

# ProtoSociology

An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research

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Facts, Slingshots and Anti-Representationalism  
On Stephen Neale's *Facing Facts*

Edited by Gerhard Preyer and Georg Peter

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# INTRODUCTION: SLINGSHOT ARGUMENTS AND THE END OF REPRESENTATIONS

*Gerhard Preyer and Georg Peter*

Modern philosophy has argued that ideas, utterances and inscriptions have a content and the power to represent reality. Thereby is caused a lot of debates how mind and reality, language and reality, facts and their representations are related. Yet there is in the philosophy of the last century a long tradition of antirepresentationalism like, for example, L. Wittgenstein's criterial behavioral semantics of mental states, G. Ryle's critique of Descartes' myth, Quine's concept of disposition and behaviorism in general. In particular Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty claim to revise totally the modern – the Cartesian and empiristic – picture of epistemology which implies a critique of the correspondence theory of truth in general. Davidson has argued that facts achieve nothing for the theory of meaning and ontology, and the formal Slingshot argument undermines individual facts. This goes back in different forms to Gottlob Frege, Alonzo Church, Kurt Gödel and Willard van Orman Quine. The epistemological and ontological issue settled by Slingshot arguments is *anti-representationalism* and at the same time ruling out relativism and scepticism as well. The argument is a new turn to reject representationalism and at the same time it goes hand in hand with the rejection of a foundation of empirical knowledge. Rorty's neo-pragmatic view in philosophy, for example, goes along with Davidson's antirepresentationalism in epistemology. The conception of our book follows this turn and the epistemological and ontological questions which are emerged thereby.

Stephen Neale has worked since 1995 on the Slingshot argument, which is rather a family of arguments than a single one. In *Facing Facts* (2001) he has formally systemized the Slingshot argument and analyzed its consequences for epistemology and ontology. He emphasizes that the end of representations and the dismissal of the scheme-content distinction – the so-called third dogma of empiricism – follows from the rejection of the modern correspondent theory of truth stating that sentences stand for individual facts. Such facts are assumed as non-linguistic entities to which representations correspond (Russell). If there are no facts, there is no representation of them. Both is essentially connected because the legitimacy of representation is dependent on the legitimacy of the ontology of facts. Neale gives a detailed formal analysis of the argument – along

Quinean lines –, and he elaborates that if the Slingshot is to succeed to reach the realm of facts it needs a precise theory of description. This leads us to the heart of much of twentieth-century and contemporary philosophy: “How is the content of thoughts, utterances and inscriptions by compositionality to be characterized?”

Neale presents a defense of facts which rests on a detailed discussion of an argument that has been used to bring them into disrepute. Neale identifies the work of Davidson as one of his main targets. Davidson rejects facts and the problems they raise. In her essay, Anita Avramides explores the debate between Neale and Davidson. She suggests that, with his concentration on the Slingshot argument, Neale overlooks the bigger picture to which Davidson has drawn our attention. She begins by reminding the reader of Russell’s defense of facts and the role they play in Russell’s philosophy. Russell’s defense of facts is intimately bound up with his defense of a certain form of realism. She moves from Russell’s defense of facts to Davidson’s rejection of them. Reliance on the Slingshot argument is, she suggests, only *part* of Davidson’s rejection of facts. The other part has to do with what is required for an adequate theory of truth. It is what we learn when we look closely at what he says on the role of other person in his philosophy. Like Russell, Davidson sees these issues as bound up with questions of realism and anti-realism. If Davidson is right about the role of other person, there is no need for facts, Avramides argues.

Neale attempts to show the significance of Slingshot reasoning through displaying the central role in Davidson’s argument against the scheme-content distinction. In his essay, Richard N. Manning weighs on the philosophical significance of Slingshot arguments, given their logic as revealed by Neale’s careful analysis. On one hand, he discusses the relationship between the substitution principles and substitution rules that the Gödel Slingshot exploits, and the general semantic theses that might seem to make them plausible on the other hand. He goes on, as many others have, to reject the idea that friends of facts and other intensional items have any good reason to think that these principles and rules are even *prima facie* or *presumptively* plausible. Manning denies that the Slingshot or its conclusion is required for Davidson’s argument against the scheme-content distinction. He also shows the way in which Davidson’s argument depends upon the idea that anything that could count as a scheme – a language – would necessarily be the kind of thing in which we could say the quite ordinary sorts of things that make up our mundane linguistic practices. Neale’s brilliant definitive discussion of the slingshot arguments forces us to attend to ways in which theories of fact and semantic theories constrain

one another. Two such constraints pertain to the way a semantic theory must allow for the representation of facts. In his essay, Stephen Schiffer calls these constraints the fact expressibility and the object representation. He argues that a theory of singular terms only be touched on in *Facing Facts* but spelled out in some of his more recent work is problematic, since it arguably commits Neale to a theory that fails to satisfy both constraints.

In her essay, Helen Steward considers the bearing of so-called Slingshot arguments on the connective *because*. Is an ontology of facts useful for understanding causation? She discusses Davidson's famous Slingshot, deployed in support of the thesis that causation cannot be a relation between facts, and also a neater version whose implications are discussed by Neale. She challenges the assumption (G. E. M. Anscombe, W. Lycan, H. Mellor, Neale) that Davidson's argument, which actually concerns the connective "The fact that ... caused it to be the case that" (FC) might equally have been directed against *because*, by pointing out important differences between the two connectives. Differences which render *because* invulnerable to attacks which are, by contrast, damaging to some tempting interpretations of FC. It suggests that the true import of Slingshot arguments directed at these causal-explanatory connectives is not so much to show that a fact-free ontology of causation is required, but to reveal the fine-grained nature of the facts which causation relates. The suggestion is made, at the end, that the distinction between causation and causal explanation may turn out to be far less clear-cut than many philosophers have assumed.

What can we learn from a careful examination of the ordinary language locution "correspondence to the facts"? Austin thought that such an examination was crucial to a philosophical understanding of truth. P. Strawson and J. Searle both regarded the locution as an explanatory vacuous expression, unworthy of serious philosophical scrutiny. In her essay, Marga Reimer develops Austin's view, arguing that "correspondence to the facts" is but one of a "galaxy" (as Austin called it) of fitting/measuring locutions employed in the ordinary, everyday assessment of statements and beliefs. This galaxy includes such locutions as: fitting, matching, lining up, congruence, coincidence, conformity, measuring, precision, exactitude, and many more. Reimer goes on to claim that the "correspondence metaphor" is what cognitive linguists call a "conceptual metaphor", whose careful analysis can tell us much about our pre-theoretical conception of truth. In particular, Reimer contends that an examination of this metaphor and related ones reveals that ordinary folk construe truth as a relational phenomenon that admits of varying degrees of success and failure. She stresses three points in connection with this idea: firstly, philosophers

must begin their inquiries into truth with our pre-theoretical notion of truth, secondly, to take fitting and measuring locutions seriously does not mean (pace Austin) to take them literally, and thirdly, there are specific types of errors that result when the philosopher interprets the locutions in question literally, including what Reimer calls the “theorization of correspondence”. This amounts to an unmotivated replacement of the intuitive content of “correspondence” with a technically philosophical one.

In her essay, Jennifer Hornsby engages with some philosophical questions about facts which seem to me to be left hanging at the end of *Facing Facts*. She disputes Neale’s claim that we can settle for Russell’s theory of facts. And she brings into the picture a Fregean account of facts, which holds that facts are true propositions. The account belongs to a discussion of Neale’s book in as much as it is quite in keeping with the Davidsonian philosophy that Neale’s work on Slingshot arguments was meant to put to the test. One reason why Neale paid no attention to such a Fregean account was that he thought that any fact-theorist who intends to get metaphysical work out of facts would endorse a Principle of Substitutivity for Singular Terms (PSST) for the fact identity connective ( $\text{FIC}[\Phi, R]$ ). Hornsby suggests that PSST isn’t really endorsed by Russell. And she explains why it needs to be no difficulty for the Fregean account that it does not endorse it. Hornsby offers some defense of the Fregean account, suggesting that we need a uniform account of ‘that’-clauses. Her idea is that the Fregean account should be thought of as intended to cast away darkness more than to shed light.

Mark Sainsbury, in his essay, gives a commentary from the perspective of negative free logic which allows definite descriptions to count as referring expressions (NFL). He argues that the philosophical motivation for such a logic is already hostile to facts, and also to Russellian propositions. As made explicit in one of Russell’s early contributions (*Problems of Philosophy*), enthusiasm both for Russellian propositions and for facts tends to presuppose that we can isolate referents with no regard to how reference to them is made. One would accordingly expect that NFL theorists would welcome the kinds of restrictions on fact theories which Neale derives from his Slingshots, and Sainsbury shows that this expectation is fulfilled: the formal changes needed to bring Neale’s proofs into line with NFL make very little difference to the upshot. Slingshots can also be used to argue for the conclusion that definite descriptions are not referring expressions. One version of the argument uses the premise that any singular term, or at least any definite description which is treated as a singular term, must license PSST. If this is correct, then indeed singular definite de-



criptions are not singular terms; but Sainsbury suggests that restrictions on PSST are well motivated, and that a suitably restricted version is consistent with treating singular definite descriptions as singular terms.

What is the relation between compositional semantics, truth and different kinds of substitutivity? In his essay, Gabriel Sandu will give an example of a compositional semantics which can be interpreted as assigning facts to sentences, and he will argue that the significance of Gödel's argument cannot be taken to be the impossibility of fact-semantics. Sandu evaluates the two compositional interpretations discussed by Neale's in the *Postscript of Facing Facts*. In one interpretation, variables are explicitly mentioned, in the other they are not. He prefers the second interpretation in accordance with his view of binding as essentially a semantical phenomenon which concerns variation of sequences in the domain. For Neale, the semantical heart of variation is the appeal to sequences other than the ones at which a formula is evaluated. Although Sandu finds these insights valuable, he also thinks that there is something important about binding which Neale's notion of variation doesn't capture. Sandu will make his point by comparing Neale's notion of binding with the one which emerges from dynamic logic where binding is a strongly semantical notion but does not reduce to variation.

Neale's treatment of Slingshot arguments shows a respect for the way in which formal matters should command the attention of metaphysicians, without overestimating the power of formal considerations to settle metaphysical issues. Davidson's Slingshot arguments claim to demolish the myth of subjective, that is, representationalism in epistemology. Yet in the end he invoked many other and much richer considerations that have to do with interpretation and intentionality in order to rule out realism in the "representationalist" mode. He regarded all of these considerations as ruling out relativism as well. However, neither he, nor any relativists have provided an adequate formal characterization of the relativist position. In her essay, Carole Rovane takes up the challenge of providing such a characterization, and she identifies the dividing issue between relativists and absolutists as an issue about whether there is a single, consistent and complete body of truths. Absolutists affirm that there is such a thing, while relativists deny it, affirming instead that there can be many incomplete bodies of truths. Rovane argues that this way of framing the issue is more faithful to the intuitive content of the doctrine of relativism than Crispin Wright's suggestion. It also brings out that this way of framing the issue has practical implications, with the result that absolutism and relativism are best conceived as alternative stances that we may take toward inquiry and

interpersonal relations. When the issue is conceived along these formal and practical lines, it emerges that metaphysical realism provides us with no reason to prefer absolutism over relativism. By way of contrast, Davidson's argument against conceptual relativism – and, hence, in favor of absolutism – emerges as having a power and significance that has not been appreciated.

What is the general philosophical significance of and motivation for Neale's *Facing Facts*? In his essay, Olav Gjelsik suggests the following points: firstly, the relationship between scepticism and the rejection of individual facts is, at best, remote. *Facing Facts* mentions Rorty's claim that accepting individual facts and representations opens the door for epistemological scepticism, and it does so in the context of motivating the present exploration of facts. This motivation is a problematic one if there is no connection. Secondly, some connections with the deep considerations about meaning and content are not fully brought out in *Facing Facts*. Gjelsik tries to claim this by investigating the relationship between Neale and "Davidsonians". His first claim is: someone who is a bit like Davidson and inspired by him could accept individual facts and representations as long as those things do not play any role in explaining truth. Such facts would have no metaphysical standing, but they would still provide reasons to reject less fine-grained notions of individual fact, as, for example, Russell's. The second claim he makes is that someone quite like Davidson would have sufficient reason to reject individual facts independently of the success or failure of the Slingshot. This last point is important for understanding the exact role of the Slingshot in Davidson's philosophy of language, and it modifies the picture that this view relies on the success of the Slingshot. Maybe Davidson was so convinced of the correctness of the Slingshot that he overplayed its philosophical role. We should not make that mistake, Gjelsik argues.

Neale's *Facing Facts* is the first book wholly devoted to the slingshot argument. It is an comprehensive examination of the working, presuppositions and significance of Gödel's and Davidson's slingshots and the impact it has on different theories of description. All this makes it an outstanding starting point for further discussion in which we still have to 'face facts' and work on a further clarification of the relation between ontology and language. In particular the problem is pointed out whether there is a strong relationship between the Slingshot argument and the deny of the scheme-content distinction in the theory of knowledge. All this leads us once again to the question how language and world are connected, that is, to one of the central themes of analytical philosophy and ontology in the contemporary scene. The project was initiated by Protosociology, J. W. Goethe-University, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. We

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## IMPRESSUM

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## Bookpublications of the Project (extract)

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**Interpretation, Sprache und das Soziale.** Philosophische Aufsätze. Gerhard Preyer. Verlag Humanities Online 2005.

**Borderlines in a Globalized World.** New Perspectives in a Sociology of the World System. Gerhard Preyer, Mathias Bös (eds.). Kluwer 2002.

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**Lebenswelt – System – Gesellschaft.** Konstruktionsprobleme der „Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns“ von Jürgen Habermas. Gerhard Preyer. Verlag Humanities Online 2000.

**Strukturelle Evolution und das Weltsystem:** Theorien, Sozialstruktur und evolutionäre Entwicklungen. Gerhard Preyer (Hrsg.). Suhrkamp Verlag 1998.

**Die globale Herausforderung.** Wie Deutschland an die Weltspitze zurückkehren kann. Gerhard Preyer. Verlag Science-Digital 2003 (FAZ/Gabler Edition 1998).

**System der Rechte, demokratischer Rechtsstaat und Diskurstheorie des Rechts nach Jürgen Habermas.** Hrsg. von Werner Krawietz / Gerhard Preyer. Sonderheft der Zeitschrift Rechtstheorie 3 1996.

**Integriertes Managent.** Was kommt nach der Lean-Production? Gerhard Preyer/Jakob Schissler. Verlag Science-Digital 2003 (FAZ, Blickbuch Wirtschaft 1996).

### Philosophy

**Contextualism in Philosophy.** Knowledge, Meaning and Truth. Gerhard Preyer, Georg Peter (eds.). Oxford University Press 2005.

**Concepts of Meaning.** Framing an Integrated Theory of Linguistic Behavior. Gerhard Preyer, Georg Peter, Maria Ulkan (eds.). Kluwer 2003.

**Analytische Ästhetik.** Eine Untersuchung zu Nelson Goodman und zur lit. Parodie. Georg Peter. ONTOS-Verlag 2002.

**Logical Form and Language.** Gerhard Preyer, Georg Peter (eds.). Oxford University Press 2002.

**Unser die Welt.** Sprachphilosophische Grundlegungen der Erkenntnistheorie. Ausgewählte Artikel. W. K. Essler. Herausgegeben von Gerhard Preyer. Verlag Humanities Online 2002.

**Donald Davidson's Philosophy.** From Radical Interpretation to Radical Contextualism. Gerhard Preyer. Verlag Humanities Online, dt. 2001, engl. 2006.

**The Contextualization of Rationality.** Gerhard Preyer, Georg Peter (eds.). Mentis 2000.

**Reality and Humean Supervenience.** Essays on the Philosophy of David Lewis. Gerhard Preyer, Frank Siebelt (eds.). Rowman & Littlefield 2001.

**Intention – Bedeutung – Kommunikation.** Kognitive und handlungstheoretische Grundlagen der Sprachtheorie. Gerhard Preyer, Maria Ulkan, Alexander Ulfig (Hrsg.). Westdeutscher Verlag 1997, Humanities Online 2001.

## Gerhard Preyer

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**Gerhard Preyer**

# Soziologische Theorie der Gegenwartsgesellschaft

*Mitgliedschaftstheoretische Untersuchungen*

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# Context-Sensitivity and Semantic Minimalism

## *Essays on Semantics and Pragmatics*

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# Contextualism in Philosophy: Knowledge, Meaning, and Truth

**Gerhard Preyer, Georg Peter (eds.)**

In epistemology and in philosophy of language there is fierce debate about the role of context in knowledge, understanding, and meaning. Many contemporary epistemologists take seriously the thesis that epistemic vocabulary is context-sensitive. This thesis is of course a semantic claim, so it has brought epistemologists into contact with work on context in semantics by philosophers of language. This volume brings together the debates, in a set of twelve specially written essays representing the latest work by leading figures in the two fields. All future work on contextualism will start here.

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