

Our Conditional World Two approaches

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Since Frege's introduction of his second-order logical system in *Begriffsschrift*, the notion of language has taken a new turn towards what Stenlund calls "the calculus conception of language":

As regards the current use of the term 'natural language' one could also say that it presupposes a general notion of language under which both natural and artificial languages fall. What then is the common idea of language here? It seems to me that this common idea, in its most general form, is the following: a language is determined (or given) by its vocabulary (its lexicon) and grammar, or – through the influence of meta-mathematics and logical semantics – by its syntax and semantics.¹

Characteristic for this view is that one considers natural language to be in principle a calculus, or a formal system that can be isolated from the situations in which it is used.² In the first part of this paper, I attempt to demonstrate that the truth functional Fregean logic,³ which indeed represents a calculus conception of language, involves some principles that we might not want to maintain beyond our logical system. In the second part, I try to approach language in an alternative way.

1.

In his book *On the Logic of Ordinary Conditionals*, McLaughlin argues that a truth functional logic cannot be a satisfactory model of a language that includes conditionals:

The truth functional calculus of propositions is one of the foundation stones in modern logic. It is so eminently reasonable, and its principles perform so important a function in all branches of standard logic, that doing logic without it is unthinkable. And yet, it is a fact that the calculus is only satisfactory as a logical model of a language in which conditionals do not exist. Even such humble assertions as 'If Smith works hard, then he will get a raise' fall outside the range of statements that can serve as interpretations of the forms of truth functional logic.

¹ Stenlund (1990), p. 6.

² For a detailed account of the calculus conception of language, see Stenlund (1990) and Segerdahl (1996). Cf. Segerdahl (1996), p. 3.

³ I will here use "Fregean logic" to mean modern truth functional logic as developed from the formal system in *Begriffsschrift*.

This would not be an embarrassment if conditionals were marginal characters on the linguistic stage. But our conviction that this is not so, that they are important actors with major roles to play, is evidenced by the many attempts that have been made to find models that properly express their logic.⁴

Along the lines of McLaughlin, I will here argue that (at least) Fregean logic is founded upon principles that presuppose a calculus conception of language, that again is based on a certain picture of the world and the relation between language and the world that we cannot maintain if we acknowledge the importance of conditionals.

In classical logic before Frege, there were three basic principles of logic that Copi calls “The three laws of thought”:⁵

1. The principle of identity: If a statement is true, then it is true.
2. The principle of contradiction: No statement can be both true and false.
3. The principle of excluded middle: A statement is either true or false.

Logic was intended as a scientific language that is unambiguous, free from contradictions, and where all superfluous and therefore potentially disturbing elements are cleared out. Ideally, logic was supposed to be for science what the telescope was to the eye. However, in the process of making logic into the perfect scientific tool, Frege took one step further than classical logic and added the principles of composition and truth functionality. A compound statement’s truth conditions were now defined purely from the truth-values of its components, and the expressions ‘and’, ‘or’, ‘if’, ‘not’, ‘all’, ‘some’, and so on, were reduced to logically defined constants. This means that it was first of all the logical-syntactic structure, and not the contentual aspect, that was regarded as decisive for a compound statement’s truth conditions. So in addition to the principles of classical logic, Fregean logic is based on the following extensional (as opposed to intentional) principles:

4. The principle of composition: The meaning of a compound statement is found in the meaning of the component statements.
5. The principle of truth functionality: A compound statement’s truth or falsity depends on (is a function of) the truth or falsity of the component statements.

⁴ McLaughlin (1990), p. 1.

⁵ Copi (1968), p. 244.

6. The syntax principle: The truth or falsity of a compound statement is assigned according to the truth or falsity of the component statements, not according to their intentional content.

Unfortunately, with the new principles of Fregean logic, some problems occur. While one within classical logic can distinguish between the two statements ‘If Socrates is a man, then he is mortal’ and ‘If Socrates is mortal, then he is a man’ by judging the first as true and the second as false, Fregean truth functional logic cannot make this distinction. In giving up on the contentual aspect of a (compound) statement, both these statements have to be judged as true within Fregean logic, since Socrates was both a man and mortal. This is because the conditional here is given a truth functional interpretation, so that ‘If p then q’ is defined as equivalent to the material conditional ‘ $p \supset q$ ’, which means that the conditional is defined as true whenever the antecedent is false or the consequent is true: ‘ $\neg p \vee q$ ’. However, since the disjunction is also defined as purely truth functional, it is sufficient for its truth that one of the disjuncts is true: not-p, therefore, ‘not-p or q’. From this again, we can infer the material conditional ‘ $p \supset q$ ’. Accordingly, if a conditional ‘If p then q’ is true according to the material conditional definition, it must be true whenever it is not the case that the antecedent ‘p’ is true and the consequent ‘q’ is false at the same time, as seen in the truth table below:

p	q	$p \supset q$
T	T	T
T	F	F
F	T	T
F	F	T

From this truth table we get the following results: i) A conditional is true whenever its antecedent is false, which means that for instance the inference ‘not-p, therefore, (if p then q) and (if p then not-q)’ is valid; ii) A conditional is true whenever its consequent is true, which means that for instance ‘q, therefore, (if p then q) and (if not-p then q)’ is a valid inference; iii) A conditional is true whenever both its antecedent and consequent are true, so that ‘p and q, therefore, (if p then q) and (if q then p)’ is a valid inference; iv) A conditional is true whenever both its antecedent and consequent are false, which means that the inference ‘not-p and not-q, therefore, (if p then q) and (if q then p)’ is valid.

This is the drawback of truth functionality, and it is what McLaughlin refers to when he says that the truth functional calculus is only satisfactory as a logical model of a language in which conditionals do not exist. Many logicians have tried, as McLaughlin notes, to solve or reduce this problem of Fregean logic by searching for more satisfactory alternative models for conditionals that could be integrated in the overall logical system. Among the attempts that have been made to solve the problem of conditionals, none of them are, however, willing to fully give up on the view that the conditional is a function of the truth-value of its antecedent and consequent.

One tradition, represented by Adams and Edgington, claims that because of the abovementioned problems with a truth functional interpretation of conditionals, natural language conditionals do not have truth conditions at all, but rather probability conditions. Adams' thesis is that the conditional probability a subject assigns to 'q' given 'p' is defined as equal to the probability she assigns to 'p & q' divided on the probability she assigns to 'p', thereby preventing the consequent from being less probable than the antecedent. Another tradition, influenced by Adams and Grice, and represented by Jackson, claims that a conditional has truth conditions according to the material conditional, but assertion conditions according to whether the conditional can be asserted or believed. One then distinguishes between some truth functional content of a conditional on the one hand and its communicated pragmatic content, which is therefore claimed not to be relevant for the truth of the conditional, on the other. However, in trying to define assertability as the conditional being robust with respect to the truth of its antecedent, Jackson uses Adams' thesis for conditional probability of conditionals. The assertability of a conditional is here calculable from the antecedent and the consequent. We have then not really gotten any further from the notion of conditionals as functions.

A third tradition that is widely accepted is the possible-worlds theory of conditionals. Lewis and Stalnaker give an account of conditionals according to which a conditional is true (in the actual world) if in the closest possible world where 'p' is true, 'q' is true as well. In this approach, one avoids that a conditional is true whenever its antecedent is false. However, in every possible world, the material conditional holds as a model for conditionals, so that in a possible or an actual world, all true statements entails each other:

According to Stalnaker if 'p' is true in our world, then our world is the closest accessible world containing p and, because the conditional is proved by its confirmation, the conditional relation holds between p and all its world's happenings. If this stone is on the ground and the sun shines, then we are bound to accept both 'If the sun shines, then the stone is on the ground' and 'If the stone is on the ground, then the sun shines'.⁶

As we can see, the thought of not being able to calculate the truth, probability or assertability of a conditional from the truth, probability or assertability of its antecedent and its consequent seems unbearable. In all the approaches sketched above, the conditional is treated as a function of the value of its components, which means that such a calculation is a central part of the theories:

Consider, for instance, what is usually taken as the strongest evidence for the truth of 'If p then q', the joint fulfillment of 'p' and 'q'. This by no means furnishes proof of 'If p then q'... The truth of 'If p then q' cannot be extracted, as a matter of logical necessity, from the truths of 'p' and 'q'... Even some who reject the truth functional model of the singular conditional propose systems in which the truth of the conditional can be equated with the joint occurrence, in certain possible worlds, of the events mentioned in the 'if' clause and that mentioned in the 'then' clause.⁷

McLaughlin here points to the fact that a conditional 'If p then q' is usually taken to be demonstrated as true when both the antecedent and the consequent are true, i.e. by the joint fulfillment of 'p' and 'q'. However, even though I can observe both that grass is green and that snow is white, this is not sufficient for me to infer that 'If grass is green, then snow is white', nor that 'If snow is not white, then grass is not green'. Moreover, even if I start out with a conditional, for instance 'If Norway joins EU, then the interest rate will fall', I cannot from the fulfillment of both the antecedent and the consequent infer the truth of the conditional. It might for instance be the case that the interest rate falls for other reasons than Norway joining EU.

So even though many logicians acknowledge the problems with the material conditional and try to solve them by finding alternative ways of representing conditionals in a logical system, the alternatives seem always to have the character of plainly being *ad hoc* solutions to problems with the material conditional. Also, all the approaches are attempts to include conditionals in a formal logical system. Adams, Edgington, Grice, Jackson,

⁶ McLaughlin (1990), p. 31.

⁷ McLaughlin (1990), pp. 8-9.

Stalnaker, Lewis, and several other logicians, offer alternative solutions that are more intricate than the material conditional approach; however, all the different approaches basically depend on the material conditional. There seems to be a craving for a pure formalism, including algorithms and calculability. And as long as one is not willing to give up on this calculus conception of language, is it then at all possible to find a satisfactory approach to natural language? I think not.

Let us now, however, assume that this problem with a logical interpretation of conditionals can in fact be solved within such an extensional, truth functional, syntactic, compositional approach. What would be the consequences? According to McLaughlin, a truth functional logic can only be a logical model of a language addressed to a certain kind of world. So given that the truth functional logic *is* a satisfactory model of natural language, then natural language must have properties according to the six basic principles of modern propositional logic, as referred above. Moreover, given that natural language *has* these logical properties, so that the truth functional logic is in fact a scientific tool that helps us decide truth and validity of our statements and arguments; then natural language must be a language of a world that has its structure according to these principles:

The propositional calculus is well designed to serve as the logic of a language addressed to a world of which all one had to say was that certain events have or have not occurred or will or will not occur. And this arrangement would be acceptable if we really thought it the case that the world is a collection of discrete or unrelated events, the occurrence or nonoccurrence of which can be expressed by simple assertions and their denials. Because if reality consists wholly of elementary facts that can, in appropriate circumstances, be determined by observation to obtain or not, and if the sentence letters of the calculus are interpreted by statements or propositions that express these facts, then if the facts are known, all the truths about the world that are capable of rational representation can be embraced in a long conjunction of simple or atomic propositions and their negations of the form 'p.q.-r.-s, . . .' each element of which states the presence or absence of a fact.⁸

According to McLaughlin, if conditionals are truth functional (in the sense that any pair of statements forms a true conditional whenever it is not the case that the first statement is true and the second statement is false at the same time), then the world must be arranged in a way so that all relations that hold between its facts can be known by finding all the atomic facts. And since all statements are either true or false, and no statements are both

⁸ McLaughlin (1990), p. 2.

true and false at the same time, we have to assume that a conditional cannot be true for some people and false for others, unless one of the sides is wrong and the other is right. From this it follows that the world must be objective and independent of our observation of it and that we have access to this world. Further, since a conditional is false only in the circumstances where it can be proved false by the truth of the antecedent and the falsity of the consequent, and is always true when the antecedent is false, we must also assume that all hypotheses are testable. Otherwise, the rules of logic would not help us to a correct result when judging all counterfactual conditionals as true. So let us assume that all hypotheses can be tested, so that we actually can get a definite answer about the relation between two events: then we must also assume that we have direct access to the objective world's events through direct observation, so that the hypotheses can be tested directly. The result is that if we know all the atomic facts of the world, then we also know all the relations (conditional or otherwise) between these facts.

This picture of the world addressed by a truth functional language seems to fit into the philosophical tradition of logical atomism or logical positivism, that comprises both an ontology and a philosophy of language. Within this tradition, the world is taken to consist of atomic facts that are described by simple statements. These atomic facts form part of a structure that corresponds to the truth functional structure of language. However, since I do not want to commit myself to a specific theory, I will draw the following picture of the correlation between the truth functional logic, the truth functional language and the world addressed by such a language:

1. The role of language is first of all to describe the world (since only descriptive statements are true or false).
2. If one knows all the atomic facts about the world, one knows all the compound facts about the world, including the relation between these facts.
3. The world is objective (independent of us observing it).
4. One has access to this objective world through direct observation.
5. One decides the truth-values of the atomic facts about the world by observing directly the occurrence or non-occurrence of these facts.

There are several problems with this picture. First of all, it misses the point of how we interact with the world, both in our everyday life and in science. McLaughlin points out

that this is not a satisfactory picture when it comes to conditionals and relations between events. To reduce the conditional form ‘If p then q ’ to a negated truth functional conjunction ‘ $\neg(p \ \& \ \neg q)$ ’ or to a truth functional disjunction ‘ $\neg p \vee q$ ’ eliminates the very notion of a conditional relation.

But this is to trivialize an important region of speech. The relations between events are just as significant to us as the question of their occurrence. We want to know the circumstances under which things happen – and this is so whether the subject matter is particles of light, cells in the body, commercial responses to movements of prices on the open market, or the behavior or feelings of animals and humans. To ground a claim that ‘if p then q ’ is true on the fact that ‘ p ’ is false or ‘ q ’ true misses the point of what the conditional is meant to say. A conditional, when applied to the experienced world, attempts to report a dependency between events, a dependency that obtains as a result of physical connection, social convention, or human purposes; this objective is not fulfilled by the fact alone that our observations show that the assertion has not been disconfirmed.⁹

Most of our interactions with the world and each other depend on us handling conditionals in a totally different way from the observing of occurrence and non-occurrence of singular events. We see how absurd the picture above becomes, when Grice (obviously caught in a moment particularly weakened by his insistence on the material interpretation) asserts the following about our reasoning with conditionals: “No one would be interested in knowing that a particular relation (truth functional or otherwise) holds between two propositions without being interested in the truth-value of at least one of the propositions concerned, unless his interest were of an academic or theoretical kind”.¹⁰ So if I tell someone ‘If you fall down here, you’ll die’, this person will have to ask me: ‘Well, am I going to fall down?’ Or if he was more concerned with the consequent: ‘But tell me, am I going to die?’ Such questions would seem strange in light of the information provided with the conditional. Another situation could be in the classroom, where the physics teacher tells the students ‘If an iron bar is heated, it will expand’. The teacher would be surprised if the students could not see the usefulness of this information unless she could also tell them whether or not the iron bar actually is going to be heated.

Assuming that our interest in the world is primarily an interest in the occurrence or non-occurrence of single events, so that our interest in relations between events is reduced to a

⁹ McLaughlin (1990), p. 6.

¹⁰ Grice (1989), p. 61.

question about whether or not we observe 'p' and 'not-q', most of our conditionals would be useless and senseless:

We know that there are countless assertions that we regard as being true or false but that employ concepts that do not take observable instances. There are no observable properties through which such concepts as pressure, energy, force, gravity, and time are immediately instantiated.¹¹

Take for instance the following physical law: 'If a body is unmoved by forces, it will continue in a uniform movement or stay at rest.' We know that no bodies can be unmoved by forces. According to our truth functional approach, such a directly untestable conditional must be true, since it cannot be proved false. This means that the following conditional would also be judged as true: 'If a body is unmoved by forces, it will spin twice around the planet and fall down.' As we saw above, the Stalnaker/Lewis tradition wants to reduce this problem with counterfactual conditionals by referring to the closest accessible possible worlds where the antecedent 'p' is true. So if the consequent 'q' is true in all the possible worlds where 'p' is true, the conditional 'if p then q' is (necessarily) true. However, such a theory does not seem to get the job done for conditionals.

In helping us to impose order on the world, they (conditionals) help us to determine our own actions. Consequently, we are not concerned to know, when 'p' is false, whether 'q' is true in the closest (but by definition unactual) world in which 'p' is true. (How could one find out such a thing?) We want to know what would happen, what conclusion one might draw, if the event expressed by 'p' is actualized by its occurrence.¹²

We have seen how difficult it is to cut loose from the truth functional logic and its principles. None of the main traditions for attempts at solving the problem of conditionals in Fregean logic has dared to step out of the picture above that sketches the principles of a logic that is a model of a language that addresses an objective, directly observable world, consisting of unrelated events.

McLaughlin's approach to conditionals makes clear that our theories about language must be consistent with our theories about the world and our interaction with the world. Put differently: he indicates that it would be inconsistent to maintain the system of Fregean

¹¹ McLaughlin (1990), pp. 6-7.

¹² McLaughlin (1990), p. 35.

logic and at the same time reject the consequences of such a calculus conception of language that this is founded on. A new concept of language must then be founded on principles that are closely related to – in the sense that they cohere with – our views on the relation between language and the world.

What we need to do next is to try to take a step out of this calculus conception of language and look at the alternatives. This time we do not start out with a logical system, and then take a look at the language it models and at the world addressed by this language. No, this time we shall begin with ourselves as linguistic beings in the world.

2.

We are humans in the world. What is a human? A human is, among other things, an organic, feeling, social, thinking and linguistic being. Language is an essential aspect of our human nature, and our presence in the world is highly influenced by us being linguistic creatures. Through language we discover, create, imagine and communicate. Language is a key to understand ourselves, others and everything else in the world. We create ourselves through language. We interact through language. We constitute our world through language. Our world cannot be separated from us discovering, defining, manipulating, changing, destroying, creating, in short, influencing, it.

Much has been said about language: what language is, how we learn language, what we do with language, what relation there is between language and the world, and so on. However, according to Cody in ‘Words, You, and Me’, one keeps forgetting to ask why we have language in the first place, that is, what makes language go:

[T]hey analyze language and thought without *human* qualities as though those qualities were an embarrassment, or superfluous. I shall assert, brashly, that without those human qualities, those of believing, wanting, hoping, longing, aspiring, attempting to influence others to like, love, admire, throw in with, turn toward, conspire with, oneself, that is to say without the range of passions (a term I wish to use quite broadly) of which we are made, or anyway, motivated, nothing would get said or understood. Analysis that confines itself to truth, truth conditions, syntax, and such propositional thoughts as are claimed to provide the *content* of statements, will be washed of any interesting much less useful pigmentation. A stronger statement is justified: without the passion, no understanding is possible, and therefore, no language would make sense.¹³

¹³ Cody (2002), p. 278.

Language depends on us having some sort of motivation, namely passion. With “passion”, Cody means something like *an eager outreaching of the mind towards something*. But even this is too strong, he says. Human agency, no matter how disinterested it may be, involves passion. Cody is not happy with the term “passion”, but he can find none better. “I mean to include not only the list of passions, pale and redolent, ...but also the passion of belief or conviction (a passion that comes in degrees), the passion of intention or purpose, and the passion of inquiry. I include them all under the rubric because in each case there is an urge, or feeling, or an ineffable inner reality – ‘ineffable’ and ‘inner’ because no descriptive words have been, nor need be, found in ordinary discourse for their classification.”¹⁴

Our passions are according to Cody our motivations to speak or act at all. Language is thus totally dependent on a mind, an ‘I’, to do the things that we do with language: greet, insult, beg, pray, flatter, lie, brag, condole, flirt, humiliate, joke, and the list goes on and on. Without the ‘I’, there would be no language: “We could have computers, somehow, that ‘communicated’ (the sneers are indispensable) with each other. What we would not have is a language”.¹⁵ As Cody says, passion is what makes language go. Perhaps we should add that passion is what makes *us* go.

Cody’s rather vague meaning of passion seems to be compatible with Hume’s use of this term. According to Hume, passions come in degrees and are sometimes so calm that we do not even feel them: “These desires are of two kinds; either certain instincts originally implanted in our natures, such as benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children; or the general appetite to good, and aversion to evil, consider’d merely as such. When any of these passions are calm, and cause no disorder in the soul, they are very readily taken for the determination of reason...”¹⁶ The passions are what motivate the will, and without a will, an interest in something, nothing would get said or done. According to Hume, our propensity to pleasure and aversion to pain are the causes of all our actions, and following Cody, including language. Unless we have an interest in something, at least the preference for something over its absence, we would not even begin to figure out how to achieve it; that is, without passions, we would not be concerned with

¹⁴ Cody (2002), p. 279.

¹⁵ Cody (2002), p. 279.

¹⁶ Hume (1958), p. 164.

such things as causes and effects, means and ends or premises and conclusions of anything. In fact, we would not be concerned with anything at all.

So what passions do we have? What motivates us? What are our interests? Ourselves? What else? To love, be loved, develop, understand, master, play, socialize, explore, create; to contribute to the world in some way, to express ourselves, to show the world who we are. All these interests involve other beings, preferably other humans. We thus have a selfish interest in others. The fact that we need other humans forms the basis of our moral lives. To protect our relationships to others is a central part of our social interaction. We need to have a good relation to people that we have an interest in. And since we as humans share passions, including the capacity to feel sympathy, we are able to recognize our own feelings and reactions in others. The feeling of sympathy generates a moral interest in the other, a feeling of compassion. Our shared passions thus place us in a moral commitment to each other.

Our moral interest in others is not a selfish interest, even though we are affected by it. From sympathy we get conscience, and this ability to feel good or bad about our own actions affects our behavior. This moral commitment has influence on what we do, but also on what we say, how we say it, when we say it, and whether we say it at all. We are in a constant state of conditionally judging and choosing our words and actions, depending on what outcome we want. In our interaction with others, then, we do not always say what we believe to be true, even if it would be highly relevant to our situation. I find a colleague rather pathetic, but I would never tell him. I think it's boring to look at my friends' new babies, but I couldn't tell them that. I slept with another man two years ago, but I could never tell my husband.

This means that when I am about to choose to say something that I think might hurt the other or destroy my relationship to others, I must consider the consequences of my utterance, and whether I am willing to take that risk. Once I have an interest towards someone, I am morally committed to that person. I cannot tell my husband about my infidelities and expect my honesty to be more important to him than my betrayal. I know that telling him is to risk hurting him and, even worse, losing him. I cannot tell my boss to sod off if I'm not willing to risk my job. So not only do we risk our relationship with others; what we say can have enormous effects on our lives, but also on the lives of others.

But this does not only concern what I say, it also concerns what I do. I cannot promise my husband that I'll be home for dinner, and then be gone all night. I cannot spit my boss in the face, and become surprised when I loose my job.

Communication is accordingly a high-risk activity. What we choose to say and do, and what we choose not to say and do, can result in considerable and unwanted changes in our own and others' lives. Our interaction with others is complex, complicated, delicate and under the influence of an ocean of interests. I have an interest in the person I interact with, and I have an interest in the outcome of the interaction. The conditional considerations of consequence and risk, and subsequently making a choice, play an important role in both our utterances and our actions. What we choose to say and what we choose to do is a result of the same process of conditional reasoning, and their consequences and risks are the same. A perlocutionary aspect is present in both: What we want to say or do is conditionally related to our interest in the outcome of our utterance or action. What consequence will it have if I do or say this? Will I hurt you? Will I destroy our relationship? Can I live with this consequence? Is this the life I want to live? Is this the person I want to be?

Let us now assume that I actually choose to tell my husband about my affair. Straightforwardly, I could just say at the dinner table: 'Hon, I've been having an affair for some years now.' But this would not be a very tactical approach if I want to be both honest and stay married. So one thing is *what* I choose to say. Another is *how* I choose to say it, the manner, when I have considered what consequences I want to achieve. My interest in the expected consequence of my action or utterance is influenced by my interest, moral or selfish, in the person involved, or my passions for this person. This passion affects the manner in which I choose to perform the utterance or act. Since I do not want to hurt my husband, but still be honest with him, I should probably try to break the news gently: first focusing on how we have been having problems in our marriage, how lonely I have been, how much I want this marriage to work, how I have done things that I regret, but now want to be honest with him in order to develop our relationship. Then I can tell him about my big mistakes, and how sorry I am. But I must not forget that the manner in which I say what I want to say is also connected with my tone of voice and my body language, in addition to my choice of words. Not to mention the chosen time and place.

These contextual aspects are all important for the complete message communicated, the outcome of all this. I cannot just say that I am sorry if I do not look sorry; my body language has to match my words in order to make what I say convincing. In fact, what I say is often of secondary importance to my body language and tone of voice. (Just think of how we talk to babies, or even animals.) Another important aspect of the linguistic performance is what kind of language is used. Whether my language is poetic, dispassionate, up- or low-class, vulgar, naïve or intellectual will also affect my message, and perhaps even more how other people view me as a person.

To master social settings is thus to master all these aspects of language. Language is socially constructive as well as socially constructed. I then mean language in this broad sense, including both verbal and non-verbal communication. Not only is language a tool for communication. All communication is language. The bodily movements of shrugging ones shoulders, nodding, winking, waving, shaking one's head, raising ones eyebrows, and several other facial and bodily expressions, are all important parts of communication. Used alone in a particular situation they are communicative devices on a par with verbal language.

To say that all communication is language enables us to call everything that conveys a message part of language. Consider for instance a piece of art: Is a sculpture merely an object? Is a painting merely a description of a piece of the world? No, even an unmanipulated photo carries a message. The artist has selected that small aspect of the world, that particular time and place, that particular perspective, and shown it to us for a reason or passion. Through her art, the artist submits a comment to the world; she gives a statement, a message, to the audience. (According to Barlindhaug even a computer game communicates a message, and some more than others: The goal of the game can for instance be to kill the Nazis or Arabic terrorists.) The receiver is expected to interact with the art, so that the message communicated through the art gets from the artist to the audience. The whole picture, the whole impression of the art, including the specific context in which it is exhibited, forms the message expressed. What speaks to us is visual, contextual and experiential, but so is the direct speech of a person: the body language, the tone of voice, the words, time and place chosen: these aspects are all equally important parts of what is communicated. As in verbal language, the receiver must interpret the piece of art. But the language of art cannot be translated into verbal language. That art is part of

language is still evident from the fact that when freedom of speech is threatened, as for instance under totalitarian regimes, a whole range of expressions of art may become illegal.

Language, including art, is power, and therefore it can be dangerous. We can for instance use language to manipulate, praise or suppress; or to produce in the audience hate, anger, love or solidarity. The choice of vocabulary affects our feelings toward something. Think of how concepts as ‘victim’, ‘terrorist’, ‘Muslim’, ‘we’ and ‘they’ create feelings of compassion, fear, alienation, solidarity and distance, respectively. Further, to call the headgear of Muslim women a ‘veil’ gives different associations than to call it a ‘headscarf’. Cavell says that language and the world become elaborated and distorted together,¹⁷ which indicated that the world is not just there as an object for us to observe and describe. The world changes, not only along with new inventions or destructions, but also along with our descriptions and definitions of it. When we organize the world into different categories, are these categories in the world or in language? For instance, we can choose to organize the world into four elements, or into different categories as ‘material’ and ‘non-material’, ‘atoms’ and ‘particles’ or ‘good’ and ‘evil’. With the different ways of categorizing the world, we do not only change our perspective at the world; at the same time we change the world.

According to Searle, we understand and interpret everything in the world against our Network and Background.¹⁸ By “the Network” he means the network of all knowledge, belief, opinion and presupposition that we need to possess in order to fully understand a certain sentence. We can also call this a model, against which a sentence, a relation or a fact is justified, understood, stated and explained. Nothing can be true or even meaningful outside the context of a model, or a network. If I say that you should quit smoking, I say this within a model or network of knowledge and belief about smoking being related to cancer and cardiovascular disease, that these are mortal diseases, that one of two smokers die from it, that I fear that you will die from smoking, that I do not want you to die, and so on. The network is in principle possible to articulate. But in following out the threads of the network, Searle says, we will eventually reach some kind of bedrock that seems too fundamental to count as beliefs. These are more like stances I take towards the world, and

¹⁷ Cavell (1976), p. 19.

¹⁸ Searle (1992), p. 22ff.

form what Searle calls “the Background”, which are sets of skills, ways of dealing with things, ways of behaving, cultural practices, and general know-how of both biological and cultural sorts. This background consists of presuppositions that are themselves pre-intentional or pre-propositional.

One can say that the background is the model I have of the world and that underlies all my activities and opinions and beliefs and knowledge. The background is something I take for granted in the way that I would not even think of questioning it. Think of the fact that when I see something, for instance my cup of tea, I see it as a spatial unit, as something I can reach out for, and touch, and move. If I move the cup, I see it from a different perspective, but I still see it as the same unit in the same space with the same possibilities. The background is the model through which I have access to the world. This means that nothing can enter the mind in a purely objective shape. So even though the world in principle is objective, we cannot have access to this world. We cannot help but see the world through and against our personal network and background.¹⁹

When I for instance try to find out more about what conditionals are, I already have a great deal of knowledge about them. Much of this knowledge is something I possess as a linguistic being, and when I think about some conditionals I know and reflect on their likenesses and variations, I learn and discover in myself knowledge about conditionals that I did not have in an explicit way before I started thinking about them. My attempt at a description thus turns into discovery. In this way, I can use my network in a creative way, and discover new patterns and connections by changing the perspective of my inquiry. While I ordinarily use my conditional knowledge in practice, I now try to systematize and reflect on them from a theoretical and philosophical perspective. Moreover, in adding the network of others, for instance my supervisor, to my study of conditionals, we will both learn much more. Not only do we learn from sharing knowledge; first of all the constant change in perspective and flow of associations activate and intensify the creative process. Once the exchange of ideas is over, who came up with what idea is practically impossible to say. As Zeldin points out: “That is the aspect of conversation that particularly excites me: how conversation changes the way you see the world, and even changes the world.”²⁰

¹⁹ Here I do not mean ‘personal’ in the sense of ‘private’, since I believe that most of the network and the background is something we share as humans, or at least as members of a culture.

²⁰ Zeldin (1998), p. 3.

Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don't just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought. Conversation does not just reshuffle the cards: it creates new cards.²¹

However, this kind of productive discourse must involve some common purpose, for instance with respect to what kind of conversation we are having. Consider a conversation between Leo and Lea where Leo thinks that Lea is there as his lawyer and that they now have a professional meeting about his divorce. Lea, on the other hand, thinks that they are having a personal conversation where Leo is trying to pick her up by talking about his terrible marriage. Such a conversation will probably end up in misunderstandings and some frustration.

Discourse succeeds in part because its participants have a common understanding of the contexts in which statements are made. If this understanding is not present, then communication breaks down. The circumstances under which an assertion is justified or placed in doubt will then be different for different speakers.²²

Searle calls this common understanding of the purpose of the conversation “shared intentionality”, and he sees conversations as a paradigm of shared collective behavior. With this he means that: “when two people greet each other and begin a conversation, they are beginning a joint activity rather than two individual activities.”²³ He gives an example where you and I are pushing a car. This is a joint activity, something we do together and that we understand and do in the context of being something we do together. If it turns out that you were not pushing, I have not only misunderstood what you were doing, but also what *I* was doing, since I thought I was pushing as part of *our* pushing. “The phenomenon of shared collective behavior is a genuine social phenomenon and underlies much social behavior. We are blinded to this fact by the traditional analytic devices that treat all intentionality as strictly a matter of the individual person.”²⁴

We understand and identify ourselves against the background of a shared intentionality and of collective behavior. To understand ourselves as humans is to understand ourselves as part of a common understanding of reality, a common background or model of the world. I

²¹ Zeldin (1998), p. 9.

²² McLaughlin (1990), p. 42.

²³ Searle (1992), p. 22.

²⁴ Searle (1992), p. 22.

understand and constitute myself through my interaction with others and with the world. I see myself as interacting in and with the world, and the way I do and master this interaction forms my image of myself. Am I mastering this? Do I succeed or fail? But I cannot understand myself to be succeeding or failing unless I understand myself as judged by others. I see myself through the eyes of others, or at least I see myself as I think I am in the eyes of others. Am I loved or disliked? When I see myself through the eyes of others, I get content or discontent with myself. In this way, my private and my social world cannot be detached. Nor can the physical world be detached from the social world.

When we interact with each other and the world, we have an all-embracing, conditional, unarticulated pre-understanding of how the world can be, what we can do, what effects and reactions our actions can produce, what we can be, and what it means to be a human that acts and interacts in the world. Without a conditional understanding, we would never act at all. Unless I believe that my actions can result in or help me achieve something I have an interest in, how could my passions and interests motivate my actions? Our interest in ourselves, each other and the world gives us an interest in conditional relations such as means and ends, dispositions and triggering factors, premises and conclusions, actions and reactions, causes and effects. But if we did not already have a pre-understanding of such conditional relations, we could not possibly look for them. And the perhaps most existential questions: Why are we here? How did we get here? Where do we come from? can only be asked in light of a conditional understanding of the world.

3.

In the beginning of this paper, I cite McLaughlin categorically declaring that conditionals are important actors on the linguistic stage with major roles to play. And he could not be more right. But conditionals are not only main characters in language; all our interpretation and understanding of ourselves, each other and the world is conditionally structured. The most fundamental conditional understanding is part of the pre-intentional or pre-propositional background, against which everything else can be interpreted, explained, understood and articulated, including the conditional relations that constitute our network of knowledge, belief, opinion and presupposition. Conditional and causal relations are substantial structures in our world and language. And it would not make any sense to ask whether they are part of an objective physical world; whether or not this world's events are conditionally related. Our world is the world, and to us, it is conditionally structured. Our

world does not consist merely of events, but of actions, interactions, intentions and interpretations. We are active in and interactive with our world: We ask and find answers, we change, influence and define; thus constituting our world according to our passions.

If we try to clear out all disturbing contextual elements of language in order to find its core, its essence, as is the aim in the calculus conception of language, we often make the mistake of inferring that this is all that language is, at least what is significant. We then end up shaking off everything that makes language what it is, that is: a human activity. By introducing language as a human activity, and humans as active in the world, we get a richer and more appealing picture of language. And perhaps the most important, we get the conditionals back in.

Accordingly, the material conditional is not only a reduction and downgrading of conditionals; it dissolves the whole idea of conditional relations. If anything, we should have learned from Hume that we cannot reduce a conditional relation to the direct observation of a constant joint occurrence of two distinct events. What we need is everything else: the network and the background we get from acting in and with the world. One has thought that a conditional relation is a material conditional plus something more. But this “something more”, our conditionally structured world of network and background, is what is implicitly interpreted into and thereby supports the whole material conditional illusion. In order to give any meaning at all to the material conditional, what we need is the natural conditional structure together with our activities and experiences in the world that constitutes our network and background, that is: we need everything else than the material conditional in order to give it content. I suggest that it is now time to discard the material conditional and instead settle for the “something more”.

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