, Timothy Williamson, Alex Orenstein, Igor Douven and Crispin Wright (the latter wasn't actually present because of health problems). They were all object of Casalegno's criticism and the conference represented an opportunity to reconstruct and discuss the debates within which they have been playing a leading role. Professor Elisa Paganini, a member of the organization committee, introduced the conference, underlying at best its aims and its spirit: "When we decided to organize the conference, we regretted that he could not be here, that he could not reply to the objections which will be raised, but we thought that the best way to remember a philosopher is to discuss his ideas and it is with these ideas that we organized this conference.". Of course, we agree with Elisa Paganini's words, thinking that the critical discussion of his thesis would have been appreciated by Casalegno himself as the greatest acknowledgment of his philosophical work. Anyway, let us add some personal considerations. Paolo Casalegno was not only a good analytic philosopher, but also an extraordinary professor, who entered teaching with as much passion as he devoted himself to research. Having been lucky enough to be his students, we had the opportunity to know him as a professor and to learn from him. For this reason, we would like to remember him also for his human approach towards students, an approach that was so equal that made him able to say (addressing to undergraduates): "Let's swap our functions! Go to the blackboard and please explain me what you have studied and I do not know."

### **Diego Marconi**

#### **Competence and Normativity**

Marconi's presentation focuses on the debate between Paolo Casalegno and Marconi himself, concerning the two notions of semantic normativity and reference and the way they are

**AUTORI.** Diana Mazzarella: [diana.mazzarella@hotmail.it](mailto:diana.mazzarella@hotmail.it) - Carlo Monti:

[carlomonti83@gmail.com](mailto:carlomonti83@gmail.com) **COPYRIGHT.** © (CC) (BY) (NC) (ND) 2011 Diana Mazzarella and Carlo Monti. Pubblicato in Italia. Alcuni diritti riservati.

related to each other. It has taken place since Marconi (1997) rejected the idea that the phenomenon of semantic deference could have been used as an argument to support an objective notion of reference.

Semantic deference is speakers' disposition to modify their own use of a word *W* according to more competent speakers' use of *W*. Casalegno (2000) suggests that a coherent account of competence requires objective reference as its presupposition. The key question is: what counts for a speaker to be considered more competent than the others? Casalegno answers that a speaker *X* is more competent than a speaker *Y* in the use of the word *W* if and only if *X* is better than *Y* in applying *W* to whatever *W* refers to. This seems to suggest that competence presupposes reference. But why should we be forced to adopt an objective notion of reference? Casalegno considers objective reference to be necessary in order to avoid a dangerous vicious circle.

Let's think about *standard* reference rather than objective reference. Reference is then fixed by communitarian standards. Because of semantic deference, speakers rely on experts to know what the communitarian standards of reference are. However, communitarian standards are circularly fixed by the experts. The reason why Marconi thinks there is no circularity is that the individual expert is indeed just an interpreter of the communitarian standards whereas the experts collectively determine what the standards are.

The second part of the presentation discusses the alleged incompatibility between objective reference and semantic normativity, i.e. the idea that the application of words is governed by criteria known to, the experts. Marconi (1997) emphasizes the fact that norms must be applicable or, in other terms, there has to be someone who is in a position to say whether they are respected or not. However, if we accept an objective notion of reference, we can't rule out either a possible situation in which nobody knows whether a certain norm applies or a possible situation in which the experts are wrong about its conditions of applicability. The conclusion he draws is that semantic normativity and objective reference can't be kept together.

Casalegno's reply tries to invalidate this result suggesting that it is not required that the condition of application "can finally and beyond any doubt be determined to hold": a norm is applicable if a subject may reasonably believe that the application condition holds. The main point outlined by Marconi is connected with the adverb "reasonably". Is it reasonable for pre-chemistry Earthians to believe that stuff sharing certain macroscopic properties with the liquid in lakes and rivers also shares its deep nature? What reasons can they provide for that? If the hidden nature of a substance is unknown, there are no reasons to consider some macroscopic properties as depending on it. Moreover, sharing the same properties does not necessary count as "seeming to have" the same nature. Consider the following case: does a cherry appear to have the same nature as a strawberry tree fruit because they are both red and ground?

Casalegno (2007) proposes a new perspective to assess the questions at issue. The debate needs to be reset without implicitly assuming that the meaning of a consists in a nor for its use. This assumption, in fact, forces us to consider an objective reference theory as a proposal about the content of such a norm. For example, the meaning of the word "water" is identified with the norm "Apply 'water' to whatever has the same nature as paradigmatic water". Thus, the norm is said to be inapplicable (there is a possible situation in which nobody knows its applicability conditions) and finally dismissed (an inapplicable norm is not a genuine norm). How can we block this slippery slope? By rejecting its starting point and defending instead a truth-conditional account of meaning.

According to this perspective, the facts that are supposed to motivate the inapplicability

of norms in regard to an objectivistic account of reference, e.g. the fact that before chemistry, nobody could know if a certain liquid was water because nobody knew water's deep nature, are simply cases in which we ignore the truth value of some sentences ("This is water"). Marconi replies that the inapplicability of objectively based norms doesn't derive from lack of content or from any indeterminacies of the truth conditions: a norm may have perfectly determinate content and be inapplicable nevertheless. Consider the following law

(x) (x must serve in the army for one year at age 18)

and suppose that its application depends on Goldbach conjecture G in such a way that the law applies to males if G is true, to females if G is false. The law's content and its conditions of application are both clear (to the extent that the notions of male and female are not regarded as particularly vague). If we are mathematical objectivists and we believe that G is either true or false in any case, no indeterminacy of any kind is involved. Despite this, Marconi highlights that it would be crazy to make such a law about serving in the military because the law would not be applicable. The conclusion is that a law may have a fully determined content and be inapplicable for epistemic reasons.

At the end of his talk, Marconi faces one of the most common and convincing argument in favor of an objective notion of reference. The argument is this: think about the discovery of water's composition in 1715 when water was recognized to be H<sub>2</sub>O. This discovery implied that there were samples called "water" that had turned out not to be H<sub>2</sub>O. There are two possible reactions among language users:

(a) "Well, they were water in the previous sense of 'water'; now we found reasons to use 'water' differently, so we won't call those samples 'water' any longer".

(b) "So, in spite of appearances, those samples were not water: all along we were wrong in calling them 'water'".

It is generally argued that (b) is a more plausible reaction than (a) but Marconi is inclined to consider (b) as plausible as (a). The plausibility of (b) is then thought to be a proof of speakers' reliance on an objective notion of reference. Speakers believe that they are going by the objectively based norm. But, Marconi asks, could one believe to be guided by a norm while he is actually guided by another norm or by no norms at all? He suggests that it could be the case. Speakers' beliefs about which norm or criterion they are applying may be false: the criteria a speaker is really going by may have no connection with the content of the norm she believes to be guided by.

In conclusion, Marconi's presentation aims at reconstructing the ten years debate with Paolo Casalegno, within a perspective that is at the same time historically accurate and deeply critical. The questions at issue are of primary philosophical importance, lying within the contemporary debate on an objectivistic approach to meaning come to the fore thanks to Kripke and Putnam's theoretical contributions.

## Bibliography

- Marconi, D. (1997), *Lexical Competence*, MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.); trad it., *La competenza lessicale*, Laterza, Roma – Bari, 1999.
- Casalegno, P. (1999), Review of Marconi (1997), *Dialectica*, Vol. 53, pp. 154 -159.
- Casalegno, P. (2000), Normatività e riferimento, *Iride*, Vol. 13, No. 30, pp. 337 – 351.
- Marconi, D. (2000), Risposta a Paolo Casalegno, *Iride*, Vol. 13, No. 30, pp. 353 – 364.

Casalegno, P. (2007), Normatività e riferimento: postille ad una discussione con Diego Marconi, in: M. Andronico, A. Paternoster and A. Voltolini, eds, *Il significato eluso: saggi in onore di Diego Marconi – Rivista di estetica*, Vol. 34, pp. 199 – 212.

## Paul Boghossian

### Reasoning and Meaning

In this talk Paul Boghossian replies to the Casalegno's objections<sup>1</sup> to the Inferential Role Semantic thesis that, more or less, goes like this: "Knowing the meaning of a constant is to use it according to some rules". First of all, Boghossian gives a general description of the problem (using Modus Ponens (MP) rule as example). We do reason according to logical rules, even if we are unaware of it, and we are perfectly entitled to do so. In fact, when people, that are unaware of MP, reason in this way:

It rained last night

If it rained last night then the streets are wet.

So, The streets are wet.

they are entitled to do so. But what does it mean that we are entitled to do so and, moreover, how can we justify our entitlement? Given that we can't provide a more general justification that relies on other rules (for, sooner or later, it will appeal to MP again) we face different positions that seems unlikely. Among them we have the skeptical alternative -we don't have any reason at all- or the explanation by means of a sort of "intuition". Boghossian believes that the best way to answer this question is to deploy some aspects of the notion of analyticity, shifting the question into the explanation of how the understanding of a concept might suffice for the entitlement. In other words: how can the understanding of "it" entitle us to use MP? This lead us to consider the Inferential Role Semantic account and a weaker version of it:

(A) Infer according to MP is *necessary* for someone to mean *if* with "if".

After having presented his views on the problem, Boghossian turns onto the critics to his conception developed by Paolo Casalegno and Tim Williamson, highlighting the fact that they concentrated more on its inferentialist assumption (A) rather than on its thesis (If we assume that «Inferring according to MP is necessary to have the meaning of "if"», then we are *blindly entitled* to reason according to MP).

The first objection concerns Ramanujan inferences. As Casalegno, in the second part of his article, puts it: "He was often unable to justify [his] conclusions by means of what most mathematician would have regarded as an acceptable proof. [...] I think it could be wrong to deny that Ramanujan's blind inferences were blameless". The answer provided by Boghossian is simple. For him, Ramanujan *was* capable to give a sort of justification for his assertions.

The next point concerns two objections made respectively by Casalegno<sup>2</sup> and Tim Williamson. Both show that it is possible for someone (i.e. Mary and Simon) to *use* the word "and" without being able to use the rules associated with the concept, that is conjunction-elimination and conjunction-introduction. Boghossian's reply to Casalegno's objection simply

---

<sup>1</sup>(Casalegno2004)

<sup>2</sup>Mary suffers from a disability: she can use the word "and" to describe complex scenes as "The box is red and the book is blue" but is unable to perform conjunction elimination and conjunction introduction (for example she is unable to derive "The box is blue" from the previous sentence.

claims that Mary *does not have* the common concept of conjunction. The reply to Williamson's objection is more articulated. Let's see it in detail.

Williamson imagines an expert philosopher of language that, due to his views on semantics and vagueness, assents to all the composed sentences (A and B) that have, at least, one conjunct whose truth value is indefinite<sup>3</sup>. It is evident that we can answer to this objection denying, as with Casalegno's one, that Simon means *conjunction* by "and". But Williamson says: "Once we become aware of Simon's deviant theory of logic [...] an explanation of his [strange linguistic behaviour] in terms of linguistic incompetence looks much more less attractive".

Boghossian, here, highlights that Simon's rules are derived from his semantic theories and, so, they are not "primitively compelling". Anyway it is possible to describe Simon's behaviour in a different way. Let's consider an example. Einstein claimed that relativity is a 3-place relation (instead of 2-place relation). Even if we become aware of his reason to prefer a different theory of "relativity" we can still think that we face a case of *disagreement of meaning*<sup>4</sup> without deny that "2-placedness was constitutive of the classical notion".

In the last part of the talk Boghossian tries to reply to the final Casalegno's observation: "Does the syllogism in Barbara belongs to our possession conditions for logical constants? [...] The problem is that we have not been told what sort of data would be relevant to establish this".

Boghossian says that we should consider an *explicit case* in which we try to introduce a new word in our language by means of a definition "X is Y and Z". Here we know exactly what it is constitutive of the word X (that is Y and Z) for we have stipulated it explicitly. On the other hand, we see that the case of Inferential Role is different because we cannot think of logical constants as having acquired their definition by stipulation. There is no behavioural analogue for this case and we don't have to fall in the trap of thinking so. There is no possibility of a behavioural reduction of those interesting concepts. The only thing that can be done is to ask in every specified context "Does this person has the concept of conjunction even if he refuse to apply (i.e.) conjunction-elimination?" and answer to it in an *intuitively* manner.

## Bibliography

Casalegno, P. (2004). Logical concepts and logical inferences. *Dialectica* 58(3), 395–411.

## Alex Orenstein

### Inscrutability Scrutinezed

Orenstein's talk deals with a conceptual analysis of Quinian thesis of inscrutability of reference and indeterminacy of meaning and it aims at facing the question if the former provides an argument for the latter.

The first part of his talk analyses two different conceptions of reference inscrutability that are related with theoretical developments starting from Quine (1960). At the beginning of his reflection, Quine directly connects inscrutability of reference with indeterminacy of translation. Anyway, in its later forms<sup>5</sup>, inscrutability of reference is independent of Quinian

<sup>3</sup>Simon's behaviour reflects his will to avoid only falsity.

<sup>4</sup>Previously Boghossian suggested not to refer to Simon's case as "linguistic incompetence" but rather as "meaning change".

<sup>5</sup>See (Quine1960) and (Quine1995).

distinctive account of observation sentences and views of language acquisition.

Let's add some details to this shifting account of inscrutability. In his later writings, Quine introduces the proxy function case as an example of the inscrutability of reference. A proxy function maps objects of one domain onto objects of another. The inscrutability of reference is said to be supported by the fact that no evidence can determine whether a person is referring to an object, or to its image under a proxy function.

Imagine a proxy function  $f$  which assigns to an object  $x$  its mereological cosmic complements,  $f(x)$ . For example,  $f$  assigns to a rabbit the entire cosmos less the rabbit itself. Then, consider the sentence

(1) This rabbit is furry.

The sentence (1) can be interpreted about individual rabbits and individual furry things and it is true iff the individual rabbit which is "this rabbit" assigned interpretation is a member of the set of individual furry things. What are the mereological cosmic complements of these referring portions? Let's apply function  $f$ : it assigns to "this rabbit" the entire cosmos less this rabbit and assigns to the predicate "is furry" each of the cosmic complements of individual furry things. The sentence (1) is true under such an interpretation because the cosmos less this rabbit is a member of the set of cosmic complements of individual furry things (i.e. that set includes the cosmic complement of that individual rabbit).

The proxy function case takes an important role in Quine's defense of the inscrutability of reference, releasing it from empiricist assumptions. As Orenstein underlines, proxy functions do not require anything but standard truth conditional semantics. They show that entirely different objects can fulfill the role of assigning the needed referents, preserving the truth we are interested in.

The second part of Orenstein's presentation focuses on indeterminacy of meaning. First of all, Orenstein highlights the difference between the indeterminacy of reference thesis, on one hand, and the indeterminacy of meaning claim, on the other: the former applies to terms while the latter applies to sentences as indissoluble wholes. As a consequent, the indeterminacy of meaning thesis can be thought as the inability to single out the propositions expressed by our sentences.

Quine's account of meaning indeterminacy is based on his famous thought experiment about radical translation. The conclusion he draws is that there is no good reason to think that a uniquely correct translation can be provided.

The final part of Orenstein's presentation is devoted to answer the following question: does model theoretic inscrutability provide an argument for indeterminacy? Quine's answer is a negative one. Orenstein considers an argument from inscrutability of reference to indeterminacy of meaning that he schematically presents as a case of modus tollens:

*P1*: Expressions don't have determinate references.

*P2*: If an expression has a determinate meaning, then it has a determinate reference.

*C*: Therefore, expressions don't have determinate meanings.

Why Quine doesn't accept it? Because according to a Quinian account of meaning as stimulus meaning<sup>6</sup>, it does not determine reference. Anyway, Orenstein replies, Quine's account of meaning is a non-standard one, whose appropriateness has been widely criticized. In Orenstein's opinion, this fact makes Quine's indeterminacy claim to be significant just in regard

---

<sup>6</sup>The stimulus meaning of a sentence for a person is the class of stimuli which would prompt the person's assent to it.

to his own view. However, if we embrace a different conception of meaning, reinterpreting Quinian meanings like standard ones (i.e. they determines reference), then the argument P1 – C is sound. Consequently, Orenstein’s suggestion is that indeterminacy follows from inscrutability.

In conclusion, it is interesting to report the objections that Timothy Williamson proposes at the end of Orenstein’s presentation. The central one is that there is no way to arrive from the indeterminacy of words’ reference to the indeterminacy of proposition expressed if we assume proposition to be simply set of possible worlds. In fact, it is possible to vary words’ reference without varying the proposition expressed. It is one way street from the reference of the individual words to the proposition expressed, unless you appeal to much stronger assumptions (for example, a conception of propositions as structured entities).

Orensteins’s reply to Williamson is less than convincing and our impression is that a deepener reflection about the relationship between the indeterminacy of meaning thesis and its philosophical assumptions would have been helpful to evaluate Orenstein’s conclusion.

## Bibliography

- Orenstein, A. (1997), *Willard Van Orman Quine*, G. K. Hall, Boston.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1960), *Word and Object*, MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.); trad. It., *Parola e oggetto*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 1970.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1969), *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, Columbia University Press, New York; trad. it., *La relatività ontologica e altri saggi*, Armando, Roma, 1986.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1990), *Pursuit of Truth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.).
- Quine, W. V. O. (1995), *From Stimulus to Science*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.).

## Igor Douven

### The epistemology of conditionals

The first part of Douven’s talk concerns the objections expressed by Paolo Casalegno to the Rationality Credibility Account (RCA) theory<sup>7</sup> in the article “Rational Beliefs and Assertion”.

Douven’s reply to Casalegno’s first objection (the equivocation fallacy regarding the term “rational” in the argument<sup>8</sup>) claims that the notion of rationality in Douven’s argument was a pre-theoretical one, that is, not-bayesian one, and that, anyway, there have been several attempts to describe that notion in a bayesian way.

<sup>7</sup>RCA has been defended by Douven especially in (Douven2006)

<sup>8</sup>Douven claims that RCA should be considered better than KR (Knowledge Rule) because it can be derived by two simple and incontrovertible premises. One of them is: “X should ... only if it is rational for X to ...”. Given the assertion-belief parallel (the Douven’s second simple premise) we can obtain the rule “X should assert  $\psi$  only if it is rational for X to believe  $\psi$ ”. Casalegno (2009) shows that there is an equivocation fallacy regarding the term “rational” for in the first premise “rational” means *practical rationality (Bayesian)* while in the obtained rule it means a sort of *epistemic rationality*.

The reply to the second objection (the “shoot-yourself” argument<sup>9</sup>) shows that the truth value of an instance of the general rule “if it is rational to  $XY$ , then it is rational to  $XY$  to yourself” depends on how we substitute the terms in it. For example: let’s assume (maybe on religious grounds) that it can be rational to shoot someone but it is never rational to shoot yourself. If we apply the previous rule we obtain this sentence: it can be rational to take care of someone, but that it is never rational to take care of yourself. So, the substitutivity rule does not indiscriminately hold.

The third Casalegno’s objection emphasizes that the RCA has trouble in explaining why the question “How do you know?” is a legitimate response to an assertion and that, moreover, RCA seems to imply that “I just don’t know” is a plausible answer. Here Douven shows that his original claim was weaker than Casalegno believed. In fact, it was: “RCA does not worse a job than KA”. Furthermore, it seems fair that we would not blame the speaker for an answer like: “I don’t know it, but I have excellent reason for believing that it is raining in Paris”.

In the second part of the talk Douven tried to challenge the “standard view” about the epistemology of conditionals, that is, the claim that Stalnaker’s Hypothesis (SH)<sup>10</sup> is False and that Adams Thesis (AT) is True. In fact, given that SH has an absurd *trivial* consequence (the probability of a conditional results to be equal to the probability of the consequent regardless of the antecedent), Adams denied that conditionals express propositions and proposed to interpret  $Pr(\phi \rightarrow \psi)$  not as the *probability* of  $(\phi \rightarrow \psi)$  but, instead, as the *acceptability* of it:  $Acc(\phi \rightarrow \psi) = Pr(\psi|\phi)$ .

Douven challenges the thesis using an experiment<sup>11</sup> aiming at discover if there are differences between the acceptability and the probability of conditionals. The experiment data shows that Adams Thesis is *overall* wrong. So we face a dilemma. Philosophers consider AT true by “intuitions” but empirical works shows that it is false. On the other side, philosophers consider Stalnaker’s Hypothesis false on the strong basis of triviality argument but empirical works (Evans, Over, ... ) shows that it is, at least, descriptively true. So, we have to reconsider the triviality argument. Some authors (Johnson-Laird et al.) claimed that the previous experimental results are due to the fact that the probability operator “takes narrow scope over conditionals<sup>12</sup>” while the acceptability operator does not (similarly to other operator like, for example, the necessity operator). As things stand we have to reconsider the triviality arguments of SH and, if we do so, we see that is based in a stronger assumption than SH, namely GSH<sup>13</sup> that, unlike SH, has not been intensively tested. Other triviality arguments do not rely on GSH but, rather, on the generally accepted principle IE<sup>14</sup>. However GSH can be derived assuming SH and IE and so we only have to care about GSH. Douven tested GSH, as he does with AT, and the experiment shows that GSH is not descriptively adequate and so does not hold. Therefore all the triviality arguments rely on a premise that is not descriptively true.

<sup>9</sup>Douven claims that belief is a species of “assertion to oneself”. And so “If it is rational for you to assert  $\psi$ , then *a fortiori* it is rational for you to assert  $\psi$  to yourself, that is, given the assertion-belief parallel, it is rational for you to believe  $\psi$ ”. Casalegno’s objection sounds as follow: “This is like saying that if [...] it is rational for you to shoot, then *a fortiori* it is rational for you to shoot yourself. Cfr. (Casalegno2009)

<sup>10</sup>Stalnaker’s Hypothesis:  $Pr(\phi \rightarrow \psi) = Pr(\psi|\phi)$

<sup>11</sup>*Context*: According to a recent report written on the authority of the Dutch government, many primary school students in the province of Friesland (where many people still mainly speak Frisian) have difficulty with spelling. Jitske is a student of a primary school somewhere in the Netherlands.

*Conditional*: If Jitske goes to a Frisian primary school, then she has difficulty with spelling.

*How acceptable is this conditional?*

<sup>12</sup>People tend to interpret: “How probable is  $\psi$  if  $\phi$ ?” as “(How probable is  $\psi$ ) if  $\phi$ ?” rather than “How probable is ( $\psi$  if  $\phi$ )” and, so, asking for the probability of a conditional is like asking for the conditional probability.

<sup>13</sup>Generalized Stalnaker’s Hypothesis, GSH:  $Pr(\phi \rightarrow \psi|\chi) = Pr(\psi|\phi \wedge \chi)$

<sup>14</sup>Import-Export, IE: “If  $\phi$ , then if  $\psi$ , then  $\chi$ ” and “If  $\phi$  and  $\psi$ , then  $\chi$ ” are logically equivalent”.



In the end, these are the results for the static part of the epistemology of conditionals: SH could be true (for the argument that undermines it lies on a false premise) and AT is false.

## Bibliography

Casalegno, P. (2006). Reasons to believe and assertion. *Dialectica* (63), 231–248.

Douven, I. (2006). Assertion, knowledge, and rational credibility. *The Philosophical Review* 115, 449–485.

## Crispin Wright

### Notes on Paolo Casalegno’s “The problem of non-conclusiveness”

The last talk of the conference should have been held by Crispin Wright. Unfortunately, he could not be in Milan due to health problems and his place was taken by Paul Boghossian (who read the handout sent by Wright) and Timothy Williamson (who commented it). Here we will expose the handout and then we will give a brief outline of Williamson’s comments on it.

Crispin Wright’s paper focuses on Paolo Casalegno’s article “The problem of non-conclusiveness<sup>15</sup>” in which the author challenges the verificationist thesis, that is the idea that a theory of meaning should be based on the *assertibility conditions* of a given sentence. Let’s see Casalegno’s thesis in detail. Consider a characterization of what a *conclusive verification* is:

- (1) We have verified S conclusively means that we have ruled out ever acquiring in the future new evidence which would entitle us to assert not-S

and an assertibility-condition:

- (I) C is an assertibility condition for a thinker X and a sentence S at t iff X accepts:  
1 - If C obtains at t, then S is assertible at t  
2 - If X believes that C obtains at t, then X will believe that S is assertible at t.

Given that it is always possible that a person X, who at time *t* is entitled to assert S given that conditions C hold, at time *t'* is not entitled to assert S anymore because of an eventual information acquired in the while, then the notion of assertibility-condition is, indeed, inconclusive<sup>16</sup>. So, if an assertibility-condition cannot be conclusive, then the whole notion becomes inconsistent because “to say that C is a non-conclusive assertibility-condition is virtually the same as saying that C is not an assertibility condition at all”.

Crispin Wright first comment concerns Casalegno’s characterization of *conclusive verification* that he considers unfortunate because it implies an equation between “having a conclusive verification” and “being in a position to rule out that it may turn out that one does not”. Wright’s proposal is to replace it with: “we have verified S conclusively just in case we have accumulated sufficient evidence *e* for S of such a kind that we can rule out *overriding* defeat of *e*”. Secondly he points out that the alleged claim that the notion of an inconclusive assertibility-condition is aporetic does not seem to hold and the reason is that we characterized it and, therefore, “there has to be *some* coherent notion of [it]”.

---

<sup>15</sup>(Casalegno2002)

<sup>16</sup>C is inconclusive means that it is possible that at a time *t* X believes that C and feels entitled to assert S and at a later time *t'* he, because of new informations, no longer believes that at *t* was the case that S.

In his article, Casalegno, suggests a new characterization of the notion of assertibility-conditions:

(1') If C obtains at t, and *circumstances are appropriate*, then S is assertible at t.

Then he points out that there are infinite possible circumstances that are not appropriate for the assertibility of S and that they vary infinitely in kind. The solution one could propose is this:

Appropriate circumstances obtains for S on the basis of C if:

- (I) There is no plausible equally good or better explanation of C, compatible with not-S
- (II) There is no evidence in favour of the assertibility of not-S that is as strong or stronger than the evidence in favour of S provided by C.

Here we have a strong assumption (and Casalegno is aware of it): the meaning of S and the meaning of not-S should be grasped separately. But this seems, to him, not acceptable.

Crispin Wright's reply to this point is more articulated than the previous. First he highlights that the difference of assertibility-conditions between a sentence and its negation does not imply that the construction of meaning for the negation of any given sentence varies "from sentence to sentence". He suggests that it is possible for an assertibility-condition theorist to accept, for example, the inferentialist account for the logical operators. In this view the uniformity of meaning would have been guaranteed by the inferential role without the need to give up the independence between the assertibility-condition for S and those for not-S.

The next point that Crispin Wright makes concerns the alleged judgment among all the plausible explanations of C in (I) and the evidence for S and not-S in (II). What does exactly mean, says Wright, for a person to have a *better explanation* for C? Similarly, how can one person compare the *relative strength* of the different assertibility-conditions? This claim seems absolutely inapplicable.

All the above represents a strong problem to the assertibility-condition thesis but this is true only if we accept the strong assumption that "theories of meaning should *explain* meaning". "But, continues Wright, the relevant sense of *explain* cannot be explain *ab initio*". This is the crucial point of Wright's analysis: the only thing that we can ask to the assertibility-condition theory is that it has to provide a description of what a person should know to understand an expression and not to "supply the means to induce an understanding of it". So, Casalegno's objections are all based on the confusion outlined above and, for this reason, they fail to hit the target.

The second part of the talk was conducted by Timothy Williamson who explained his views on Crispin Wright's handout and replied to the questions posed by the audience. It would take too long to carefully describe the debate, so we will only give a very brief outline on the two most interesting Williamson's critics.

The first one. Let's recall Casalegno's second attempt to define what the term "appropriate circumstances" means. Casalegno claims that it would be better to differentiate the assertibility-conditions for S from the assertibility-conditions for not-S. In order to overcome Wright's objection, Williamson thinks that we should require assertibility and *deniability* conditions for S. In this way the meaning of a sentence would be defined in a stronger way.

The second point Williamson sketched out refers to Wright's general objection to Casalegno. Williamson said many criticisms were ascribable to Wright's perspective on meaning. Unfortunately, a Dummett-inspired theory of meaning shall be very different from the one Wright has in mind. First of all, following his verificationist theory, Dummett says that we

do need a semantic that must be decidable. Hence, Wright's standpoint is highly problematic, at least from a dummettian perspective, and this makes some kind of criticism to Casalegno quite mislead.

### **Bibliography**

Casalegno, P. (2002). The problem of non-conclusiveness. *Topoi*, 75–86.