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MICHAEL DUMMETT'S RECENT VIEWS ON
LANGUAGE AND TRUTH¹

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Sir Michael Dummett belongs to a small group of the greatest analytical philosophers of the second half of the 20th century, and presumably it would be no exaggeration to consider him the most prominent and influential British philosopher over the last three decades. He has published numerous articles, not only in the field of philosophy. However, a reader willing to learn his recent views is going to face some problems. Although Dummett's most extended monograph — *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* — being a systematic exposition of his own views, was published (Dummett 1991) relatively not so long ago, large parts of it, presented as The William James Lectures at the Harvard University, originally have even come from 1976. From this earlier material, the reader can hardly separate what Dummett has added when preparing this monograph to publication, at the end of the 1980s. After the publication this monograph, in his articles and lectures, Dummett expressed his philosophical views many times, but only briefly.² The more detailed elaboration of these recent views is included in the

¹The previous version of this text has been presented during the philosophy seminar on "The natural language: thinking – cognition – truth," chaired by Professor Jerzy Pelc, at the Institute of Philosophy of the University in Warsaw, on the 22th November 2002. I am grateful to the participants for their instructive and useful comments, in the first place to Professor Adam Nowaczyk and Professor Jerzy Pelc.

²The published articles to be referred to, first of all, are the following: Dummett (1993c), Dummett (1995), Dummett (1997), Dummett (1998a), Dummett (1998b), Dummett (1998c), Dummett (1998d), Dummett (1999), Dummett (2000), Dummett (2002a), Dummett (2002b). One should mention also Dummett (2001b), a short book, published in Italian, in which, in sixteen short chapters, Dummett presents his views on nature, and the future of philosophy, as well as the relation of philosophy to science and religion.

Gifford Lectures held in 1997 at the University of St Andrews in Scotland,³ as well as in the Dewey Lectures presented at Columbia University in New York City in April 2002.⁴

The aim of this article is to present the crucial elements of a philosophical view presented recently by Dummett — in the first place the ones concerning the nature of language, meaning, and truth — as well as the necessary explanation of these elements.⁵ The presentation concentrates neither on the critique nor on the unconditional defense of them. It may, at most, contribute to eliminate some characteristic misunderstandings which have gathered around the philosophy of Dummett, and which might make its right construal almost impossible.

1. THOUGHT AND LANGUAGE

Like many representatives of analytical development, Dummett states that it is the task of philosophy to provide a clear view of the concepts, by means of which we think about the world, for this enables us "to attain a firmer grasp of the way we represent the world in our thought" (Dummett 1991: 1). Developing this idea, Dummett (with reference to G. Frege whom he considers the initiator of analytic philosophy⁶) observes that when we speak of our thoughts about the world, we should identify them not with what the cognizing subject actually experiences consciously (that is, with the processes of thinking such as imagination, comprehending, judging, etc.) but solely with what the content or object of these experiences or processes are, with what is expressed or grasped in these experiences and processes. Identifying thoughts and their structures with thinking processes and their progress is a symptom of the pernicious psychologism, which we, at any price, ought to avoid. But if, nevertheless, thoughts and concepts of which these thoughts consist, as well as their combination constituting propositional structures, are not mental beings located in the mind of the individual cognizing subjects, then the question arises where — from the ontological point of view — are they to be located? As we know, Frege gave a typically platonistic answer to this question:

³They have been presented together in *Thought and Reality* which embraces four lectures successively devoted to propositions in the sense of logic, facts, truth and meaning, justificationist semantics, as well as justificationist metaphysics. Unfortunately, these lectures - although circulating in typescript format among a small group of philosophers — still are not prepared by Dummett for publication. The working manuscript of them has 122 pages.

⁴These lectures were originally published as Dummett (2003).

⁵Although this article is thematically related to the subject of my monograph (Szubka 2001), I propose here the other insight into Dummett's philosophy, and I develop ideas merely mentioned there.

⁶The detailed arguments for this view are provided in many publications, i.e. in Dummett (1993b). The recent and the briefest presentation is included in Dummett (2001a), an encyclopedia article on Frege.

"if thoughts are not contents of the mind, they must be located in a compartment of reality distinct both from the physical world and the inner world of private experience" (Dummett 1993b: 131). This compartment, or region, of reality was called by him the "third realm," and he also located in it various abstract, logical and mathematical objects. Is there, if we are to avoid psychologism, nothing left to choose, but to advocate this answer, and to become a victim of what some contemporary philosophers contemptuously call the "platonistic mythology?" Dummett thinks we have another, much more satisfactory, solution, namely, we may regard these thoughts and their constituents as meanings of particular linguistic expressions. In this way, it is reasonable to assume, as many analytic philosophers do, that "the only route to the analysis of thought goes through the analysis of language"⁷ (Dummett 1993b: 128). We can carry over this dependence into the area of other cognitive procedures, when we, for instance, say that in the order of explanation language is prior to thought. It is clear that this explanation priority can be, but it ought not to be, connected with the priority in the order of time. Shortly speaking, the view, according to which we are unable not only to explain but also to grasp some thoughts without referring to the language (the priority of language in explanation and in time orders), is a consistent one, although there also exist such elementary thoughts which, even if being explained through referring to language, can be grasped by human beings speaking no language, for instance, by small children (in this case, language has no priority in time order while preserving one in explanation order).

From the perspective of such an analytical and explanation priority, the discipline that becomes a fundamental one in philosophy, is the philosophy of language, or — to use the terminology preferred by Dummett — an appropriately conceived theory of meaning. Is there only a danger of falling back into psychologism or platonism at the philosophical description and explanation of thoughts, without the need to referring to language in a special way, or are there, additionally, some more other reasons that are also called for to make the theory of meaning the main part of the philosophy? Or, in other words, could the philosophy of thought — as for instance G. Evans and C. Peacocke suggest — not become the central branch of philosophy? Dummett calls for some additional reasons, two of which should be at least mentioned,⁸ namely the necessity to guarantee the communicability of thoughts, as well as the conceptual and terminological importance of the philosophy of thought.

⁷Dummett regards this assumption as a fundamental axiom of the analytic philosophy, which is believed to be the core of the "linguistic turn," characteristic for this philosophy.

⁸All these reasons, formulated as seven challenges addressed at proponents of the philosophy of thought, which assumes the priority of thought over language in the order of explanation, C. Peacocke comments and criticizes in his article in Peacocke (1997) "Concepts without Words."

Dummett claims (1993b: 143) that communicability becomes highly doubtful if we apply the strategy advised by philosophers of thought, that is, when we assume the priority of thought over language in the explanation order:

For when the meanings of words are explained in terms of the kind of thought expressed by the speaker, and the kind of thought which is required of the hearer if he is to understand what the speaker says, there is an inevitable concentration upon what goes on within the minds of the individuals concerned. The meaning of an expression of the common language is objective because it is embodied in the use that a competent speaker is required to make of that expression; but when its meaning is described in terms of the thoughts that speaker and hearer need to have in order to be using it, or understanding it, correctly, the connections with publicly observable use is broken unless public criteria are supplied for someone to have a thought of the required kind.

In the last sentence of this quote, Dummett admits that the situation of someone who defends the philosophy of thought is not completely hopeless, because he can try to offer public, thus completely communicable, criteria for having thoughts. Of course, the effectiveness of such attempts is another question. But we must notice that there is, principally, no fundamental reason not to enable the philosopher of thought to defend the thesis that thoughts are NECESSARILY communicable. As Peacocke (1997: 16) writes, "it is wholly consistent for the theorist of thought to insist upon the necessary communicability of thoughts, provided that he can derive its necessity from his own fundamental principles," although he at the same time admits that there may exist such extreme theorists of thought for whom the communicability of thoughts is random. Of course, the theorists defending the necessary communicability of thoughts must refer to another source of this necessity than the one referred to by the proponents of the thesis that the fundamental discipline of philosophy is the theory of linguistic meaning. In the case of many thoughts, this other source may be for instance the fact that grasping and having thoughts manifests itself in publicly observable behaviour, and in reactions to appropriate features of the environment (to make sure about it, one only needs to try to give the necessary and sufficient conditions for having a thought that — for instance — the colour of the given object is green). The necessity to guarantee the communicability of thoughts, then, is not a conclusive argument in favour of the standpoint according to which the analytical and explanation basis of language is assumed.

The argument that categories adopted from the philosophy of language, or these of the meaning theory, are used for the description and explanation of thoughts, is a more promising one. Dummett claims that "the discernment of constituent senses as parts of a thought is parasitic upon the apprehension of the structure of the sentence expressing it," from which it may be concluded that "the

thought is grasped in grasping the semantic properties of the sentence: to speak of the structure of the thought is to speak of the semantic interrelation of the parts of the sentence" (Dummett 1993b: 7-8). Is this really so, that is, do we really have to do this here with such a strong and uni-directional dependence? To answer this question, it must be first and foremost clearly distinguished between the unquestionable and the truistic thesis claiming that, to describe and to explain the thoughts we have and the conditions of having these, we must necessarily use a particular language and its categories, from the controversial and not-truistic thesis that the categories serving as means of description and explanation exclusively are of a linguistic nature. It is obvious that the second thesis does not ensue from the first one, which Dummett does recognize, but not always appropriately stresses. But if we want to prove the second thesis without making it trivial, it should be indicated that they are strictly linguistic categories, that is, the ones which semantically and pragmatically, in an essential way, are not based upon expressing these and other thoughts and their constituents. It is a difficult task to prove something like this, regarding the fact that, when building semantics and pragmatics of a language it is difficult to abstract from linguistic expressions having such and not another character, belonging to this or that category, because they express particular kinds of thought and its parts. It is highly doubtful, after all, if everything connected with the nature of thought, its kinds and possessing condition is possible to be explained through referring to linguistic categories. To prove that this doubt is reasonable, it is sufficient to mention for instance the category of non-conceptual content, at present widely discussed. Reference is made to this category by the authors describing the nature of perception, and its part played in constructing appropriate notions and judgements, among them Evans and Peacocke, who seem to regard this as one of the reasons not to reduce the philosophy of thought to the philosophy of language. Dummett probably would say that this category is not the domain of the philosophy of thought, because in perception non-conceptual contents are connected with at most so-called proto-thoughts, not with thoughts *sensu stricto*. In other words — according to Dummett (1993b: 121) — when speaking of non-conceptual contents, "we are in fact [...] operating at a level below that of thought as expressible in words; at that level, namely, at which animals devoid of language operate." But even if it was so, then if we assume that it is necessary to refer to the category of non-conceptual contents when explaining the nature of certain notions and judgements constructed by means of them (which seems to be a highly plausible assumption), the thesis of the analytical and explanation priority of the philosophy of language over the philosophy of thought will not remain valid, because everything that happens in the sphere of thoughts sometimes requires an explanation by means of not much linguistic categories, but of proto-thoughts, or categories wholly preceding thoughts, that is, clearly pre-linguistic categories.

2. MEANING AND TRUTH

Suppose that all these doubts are not able to remove the philosophy of language, or the theory of meaning, from their first place as the fundamental discipline of philosophy, which — according to Dummett (1993b: 127) — by no means can be seen as "a minor specialised branch of the subject, but as the stem from which all other branches grow." It is not important for the shape of the whole philosophy whether the theory of meaning is absolutely prior to other disciplines of philosophy or not, but, first of all, which form such a theory should have.

A philosophical theory of meaning should, according to Dummett, answer a general and fundamental question about the nature of meaning.⁹ This is a question that is completely different from those asked in everyday life when we want to establish the meaning of this or that particular word. The philosophical question about meaning concerns what generally the meaning of any particular expression consists of, that is, in other words, what makes a given expression to have such, and not another, meaning. When answering this question, and when constructing an appropriate theory, we discover nothing new at all, which was not known to us before, we rather make clearer and systematize what we implicitly know by virtue of being competent users of our mother tongue. But as we might be asked by someone, is there a general answer to the question of what the meaning of any particular expression, or word, consists of? Should we not, considering the great diversity of words and their meanings, state, that it at most can be said what the meaning of any particular types or sorts of a word consists of, but should we give up trying to give a general answer to the question about the nature of meaning? According to Dummett, such skepticism is unreasonable; not questioning the great diversity of words and their meanings, we should not forget Frege's fundamental principle that a word has meaning only in a sentence context; thus, the meanings of particular words can be characterized in categories of their contribution to the meanings of the sentences in which they appear. Then, trying to give a general answer to the question about the nature of meaning cannot be given up while regarding it primarily as a question about the nature of the sentence meaning. It is about what the meaning of a sentence uttered in a certain situation consists of, that is, what makes a sequence of sounds articulated in this situation relevant in an essential way going beyond its usual physical features. Therefore, the question about the nature of linguistic meaning is a question about the nature of language, and a philosophical clarification of the linguistic meaning necessarily must appear in the form of a philosophical clarification of language. To be a clarification of a maximalistic, fundamental character, it cannot — Dummett claims — refer to categories acquired when learning a language, such as asserting,

⁹In this part of presentation, I am using mainly ideas included in the second and third Gifford Lectures, sometimes supporting them by quotations from recently published articles by Dummett.

saying something, questioning, denying, etc. In other words, such an explanation should be comprehensible not only for people who speak our language, or who speak a similar one, but also for hypothetical extraterrestrial beings to whom we would be able to give this explanation in an extra-linguistic way.

One might have doubts about the possibility of meeting the requirements of such a maximalistically conceived theory of meaning, and such doubts were raised many times. For the present purpose, let us provisionally assume that Dummett is able to prove that these doubts are unreasonable. But is he able to construct a complete theory of meaning, starting from the analyses of a sentence meaning? If yes, then which distinctions and assumptions does he need to come up with? At first it must be noticed that actually in each language we can construct countless sentences. Thus, if we want to construct an exhaustive description and explanation of their meanings, a few steps are necessary, namely a separation of a finite number of basic sentences, a characterization of their meaning and of the meanings of words constituting the sentence, and finally an explanation in which way new sentences can be formed from these words. According to what Dummett declares, since the sense of individual words is to be conceived in the categories of their contribution to the meaning of the whole sentence, it becomes essential to know which sentences are to be regarded as basic sentences, and how it is possible that words retain their meanings, in spite of appearing in various sentence types: affirmative, interrogative, imperative sentences, etc. For instance, how come that the word 'brother' has the same meaning in the following sentences: 'Peter is my brother', 'Introduce me to your brother, please' and 'Leave my brother alone!', etc.? Dummett says that this problem is solved when using the distinction once introduced by Frege, the distinction of meaning into sense, force and tone, as being its three various parts. A sense of a sentence is a thought, or a propositional content, expressed by the sentence. This thought, or content, may be ascribed a various force in various sentences; we sometimes assert that it is true, another time we ask whether it is true or not, or some other time we command that it should be made true. A tone is a category embracing the remaining elements of linguistic meaning. It corresponds to what Frege calls *Färbung* (colouring), and it is distinguished from sense "in that it cannot affect the truth or falsity of what is said" (Dummett 2001a: 13).

First of all, but not exclusively, the theory of meaning is a theory of the sense of sentences used to assert something, that is, a theory of the sense of sentences having an assertoric force. A detailed analysis of thoughts or propositional contents, expressed in sentences used in such a way, leads to the conclusion that these thoughts as well as their parts are ascribed to appropriate semantic values (referents in the case of proper names, functions taking place in a given domain — in the case of function expressions, logical values, i.e., truth and falsehood, in the case of complete sentences, etc.), and thoughts or propositional contents cannot be

explained without reference to their semantic value. What underlies the theory of meaning, must be then the semantic theory making the ascriptions mentioned. However, the theory of meaning cannot be reduced to mere semantics. As Dummett (2002a: 256-257) writes:

A semantic theory is only the nucleus of a theory of meaning. It does not in itself constitute a theory of meaning, or even that component of a whole theory of meaning for a language which specifies the meanings of particular sentences and expressions. It does not do so because it is inadequate to explain in what the understanding of such expressions and sentences consists which is possessed by the speakers of the language. It is because they mutually understand those expressions that the speakers can communicate with one another by means of the language: if a theory of meaning for the language is to explain how the language functions, it must be able to explain what it is for a speaker to understand an expression, that is, to know what it means. A bare semantic theory cannot explain this because it can never be a complete account of what a speaker knows concerning an expression that he knows its semantic value. We can never think or conceive of an object, or a function, or of anything that can be the semantic value of an expression, just as that object, or that function, etc.: the object, function or whatever must be given to us in some particular way. An object, for instance, may be given as the object presently perceived, or as the one previously perceived, or as that which plays a certain role in events, or as that which stands in a certain relation to some other object, or in any of a multitude of other particular ways.

This passage contains two implicit theses. According to the first one, the theory of meaning based upon a semantic theory has to be a theory of understanding, i.e. its task is to describe and to explain the knowledge of competent language-users, which is necessary and sufficient to understand a given language and to communicate by means of it effectively. According to the second thesis, thoughts or propositional contents constituting the senses of sentences uttered by us are reduced to the ways in which their semantic values and the semantic values of their parts are given to us. Dummett emphasises that the semantic values are never given in a straightforward way, i.e. completely and in themselves, but they are always given to us in a particular way. While developing this thesis, however, he makes it clear that such a standpoint should not lead to weakening the tight connection between the semantic value of an expression and the sense of it (which is common in the contemporary philosophy of language), the connection consisting in that the expression's sense defines or determines its semantic value. This connection is not to be questioned because, by doing so, we would not know where such and not other semantic values of expressions come from.

Various theories of meaning are often united in that they respect a deep-rooted intuition of the interconnection and interdependence between meaning and truth. Dummett expounds this intuition in a form of the following constraint:

The concepts of truth and meaning must [...] be explained together, as part of a

comprehensive description of the practice of speaking a language. We cannot take the meanings of statements as given before stipulating what it is for them, or the propositions they express, to be true: nor can we take the notion of truth as given and use it to explain what it is for the words and sentences of a language to have the meanings that they have. (Dummett 2002a: 260)

This constraint is to some extent respected by the most widespread theory of meaning, which is called the truth-conditional theory. Its proponents are G. Frege, the early L. Wittgenstein, and D. Davidson. Its principal idea was concisely expressed in the thesis 4.024 of L. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "To understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true." (1961: 40-41)¹⁰ Wittgenstein seems therefore to claim that the meaning of a sentence are the conditions in which it is true, and to understand a sentence means to know what these conditions are. Of course, these conditions must be satisfied for a given sentence for it to be true. We might not know if these conditions are fulfilled (because of lacking access to the information about the current state of the world), and, at the same time, very well realise what these conditions are, and thus to know the meaning of a sentence under consideration. Proponents of the truth-conditional theories of meaning, starting from Frege, generally understand these conditions in a way that it is defined or determined whether they are fulfilled or not. So if the meaning of a sentence reduces itself to its truth conditions, and if these conditions are fulfilled, then the sentence is true, and if they are not fulfilled, then it is false, so there is nothing left to choose but to declare that all such sentences are either true or false, that is, the principle of bivalence is obligatory for the language. The meaning of individual words in this kind of theory is characterised in categories of their contribution to constituting truth conditions for the appropriate sentences they appear in. For instance, the meanings of expressions acting as predicates in sentences will be characterised in categories of the domain of their use and the features of this domain. In order to apply the principle of bivalence for the truth conditions characterizing the meaning of sentences, the meaning of each predicate must be defined or determined in relation to each object, whether the predicate applies to this object or not.

There is an objection often addressed to the proponents of truth-conditional theories, namely, while explaining meaning in categories of truth conditions, and then characterising what these truth conditions are, they use the notion of truth without any attempt to define it, or to make it clear. They simply consider the notion of truth primitive and self-evident without usually trying to justify this

¹⁰In the Polish language, this passage sounds as follows: "Rozumieć zdanie, znaczy wiedzieć, co jest faktem, gdy jest prawdziwe" (To understand a sentence means to know what is the fact, if it is true) (Wittgenstein 1997: 23). It is worth adding that neither in the original German text nor in its English translation there is an implicit reference to the category of fact. Dummett, in the Gifford Lectures, instead of the term "proposition" introduces the word "sentence."

relevant theoretical decision. Dummett believes that even though in some articles of the proponents of truth-conditional theories there is sometimes a reason to raise such an objection, this objection can be refuted. To do this, we must observe that the notion of truth plays an important role in the process of a complete description and clarification of language use. Even if this notion is used in a category of truth conditions without having been clarified appropriately, it is to keep in mind that the conception of sentence meaning, or, more precisely speaking, the conception of its sense is only part of a complete theory of meaning, whose task is to describe and to clarify language and its functioning, including the force in which the sentences formulated within this functioning are used. In such a complete theory of meaning, the notion of truth will appear at many places, and on the grounds of a role played by this notion it will be possible to define its content. It is clearly another question whether this finally leads us to the classical conception of truth, that is, to the one implying validity of the principle of bivalence. Dummett's standpoint is that it rather will not be the case, unless we have to deal with some specific parts of language.

There is yet another, much more serious charge that can be leveled against truth-conditional accounts. That is namely the charge of circularity that must not be tolerated in any way if the theory of linguistic meaning is to carry out its set explanatory tasks. Every truth-conditional account — as Dummett suggests in one of his last works:

must either sweep aside the notion of the speaker's understanding of his own language altogether, which is absurd, or explain it in terms of an inner conception that the speaker is supposed to possess. For any statement that he understands, a speaker is presumed, on such an account, to know what it is for that statement to be true. The presumption is harmless when the speaker knows how to decide the statement, that is, knows how to get himself into a position in which he can recognise the statement either as true or as false. But he undoubtedly understands many statements which he cannot so decide; a truth-conditional theorist nevertheless credits him with knowing what it is for the statement to be true. What kind of knowledge can this be? It cannot be verbalised knowledge, since such an account of linguistic understanding would plainly be circular. Can it be knowledge of a kind that can be attributed to a human being in advance of this being able to express it in words? Well, can a dog expect his master to come home next week, or an infant expect his mother to come in about two hours? There may be some dispute about what thoughts can plausibly be attributed to one who has no language in which to express them: but all must agree that their range is very narrow in comparison with that of the thoughts he can grasp once he has language. (Dummett 2002b: 17)

As far as this charge is concerned, Dummett argues that the theory of meaning is supposed to be the theory of understanding, i.e. it is supposed to not only

explain why the expressions of a given language have certain meanings, but also to determine how the users of that particular language understand those meanings; in other words — what does it mean to understand a language. The theory of understanding, as defined by Dummett, must not be based on the theory of thought, which describes the ideas and beliefs the users might have prior to mastering a language. If a supporter of the truth-conditional account respects these two key premises, they must confront the following dilemma: either they explain the grasping of the conditions of a sentence's truthfulness by referring to language users' ability to recognise the conditions, which means that grasping the conditions of truth of a undecidable sentence cannot be explained, or they state simply that knowing the truth conditions means the recognising and understanding of a sentence which assigns certain truth conditions to another sentence, which means that they accept the circularity of the proposed theory. According to Dummett, the supporters of the truth-conditional theories of meaning usually silently accept the second option of the above dilemma, which makes the theories they propose unacceptable, particularly if we want to explain how competent users understand their language.

We are therefore faced with the necessity of developing theories alternative to the truth-conditional accounts. These theories will form two groups — justificationist and pragmatic — depending on the main notion in the description of the meaning — it is either "what justifies our treating the statement as true" or "what is involved in accepting the statement as true" (Dummett 2002a: 253). It seems that both of these notions will be of a great significance in a full description and explanation of the meaning, so the most appropriate theory of meaning would probably be some version of the justificationist-pragmatic theory. According to Dummett, while embarking upon building the theory of meaning, we will naturally turn to some sort of a justificationist theory. If we begin with the observation of the linguistic behavior and its description, we will first describe the utterances of the language users and the circumstances in which they are delivered and accepted. It is also the core of the process of learning a language, in which a given person gains the ability of delivering and accepting certain utterances or statements in specific observable or recognisable situations. Assuming that in this process we primarily deal with declarative sentences and only secondarily with other types of sentences, like interrogative or imperative sentences, the accepting of the utterances or statements might be defined as considering them true or recognising them as true. Nonetheless, to avoid misunderstandings, Dummett admonishes us that while talking about considering an utterance or a sentence, the expression "to recognise as true" should be seen — from the semantic perspective — as a uniform and an indivisible expression (it can be presented graphically by means of hyphens as "recognise-as-true"). Therefore, it can be by no means equated to the aspect of meaning with a similar expression "recognise to be true." In brief, to

recognise a sentence as true means not only to consider it but also to "accept it as subject to no threat that its acceptance may have to be withdrawn" (Dummett 2002b: 15). As far as the recognition is concerned, the author does not speak about any possible recognition that is stable enough, but about a legitimate recognition that is made in certain circumstances i.e. such circumstances that authorize the correct approval or assertion of a sentence. The meaning of the sentence and, indirectly, of the words that make up that sentence, is determined precisely in terms of the circumstances of the approval or assertion of that sentence. However, are all conditions of a correct sentence approval constitutive for its meaning? Not at all, as Dummett suggests. Constitutive for the meaning of a sentence are only those conditions that can be considered DIRECT foundations of its recognition, i.e. the conditions that reflect the structure of the sentence and the meaning of its components. In other words

for every statement, there will be what we may call the canonical or typical means of recognising it as true. It is this which is given with its sense; an understanding of the statement demands only an ability to recognise its truth in this canonical or typical manner. (Dummett 1998b: 20)

For example, a direct or standard method of recognising the truth of a sentence about the number of plates in a dresser or of the one about the number of child's toys is simply counting them. The meaning of those sentences and the way the language users understand that meaning comes down to the knowledge of the items in the sentence and the method of counting them. Of course, besides those direct methods of recognising the truth of a sentence, there are always various indirect methods. For example, we can determine the number of plates in the dresser if we remember how many guests there were at yesterday's party (knowing that all plates had to be used at the party) and if we take the number of the plates borrowed from a neighbour from the number of party guests. The number of toys a child has bought can be determined if we know their unit price, the amount of money a child has been given to buy the toys and the change a child was given back. Irrespective of how useful those indirect methods are in everyday life and in science, it is not necessary to be familiar with them in order to grasp the meaning of the sentences, the truth of which is determined by means of those methods.

The examples given by Dummett as well as the description of distinguishing direct or canonical methods of establishing the truth of a sentence from indirect or uncanonical methods (only the first ones constitute the meaning of given sentences) suggest that those direct methods are simple observation or experience, and the indirect methods are reasoning as well as everything that considerably depends upon reasoning. Dummett neither accepts this suggestion nor the inter-

pretation of the distinction in question. Direct, standard or canonical methods of recognising the truth of sentences, i.e. their legitimate and unshaken acceptance, do not have to be based on sheer observation that is not infected by inferential elements — contrary to subsequent generations of positivists. Usually they contain an inferential component, and so we cannot grasp the meaning of the sentence unless we know that component. Similarly to W.V. Quine, Dummett (1998b: 20, cf. also Dummett 1991: 211) claims that

our statements cannot be divided into two classes, empirical and *a priori*, the truth of the one to be decided by raw observation and the truth of the other by unaided ratiocination. Rather, they lie on a scale, at one end of which stand the purely observational statements and at the other mathematical ones arrived at by pure deduction. Most statements occupy some intermediate position; their truth is to be established by a mixture of observation and of reasoning, deductive or otherwise. To have the capacity to recognise a statement as true or as false [...] requires being able so to recognise it when informed of the relevant observations and presented with the relevant reasoning.

Such a position would imply some version of holism. If the recognising a sentence as true depends on an inferential component, and thereby on reasoning, then it will be dependent upon other sentences. Since the understanding of meaning of a given sentence is tantamount to the ability to recognise the sentence as true, and since this ability requires the capability of using other sentences, and therefore the understanding of their meaning, then we cannot avoid the conclusion that the understanding of the meanings of sentences and meanings themselves are closely connected. It would be therefore difficult to disagree with Wittgenstein, who claimed in the second period of his philosophy that to understand a sentence i.e. to grasp its meaning, means to understand a certain language. This statement can be seen as an expression of the radical holism, according to which one has to understand a whole ethnic language (Polish, English, Italian, and the like) in order to fully understand its one sentence. Dummett thinks that such a radical holism is not acceptable, just as unacceptable is the thesis closely related to holism, which claims that the theory of meaning that describes and explains the tendency of a language user to recognise some sentences as true will be incomplete as long as it does not spread over recognising all sentences that the user understands. We should embrace MODERATE HOLISM instead, according to which one cannot grasp the meaning of a given sentence without understanding the meaning of many other sentences that are related to it, i.e. without knowing some parts of that language. Therefore, the theory of meaning which explains the knowledge of the meaning of the sentence will be incomplete until it explains the importance of grasping the meanings of related sentences (it can of course become complete without spreading over absolutely all sentences that a given language user is able

to understand).

Describing and explaining the meaning of sentences, as well as grasping the meaning, in terms of conditions that authorize the users to stably and definitely recognise the sentences as true, suggests that the conditions must always be conclusive. Nonetheless, things are not like that, and no theory of meaning which respects the fundamental features of our actual language practice can ignore that the conditions which induce us to recognise a given sentence as true are very often inconclusive and can be invalidated. For example, if we talk about a conditional expressed as "if A, then B," then the conditions that let us accept it will be connected with the possibility to legitimately recognise B assuming that A. This legitimate recognition does not have to be deductive, though; in many cases it will be the result of inductive reasoning, the conclusion of which is after all revocable. It can be therefore said that the grasping of the meaning of such a sentence will "consist of an ability to recognise evidence for the statement when presented with it, and to judge correctly whether or not it is outweighed by any given piece of counter-evidence" (Dummett 1998b: 19). Nonetheless, one must remember that this inconclusive evidence does not constitute directly and entirely the meaning of such sentences because if it did, we would not be able to define that it is inconclusive and revocable. The meanings can only be constituted by evidence that is conclusive and irrevocable.

A detailed development of the indicated ideas will lead to some version of justificationist theories of meaning. These theories, even if not so imperfect and unsatisfactory as the truth-conditional accounts, do disregard, according to Dummett, a certain very crucial aspect of the language practice. The user of a language is not only somebody who utters sentences in given situations and recognises the sentences uttered by others. They are also a person who acts based on sentences recognised as true, and such an action is connected with the ability to derive appropriate consequences from the sentences. It can be seen in the following example: a full grasp of meaning of the sentence "There are ten different pieces of cake on the tray" will be attributed to a child who not only knows how to count them but also realizes that there will be enough cake for everybody if they invite ten people to their party, given that every person will settle for one piece of cake. We can state that the child uses the sentence with understanding and that they not only communicate something but also speak in a specific language. Dummett (1998b: 22) describes it vividly:

We are not mere instruments for registering states of affairs that we can observe or infer to obtain. If a dog were trained to give various different signals in particular observable circumstances, such as the post's arriving, the front door's remaining open when nobody is on the porch, etc., we might say, "He's telling us that the post has arrived," but we could not rightly say, "HE'S SAYING THAT the post has arrived." The aspect of

the matter would be entirely altered if the dog proved capable of spontaneously and intelligently reacting to another dog's giving any of these signals. And that, of course, is what we learn to do when we learn language: to accept the assertions of others as true, and to act on their truth. A child can be said to be SAYING THAT something is so only if he has not only learned to tell, by his own capacities, when it is so, but will, when occasion presents itself, act on its being so when he has been told by others that it is. Only if he does this has he entered into the communal practice of using language.

If all these factors are indispensable for the correct use of a language, there is probably nothing else to do but to admit that the full theory of meaning "must attribute two independent features to every statement: what is required for it to be recognised as true, and what constitutes acting on its truth" (Dummett 2002b: 16). The full theory of meaning — as it was suggested before — should take the form of a justificationist-pragmatic theory.

Nevertheless, one should never overestimate the theoretical significance of this statement because these two features of every sentence that constitute its meaning, and namely the conditions of recognising it as true, as well as the resulting consequences, are not all completely independent from each other. They should be connected and harmonized in such a way that "what we take as the consequences of accepting a statement as true ought not to exceed what is called for by what would justify asserting it in the first place; correspondingly, anything called for by what establishes the statement as true ought to be admitted as an appropriate response to it" (Dummett 2002b: 16). If such a harmony exists, then both features constitutive for the meaning of a sentence — legitimate grounds that authorize the recognition of a sentence as well as direct consequences that results from the acceptance of a sentence — are mutually derivable. Therefore, nothing stands in the way of developing the theory of meaning for one feature of a sentence as well as the words that make up that sentence and assuming that it will be possible to describe and explain the other feature by means of this theory. Usually it is the feature of recognising a sentence as true, i.e. the justificationist theory, which is exemplified well by saying that "the intuitionist theory of meaning for mathematical statements is framed in terms of what is needed for the proof of a given statement, and not also in terms of what could be proved from it" (Dummett 2003: 11). It has to be emphasized that the principle of harmony (or equilibrium) is a requirement that the actual language practice does not always abide by.¹¹ Dummett (2002b: 16) gives two distinctive examples of the lack of that equilibrium, one of them is trivial and the other one is dangerous. In

¹¹According to Dummett, even the language of classical logic, with its typical introduction and elimination rules for negation, does not abide by this principle. Cf. the appropriate passages in Dummett (1991), especially chapter XIII, as well as Dummett's discussion with Ian Rumfitt (Dummett 2002c).

the first example the language user legitimately states that "Someone is coming down the stairs" and based on that comes to a conclusion that it is already a good reason not to go up the stairs. In the second example, another language user legitimately states that "The person who applies for a job at my company is Jewish" and thinks it is a good reason not to hire that person. In both cases we can observe a patent disturbance of equilibrium because the consequences derived from the stated sentences do not match the grounds that authorize its legitimate recognition. Such a disturbance of equilibrium or harmony of the language practice, as well as its other instances, entitle us to criticize it from a point of view of the theory of meaning. Thus, even though this theory of meaning is supposed to describe and explain our language practice, this practice is by no means something that must not be altered. In other words "if the best fully coherent theory of meaning for a language fails to fit completely with the conventional practices of its speakers, the language is in need of reform; and the theory will show in which respects it needs to be reformed" (Dummett 2003: 12).

The justificationist theory of meaning (similarly to the pragmatic theory of meaning which complements it and the truth-conditional theory which competes with both aforementioned theories) is first of all the theory of meaning of the whole category of the most diverse simple sentences of a language. Nonetheless, the theory cannot treat sentences as indivisible units if its aim is to satisfactorily explain the users' ability to create more and more simple sentences and understand the sentences, the use of which they have not been taught beforehand. The theory must also describe the structure of the sentences and define the meaning of individual words, i.e. the components that make up a sentence. Ultimately we strive to develop such a theory of meaning which would explain, based on the use of these words in different sentences, why a language speaker is ready "in appropriate situations to recognise as true statements expressed by means of them, even though he has not been in those situations" (Dummett 2002b: 14). This way we will be able to explain how the language users understand new sentences.

However, one has to take into consideration that simple sentences — which are in the range of interest of meaning theorists — make up various compound sentences. What is more, the meanings of simple sentences, which have been used independently to state something, are not always exactly the same as their meanings when they are components of other sentences. By describing this issue it is helpful to differentiate between assertoric content of a sentence and its ingredient sense. On the one hand, as Dummett (2002b: 18) writes, in order to understand a given sentence

we must [...] know what is conveyed by a speaker who on any occasion uses it on its own to make a statement: how we must expect things to be if he spoke correctly. We may call this its ASSERTORIC CONTENT. But in addition, if we are fully to understand the

meaning of the sentence, we must grasp the contribution it makes to determining the assertoric content of any more complex sentence of which it is a subsentence: we may call this its INGREDIENT SENSE.¹²

A simple example that illustrates this distinction are the two sentences: "It is raining here" and "It is raining where I am." Those sentences uttered to someone over the phone or added to regards on a post card convey exactly the same message to the recipient; thus, they do not differ from one another in terms of the assertoric content. They are nonetheless different in terms of the ingredient sense, which is visible if we insert the temporal quantifier "always" in both sentences. We will then obtain two logical compound sentences that have different assertoric contents: "It is always raining here" and "It is always raining where I am." It is because of the fact that the adverb "here" is temporally rigid, i.e. it refers to a specific place in a given temporal moment, whereas the expression "where I am" — quite the opposite — is characterized by temporal flexibility, i.e. its reference changes according to the place, where the person who uses this expression currently is.

The justificationist theories of meaning (and pragmatic theories that are related to them) undoubtedly avoid typical charges that are made against the truth-conditional theories, such as using the term of truth without explaining it or lack of a satisfying uncircular explanation of how language users know the conditions of the truth of a sentence (which are allegedly supposed to constitute the meaning). There are rather other charges made against the justificationist theories, such as the elimination of the notion of truth or replacing it with other categories, which then turn out to be inapposite for their role or assume in a more or less implicit way the existence of the notion of truth. Even though some early works of Dummett warrant such charges against the justificationist and pragmatic theories, his newest writings (especially the Dewey Lectures 2002) suggest simply that it is a mistake to claim that the justificationist-pragmatic theory can completely go without the notion of BEING true because it settles for the idea of discerning the truth or recognising something as true (Dummett 2003: 14, see also Dummett 2002b: 17). It has nothing to do with a simple observation that in the justificationist theory of meaning the knowledge of the meaning of a given sentence consists in knowing the conditions that authorize recognising a sentence as true, which then requires the grasping of the notion of truth or at least of some of its aspects. It has either nothing to do with the fact that in the pragmatic theory of meaning the grasping of the meaning of a sentence is

¹²For more information about this distinction- to which Dummett attaches a great significance — see also Dummett (1991: 47-50), Dummett (2002a: 259) and Dummett (2003: 16-18). The problems, that are connected with this distinction in the context of requirements Dummett imposes on the theory of meaning, are indicated in Weiss (2002: 117-118).

tantamount to the ability of deriving appropriate consequences from recognising the sentences as true and to the readiness to act based on its truth, which then requires the understanding of the notion of truth. The thing is that the notion of being true with reference to a sentence, i.e. its truth that is something separate (but not entirely independent) from an actual or real acknowledgment of truth is necessary for the justificationist and pragmatic theory of meaning for three reasons.

First of all, while developing a theory of meaning we must, as a part of this theory, describe and explain the practice of putting forward arguments that are supposed to authorize the recognition of a sentence or to persuade the recipients to recognise it. One of the key elements of this practice is the deductive reasoning. It is conclusive, i.e. it guarantees that a distinctive feature of the premises is also reserved for the conclusion, or, in other words, it is transferred from premises to conclusion. It is usually assumed that this feature is simply the truth. There are strong arguments that support such a position because e.g. the assumption that the feature is the recognition a sentence as true, i.e. that the sentence is recognised as true, would trivialize the deductive reasoning, because under such an interpretation deduction would not provide us with new knowledge, but instead it would lead us from sentences recognised as true to other sentences also recognised as true. Second of all, the notion of truth seems to be indispensable for the explanation of what is the assertoric content and assertion. Our statements or assertions are divided into correct and incorrect ones. We can also assume that a true sentence is a sentence, a recognition of which would be correct, and more precisely "an assertion of it would be justified, whether or not a particular speaker would have been justified in making it" (Dummett 2003: 18). In this case we talk about a legitimate recognition of a sentence that is treated separately and not as a component of another sentence, and because of that the assertoric content and not its ingredient sense is of a great importance. Therefore it can be assumed that the assertoric content of a sentence is defined by the condition of truth of a separate utterance of this sentence. Thirdly, the notion of truth is crucial in the transition from the theory of meaning to metaphysics, i.e. to a general conception of the world's nature and reality. To put it simply, "the world is the totality of facts, and facts are true propositions: on what propositions are true depends how reality is constituted" (Dummett 2002b: 17, see also Dummett 2003: 18).¹³

We should then agree with the proponents of the truth-conditional theories that the notion of truth is indispensable in the theory of meaning (Dummett 2003: 18). Nevertheless, such an agreement should not be identified with accepting

¹³The concept of propositional contents or propositions as well as considering them equivalent with the facts are very important for this short remark. The question of this identification and problems connected with it are raised by Dummett in the first Gifford Lecture.

their conviction that the notion of truth must be the notion of classical truth. There is namely another, non-classical notion of truth, that is appropriate for the justificationist-pragmatic theories of meaning supported by Dummett. Nonetheless, these claims should not be interpreted — for we tend to assess things too hastily — in a way that Dummett therefore acts against our deep-rooted intuition which says that the truth depends in general on the objectively existing world, which would mean that a sentence is true only when it coincides or corresponds with the actual state of affairs. By saying that our notion of truth does not have to be the notion of classical truth, Dummett (2002a: 256) means only that "the notion of truth may be said to be classically conceived if it is regarded as subject to the principle of bivalence, namely that every meaningful statement is determinately either true or not true, independently of our knowledge."¹⁴ If the notion of truth does not respect the principle of bivalence, it does not mean that it cannot incorporate the correspondence and objectivity intuitions. It is attested e.g. by the non-classical notion of truth that is favored by Dummett and which harmonizes well with the justificationist-pragmatic theory of meaning. According to this notion "the truth of a statement must consist of there being an effective means for someone suitably placed in time and space to come to recognise it as true", but, as Dummett (2002b: 17) adds, we have to recall that "recognition of a statement as true will not in general consist of unaided observation, but may extensively involve inference."¹⁵ Even though in the view of such a conception of truth — as emphasised by Dummett¹⁶ — it cannot be claimed that BECAUSE a sentence is true, its truth can be recognised, but it can only be indicated that its truth follows from the possibility to recognise it as true, yet such a position does not disturb the objective character of this conception of truth. The possibility to recognise the truth is here an appropriately idealized possibility (that does not come down to the actual truth recognition) which also leaves aside our casual cognitive limitations, our space-time location, and the like. Therefore, such a conception of truth lets us preserve e.g. our deep-rooted conviction that many sentences concerning the past are true, even though at present we do not have any methods at our disposal of recognising their truth and, most probably, we will never have them. In the view of the conception of truth supported by Dummett these sentences are true because someone who is properly situated in time and space could recognise their truth, albeit the real possibility of such a situation is irretrievably gone.

¹⁴The adverb "determinately" is not only a weirdly sounding embellishment in the definition of this principle. Cf. the appropriate explanatory notes in Szubka (2001: 71-72).

¹⁵At some point Dummett calls it the epistemic concept of truth and defines it as follows: "any statement A is true only if someone who is rightly placed could know or could know later that A" (Dummett 2001c: 1).

¹⁶Dummett states it explicitly in the fourth Gifford Lecture.

3. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of the justificationist-pragmatic theories of meaning it can be said that the world is formed by what we know about it or by what we could know about it. Our knowledge reaches so far, as far as the — properly idealized — effective ways of gaining it extend. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to claim, as Dummett suggests, that we CONSTRUCT the world because, as a matter of fact, we do not have control over what we learn about it.¹⁷ The reality is after all largely independent from what we know about it and from the methods we use in order to get that knowledge. It is the reality that makes our sentences true when they are true and makes them false, when they are false. We should all be in large measure realists when we describe the realism in such highly vague and minimalistic way. The philosophers — as Dummett writes — should not question this fundamental recognition of objectivity and independence of reality.¹⁸ They should however distinguish between this minimal realism and various forms of maximal and extravagant realism, i.e. such forms which claim that the reality is not only objective and independent from our knowledge, but also formed in such a way that it makes every meaningful sentence either true or false. Dummett, who does not accept such forms of realism, describes himself as a proponent of anti-realism. However, such an anti-realism is far from the views popular among some philosophers that are also called anti-realistic and which claim that the reality is constructed by our cognitive processes in a more or less arbitrary way.

4. APPENDIX (2015)

The paper on Michael Dummett's recent views on language and truth was written several years ago, at the very beginning of the present century. At that time the most up-to-date systematic exposition of Dummett's philosophy were his Gifford Lectures given at the University of St Andrews in 1997, circulated in typescript among a handful of scholars. I was fortunate to have access to them while working on my paper, but did not have the permission to quote from them at length. For some time Dummett was hoping to revise and expand them considerably. Eventually he gave up this hope, amended them only lightly, and published as a book (2006). He did the same with his 2002 Dewey Lectures (2004). In addition, the original English version of his 2001 Italian book on nature and future of philosophy was made available in print (2010), although it was poorly edited and contains a number of linguistic flaws and small errors. These three short books (unusually short, give the daunting size of Dummett's earlier publications) constitute the best introduction to his later philosophy. Here and there they may be usefully supplemented by Dummett's extensive replies to papers included in a

¹⁷Cf. e.g. appropriate passages from the fourth Gifford Lecture.

¹⁸It is a paraphrase of a disquisition argument from the third Gifford Lecture.

volume on his philosophy which appeared in 'The Library of Living Philosophers' (Auxier, Hahn 2007).

Writing on Dummett's philosophical views and interpreting them is a challenging and difficult task. Any endeavor to put together various threads from his scattered publications always carries with it a risk of distortion and misinterpretation. Dummett himself insisted more than once that his publications should not be taken as parts of one comprehensive philosophical system, and explicitly wrote that for him "every article and essay is a separate attempt to arrive at the truth, to be judged on its own" (Dummett 2004: x). Nevertheless, the same or closely similar themes and arguments in his publications tempts one into merging them into one concise account. This has been the primary aim of my paper. For that reason I have not focused properly on various objections to Dummett's theoretical proposals, including the stringent constraints imposed on drawing the distinction between direct and indirect ways of establishing the truth of a statement, the epistemic, yet fully objectivist conception of truth, and the puzzling relationship between justificationist and pragmatic facets of the theory of meaning. Objections of this kind have contributed to some extent to the demise of the Dummett's philosophical program, and his ambitious philosophy of language, conceived as the foundational philosophical discipline. However, perhaps the prevailing major reason of this demise have been the growing doubts about the legitimacy and fruitfulness of the linguistic turn.

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