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# COMMUNICATION & COGNITION

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# IS THERE ANY NORMATIVE CLAIM INTERNAL TO STATING FACTS?

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#### Summary

In this paper I want to discuss a thesis by Jürgen Habermas according to which a normative claim is built into speech acts of all categories, including those of the assertive class. It will be argued that Habermas' reasons are insufficient to establish the thesis. They are sufficient merely to establish a much weaker thesis: the thesis that moral, legal or other normative standards can be applied to every speech act - as they can be applied to all other sorts of acts (as distinct from mere events) as well. Habermas' approach is based on a confusion of conditions that are internal and conditions that are external to the performance of speech acts. In accordance with Searle an analysis of the internal conditions of assertives is presented. It will enable us to prove against Habermas that the specifications of his rightness claim are merely regulative rules on, but not constitutive rules of assertive speech acts.

Reading the title of this paper one might wonder whether the word "claim" is in place, since claims, according to our intuitive notion, ought to be explicit. The word is used in this paper because I want to discuss Jürgen Habermas' thesis that a normative claim ("Anspruch") is internal to speech acts of all categories. In the case of assertives of course Habermas thinks of it as something *implicit*, as a kind of presupposition, i.e. of something much weaker than an explicit claim. Nevertheless we may adopt this as a manner of speaking for the sake of Habermas' argument. In his "Theory of Communicative Action" (1) Habermas advances the following thesis: In the performance of - that's a crucial point - every speech act a speaker raises four "claims to validity", each of them saying that the "conditions of validity" are fulfilled:

(1) an intelligibility claim (to the effect that his speech act is understandable),

- (2) a truthfulness claim (to the effect that his speech act is sincere),
- (3) a rightness claim (to the effect that his speech act is normatively justified, that is: morally/legally right), and
- (4) a truth claim (to the effect that his speech act is true).

Immediately the question arises: Do we ever say "This speech act is understandable - hence it's valid", or "This speech act is sincere - hence it's valid"? Well, we do not say that, but again, for the sake of argument, we may accept the ascription of "validity" to (1) and (2) as a manner of speaking.

According to Habermas usually one of these validity claims is more or less (2) explicit - called the "dominant" claim -, whereas the other three are implicit (3). So if somebody says "You should open the window", the moral rightness claim is dominant, because "should" in this sentence means just "that's the right thing for you to do, and since it is the right thing for you to do, it is also the right thing to ask you to do so". But implicitly the speaker also claims that his request is understandable (that's the intelligibility claim) and that he wants the hearer to open the window, i.e. that he means what he says (that's the sincerity claim). There is a problem about the truth claim. Let's suppose A says "Open the window" and B asserts the truth of the content of this request by saying "The window is open". B then of course has not confirmed the validity claim of this request. On the contrary, that's a negation of the request: in fact he has made the request inoperative. In the case of an assertion the denial of the truth of the propositional content is a denial of the assertion, whereas in the case of a direction, just reversely, the assertion of the truth of the propositional content is a denial of the direction. It's only in the first case that the speech act is assessible simply as true or false - the other categories of speech acts don't have anything exactly like that truth claim that can be assessed in the performance of an assertive speech act. To save Habermas' thesis we have to switch over to what is usually called "existential presuppositions". In the example discussed here, these would be the assumptions that you are there, that a window is there, that the window can be opened and that you are able to open the window - and clearly all these can be true or false. - To summarize these points: by a serious and literally meant request a speaker commits himself to the intelligibility, rightness, and truthfulness of the request, and to the fulfilment of the existential presuppositions of the request; by way of his commitment to the rightness of the request he obliges the hearer to comply with the request. Other ends (e.g. to amuse or bore the hearer with his request) are open to him - none of them is internal to the performance of the speech act. So we may for the present assume that Habermas' thesis is correct for directives, although this of course cannot be proven by the examination of just one example.

Expressives will be left unexamined because that's not the topic under discus-

sion here (in the case of this class of speech acts it is hard to see that there is any other claim than the truthfulness claim as dominant and the intelligibility claim as implicit (4)).

The intelligibility claim of course is always presupposed but never dominant. It's clearly always an internal criticism of a speech act to say "That's unintelligible". But the intelligibility claim is never internal to the speech act's being a speech act of a particular illocutionary category (e.g. assertive or expressive). It's internal to its being a speech act at all. The other validity claims (truthfulness, rightness, truth) are dominant in different types of speech acts, the intelligibility claim is not in this way specific to any type of speech act. (Therefore Searle was right in putting it, as a "normal input-output condition" (5), somewhat on a different level.)

For the rest of this paper the features only of the assertive class shall be analysed. As we have just seen, the intelligibility claim is internal to all speech acts. By definition, the truth claim is internal to speech acts of the assertive class. Truth and truthfulness are internally connected; by a serious and literally meant assertion the speaker commits himself to the truth of the assertion; he claims that his assertion is true, that it corresponds to the facts (truth claim), and he (implicitly) claims that he believes that it is true (truthfulness claim). But one might just deny, against Habermas, that the normative rightness claim is internal to the performance of a statement. This of course would not necessarily mean that there isn't any morally relevant claim internal to the performance of a statement, since truthfulness, on the contrary, without a doubt is morally relevant (6). But Habermas' thesis is much stronger, for he holds the view that the speaker implicitly claims that his act of stating is normatively justified. (This thesis, which refers to a genuinely normative dimension, is also different from the following argument that could be advanced in favour of a morally relevant claim: According to Searle a speaker who makes an assertion that p implicitly claims that he was able to find out whether p is the case. But, if this were correct, a person which asserted something but knew that he/she could not find out whether it is true, would be acting irresponsibly - i.e. doing something he/she ought not to do. So a morally relevant claim would be connected not only with the sincerity condition, but also with the - as we may call it - "epistemic" preparatory condition. But again, as it was already said and will be seen in the sequel, this is not the point Habermas is driving at.)

In fact Habermas presents two arguments. The first runs as follows: By using a language a speaker will always refer to something in the objective world (because he is speaking about something), to something in his subjective inner world (which he expresses), and to something in the social world (because he uses a medium shared by a community). The truth of this maintenance might well be a necessary precondition for the truth of the maintenance that always all four validity claims have to be raised. But it is obviously not sufficient. It has not yet been shown that

the speaker has committed himself to claim truth for his linguistic reference to the objective world, truthfulness for his linguistic reference to the subjective world, and normative rightness for his linguistic reference to the social world. To establish this stronger thesis further argument would be necessary. Habermas' second argument is taken from the theory of speech acts: Speaking is performing actions, and actions are regarded as right or wrong, not as true or false. Again we are confronted with an obvious "Non sequitur": the point of course is correct, but it does not show that there is a normative rightness claim internal to speech acts of all kinds. It just shows that you can judge acts according to legal or moral criteria (if you've got some), whenever you like - and that's not a very exciting insight (or, if exciting, at least it isn't the strong thesis Habermas is driving at).

In the chapter on "claims to validity and modes of communication" (III 4) of his "Theory of Communicative Action" (7), Habermas makes the following point: "It might be objected against the thesis of the universality of the normative rightness claim, that reference to a normative context does not form a part of the meaning of non-regulative speech acts. But, I want to say, informations are sometimes 'inappropriate', reports are sometimes 'out of place', confessions are sometimes 'embarrassing', revelations are sometimes 'cutting'." I think this passage sufficiently shows that it really was a confusion which lead Habermas to his thesis about a universal normative rightness condition implicit in speech acts also of the assertive class. Of course it is quite correct to state: Whatever is said - there can always be the objection that it is "inappropriate" or "out of place" or "embarrassing" or "cutting" (8). So these are universally applicable. But this does not establish Habermas' thesis about four and only four internal claims. On the contrary, if universal applicability is the criterion, we will get lots of counterexamples, e.g.: Whatever is said - there can always be the objection that it was said too loud (because whatever is said is said at a certain loudness level), or that it wasn't said euphonically and pleasing to the ear (because whatever is said is said with a certain colour of voice, timbre &c.) or that stylistically it didn't turn out well (because whatever is said either is in conformity with the rules of classical poetics and rhetorics, or, usually, it is not - tertium non datur).

It may well be that those things Habermas advances as evidence for the universality of the rightness claim - appropriateness, being in place, not being embarrassing or cutting - are in a certain degree more important than loudness level, euphony, pleasure to the ear, colour of voice, timbre, stylistic and aesthetic qualities, and, as we may add, brevity or length, diverting qualities or tediousness (&c.) of what has been said. That's not the point. When we look for aspects under which speech acts universally can be criticized, there will always be an indefinite number, - some of them important, and some of them unimportant, but all the same universally applicable (9). Hence we need a stricter criterion. Such a criterion has

been introduced already, but it has not been used consequently: If we actually specify the content of the aspects under which speech acts can be criticized, we find that some of them are internal to the performance of the speech act, and some of them are not. In the case of a statement we have already found three internal conditions, related with the intelligibility, the truthfulness, and the truth of what has been said. These are internal to the performance of the speech act because it couldn't be a speech act at all if it wasn't assessible in the dimension of intelligibility, and it couldn't be a speech act of this kind, i.e. a statement, if it wasn't assessible at least in the dimensions of truth and truthfulness. But there are all kinds of - even universally applicable - assessments that are not internal, some of which - e.g. loudness level - we have already mentioned. If someone is performing a statement the hearer might respond "That was a stupid thing to say", or, to take a moral criticism, "You are talking too loud! You might wake the people in the next room". Both of these assessments are external to the performance of the statement because they have nothing to do with its being that kind of a speech act. A statement needn't be intelligent or low in order to be a statement. Grice, e.g., in his notes on conversation (10), makes the mistake of not drawing a sharp line between internal conditions on the one hand and social demands for relevance, intelligence &c. on the

The most convincingly conducted analysis based on the internal-external-distinction has been presented by John R. Searle in his essay "Speech Acts". Searle distinguishes four kinds of conditions which differ from all other universal and non-universal rules that people may *impose on* speech acts in being *internal*:

- "normal input-output conditions"
- "preparatory conditions"
- "sincerity conditions", and
- "essential conditions".

A claim or a condition c is *internal* to a speech act F(p) if and only if the conjunction of F(p) and the explicit negation of c as a whole doesn't make sense, although F(p) makes sense and not-c makes sense, if they are separated from each other. As Searle has pointed out a speaker who *asserts* that p raises four internal claims. He claims

- (1) that F(p) is understandable,
- (2) that he is able to judge whether p,
- (3) that he believes that p, and
- (4) that p is true.

The test whether these are *internal* runs as follows: the conjunction of F(p) and the negation of c (1), (2), (3), or (4), where F has got the force of an assertion,

has to lead to a pragmatic paradox:

- (ad 1) "I assert that xlm rnnnkö hhmnfn, but neither I myself nor anybody else knows what that means."
- (ad 2) "I assert that p, but I am totally unable to find out whether p."
- (ad 3) "I assert that p, but I don't believe that p."
- (ad 4) "I assert that p, but it is not true that p."

The reply to all these sentences will be: "What do you mean?" They don't make sense. Why? Because the claims denied in the second half of each sentence are internal to and constitutive of the speech acts performed in the first half of each sentence.

Sometimes it is argued that what counts as a pragmatic paradox in one culture doesn't count as a pragmatic paradox in another culture. An anthropologist might tell us: "This tribe has very strange customs in making assertions and promises. Whenever one of them makes an assertion he tells someone that he has got three arms but that he doesn't believe to have three arms, and whenever one of them makes a promise he does not commit himself to do or omit anything, and in fact nothing at all follows." In this case we know as a matter of course that the anthropologist has just falsely translated or otherwise misinterpreted the tribe's linguistic behaviour. If the speaker said no more than that he has got three arms yet does not believe he has three arms, then this perhaps was an example of the tribe's practice of giving each other philosophical examples of pragmatic paradoxes or telling each other boring jokes. But it certainly was not a genuine assertion, Likewise if the speaker didn't commit himself to do or omit anything, then his speech act just wasn't an example of a promising practice. It certainly does not prove that the constitutive rules of the language games of asserting and promising differ from culture to culture arbitrarily (although the regulative rules might differ from one culture to the other).

As soon as a speech act is publicly performed the conditions mentioned above create different dimensions of assessment. These are, to stress this point once more, internal to the performance of the speech act, i.e. it couldn't be a speech act of this type unless it wasn't assessible in *these dimensions*. So we get four types of *internal criticism* that can be advanced against a statement:

- (ad 1) "The input-output condition is not satisfied." = "That's not intelligible."
- (ad 2) "The preparatory condition is not satisfied." = "You don't have enough evidence to say that."
- (ad 3) "The sincerity condition is not satisfied." "You are lying".

### (ad 4) "The essential condition is not satisfied." - "What you say is false."

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Notice that a false statement of course can be sincere, but also that a lie can be - so to speak inadvertently - true, because the question of truth and falsity does not depend upon the speaker's (or anybody else's) beliefs, but only upon the facts. - Furthermore one might be inclined to say erroneously that in the case of an assertive, there isn't any difference between "preparatory conditions" and "essential conditions", because if somebody has enough evidence that p is true, or if he is really in a position to judge that p, then p must be true. That's a purely analytical point. An extra "... and he is right in that" doesn't add anything to the sentence "He knows that p". If we say "He knows that p", then we are committed to the truth of p (and we can only avoid this commitment by saying "He believes that p"). But this dependence works only one way, it is not an interdependence. Of course a person cannot have sufficient evidence that p is true, although p is false, - but p may be true although none has got enough evidence that p is true. One might claim that p and it might be true that p even though he was no judge that p. So there really is a difference between the two criticisms "You are no judge of that" and "That's false". that is: between rejecting that the preparatory conditions are satisfied and rejecting that the essential conditions are satisfied. If I hear someone asserting "Mozart's 'Prague' Symphony is really magnificent", then I can without any inconsistency hold both the opinion (1) that this someone is no judge whether Mozart's 'Prague' Symphony is magnificent, and (2) that Mozart's 'Prague' Symphony really is magnificent. - In fact there is even an independence in the other direction for the reason that human knowledge is fallible and certainty seems to be unattainable. So if we ask: "Do you have enough evidence to say that p?" and the question is answered to our satisfaction, it does not follow for certain that p. Asking for certainty would be necessarily asking for too much, - because then we would never be allowed to regard an answer as satisfactory. But if a speaker wants to make a genuine assertion (as opposed to just a guess), he cannot say "I assert that p is true, although I have no way of answering the question 'Why do you think that p is true?'", or "p but there isn't any evidence available that p", or even "I claim p to be true, although there is nothing at all which, if someone took notice of it, could count as evidence for the truth of p". He has to be able to give reasons of some kind which are sufficient for preliminary acceptance, although they need not, and, according to Popper, even cannot be sufficient for final verification.

The following clarification is more important: Also an unfounded, insincere, and false statement is, of course, a statement - whereas it is not an act of stating (indeed no linguistic act at all) to produce just a sequence of noises, which can be heard, but cannot be understood, because it doesn't make any sense at all. And such a sound won't become a statement by someone's comment "What we just heard I

claim to be intelligible" (although this claim itself of course forms a statement). A statement must be understandable in fact (although it might fail to be understood in fact), and it must in fact state something, in order to be a statement, but - that's crucial - it needn't be in fact connected with reasons, it needn't be truthful, and it needn't be true, in order to be a statement. Nevertheless it has to be implicitly connected with the claim

- that it is (in some way) based on evidence,
- that it is sincere (that the speaker means what he says), and
- that it is true,

in order to be a statement. It must be assessible in these dimensions - but, nevertheless, if it has been subject to a valid criticism (in one or more of these points), it is still a statement, although a groundless, insincere and false one. The conditions needn't be fulfilled, but the speaker has to claim that they are fulfilled in the first place, - otherwise he has to give up his intention to make this statement. He may be unable to give any evidence, he may lie, he may say something false, but he must not admit that, if he wants to make a statement: he must not explicitly deny the satisfaction of an internal condition.

It is important to keep in mind that a violation of the preparatory rule, the sincerity rule, or the essential rule does not lead to a self-contradiction in the strict formal sense of logic, but to what we called a pragmatic paradox. In the case of a pragmatic paradox there is an asymmetry between the first person's performance and the third person's characterization of the speech act, whereas there is no such thing in the case of a logical contradiction. It is equally contradictory to say "I state and I do not state (with the usual Aristotelian addenda: at the same time, at the same place, in one and the same regard)" and to say. "He states and he doesn't state (as above)". This is quite different from a denial of the fulfilment of a pragmatic presupposition: It is pragmatically inconsistent to say "I state that p but I don't believe that p", but a third person's hypotheses (a) that I state that p and (b) that I don't believe that p, are perfectly consistent with each other (they are altogether just a circumstantial and long-winded paraphrase of the simple hypothesis that I'm telling a lie). Though it is fishy to say "It's raining, but I don't believe it", "I order you to leave the room, but I don't want you to leave the room", "I apologize for stepping on your foot, but I'm not at all sorry that I stepped on your foot", "Congratulations on winning the prize but I'm not glad that you won the prize", "Thanks for giving me the money, but I'm not grateful that you gave me the money" (the examples are Searle's), it is not at all fishy to say about me: "He claimed it was raining but he didn't believe it was raining", "He ordered me to leave the room but he didn't want me to leave the room" &c. So if we call the sincerity condition internal we refer to the circumstance that whenever I make a statement I express the belief that its content is true, - whenever I make a promise I express the intention to do what I have

promised, - whenever I give an order I express the desire that the addressee should do the thing I have ordered him to do. It may be that I do not have the belief, intention or desire, but I mustn't deny its existence and stick to the attempt of performing a speech act of the respective type.

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It is interesting to think tentatively of counter-examples because they are very revealing. In institutional situations speakers are sometimes forced to perform speech acts that do not come from the heart. Searle (11) suggests the example of an officer who says to his troops: "I order you to attack those fortifications but I don't really want you to do it". That's roughly equivalent to "It's my duty to give this order - so here it goes. But what I'm actually thinking is something else". What we've got here is *not* a genuine counter-example, - what happens in this case is: the speaker dissociates himself from his own speech act; "it is as if one were mouthing a speech act on someone else's behalf" (12). This does not expose the claim that we mean what we say as a kind of superfluous musical accompaniment, but it is, quite on the contrary, the exception that proves the rule that you cannot perform a speech act of a particular kind and negate one of its internal conditions explicitly.

By way of contrast in speech acts like "The cat is on the mat although it's not appropriate to say that here" or "I know it's out of place but I say it: The cat is on the mat" or "I state that the cat is on the mat although it's a stupid thing to say that", there is a denial of external claims that people may, as a matter of social fact, or may not rise. (Remember that the first two were Habermas' alleged evidence for the - according to him - internal, but, analysed correctly, external claim to normative rightness.) Clearly it does not destroy the internal-external-distinction that the external claims a society may impose on speech acts (e.g. the requirements of appropriateness) might be very strong. It may even be the case that people who offend against them are threatened by punishment or humiliation or shame. Prohibitions and commandments can regulate the language game of asserting quite drastically, but they do not create or define it. They are only - according to the manners and customs of different societies more or less - regulative rules, as opposed to the constitutive rules of the language game of stating, i.e. the preparatory, sincerity and essential rules (13).

If somebody is sworn in as the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and he utters, at the critical point of the whole ceremony, in a clear and loud voice the following statement: "My refrigerator is full of beer", there is something hopelessly inappropriate about this utterance in these circumstances. But still, from the conceptual point, it is a perfectly fine statement: understandable, possibly supported by evidence, possibly sincere and possibly true. The criterion of being "perfectly fine" in this sense is not a matter of taste, but acts according the criterion that has been introduced already: the test is always whether a claim can be denied explicitly in the performance of the speech act.

In the following examples there is a denial of an external, though universal (universal because it's always possible to say "You are speaking too loud", "That's out of place" &c.) claim:

- The brutal lieutenant shouts: "I'm speaking so loud that your ears are shaking really, and I command you to open fire!" Is this still a command? Yes, namely a loud one.
- "I know this is not the right place to say that, nevertheless I'm hereby informing you that my refrigerator is full of beer." Is this still an information? Yes, namely an inappropriate one.
- "It's not to the point, but I just want to report a story about my little brother, and that is: he once..." Is this still a report? Yes, namely one that is (e.g. in a discussion about the necessity of a non-classical logic for quantum mechanics) out of place.
- "It's really embarrassing but I have to confess this to you: I've got haemorrhoids since I was four years old." Is this still a confession? Yes, namely an embarrassing one.
- "I know this revelation will be really cutting for one of the persons present, for X X has got haemorrhoids since he was four years old." Is this still a revelation? Yes, namely a cutting one. And it makes perfectly good sense. There is no analogy to "The cat is on the mat, but I don't believe it". Why not? Because there is no internal connection between the language game of revealing something and a claim not to offend the person about which the speaker reveals something. He may even go further and say: "I know exactly, how deep it will wound you, X I know even that you will kill yourself indeed, that's exactly what I want when I hereby make the revelation that you, X, suffer from haemorrhoids since the age of four." This has nothing to do with a pragmatic inconsistency, and it is an external criticism to say then: "But you will drive X to death!" because the speaker has never 'implicitly' or otherwise claimed that he won't do that (- quite on the contrary).

Informations are not only then informations when they are connected with a claim to appropriateness; reports are not only then reports when they are connected with a claim to being in place; confessions are not only then confessions when they are connected with a claim not to embarrass people; revelations are not only then revelations when they are connected with the claim not to cut anybody. So Habermas' "normative rightness claim" really is an external claim. None of its specifications constitutes the language games of informing, reporting, confessing or revealing. Habermas is indeed pretty right in remarking that a report is from time to time out of place, but he should have added that it is also sometimes short, long, amusing, boring, beautiful, dreadful, stupid, brilliantly formulated &c. If we would

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adopt the Habermasian criterion we would have to have universal validity claims for all these features as well. But if we do not adopt it, and draw the distinction between "internal" and "external", then we have to accept that moral, legal, aesthetic &c. pretensions are external to speech acts at least of the assertive class. This - disappointing as it is - has to be the answer to the question posed in the title of this paper.

#### **NOTES**

- (1) J. Habermas: Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns. 3rd ed. Frankfurt 1985. Vol. I.
- (2) There can be gradations in making a claim explicit: "The cat is on the mat." "I state that the cat is on the mat." "I state that it is true that the cat is on the mat."
- (3) The explicit-implicit-distinction must not be mistaken for the external-internal-(or regulative-constitutive-)distinction introduced by Searle. External claims are sometimes imposed by other people on a speaker's utterance. Internal claims can be implicit or made explicit:

Internal claims
(raised by the speaker in the speech act)

implicit explicit
= constitutive rules
of a language game
(the language game
exists in virtue of
these rules)

External claims
(imposed by other
other people on
somebody's speech
act)
= regulative rules imposed on a language
game (the language game
exists independently
of these rules)

(4) The truthfulness claim is dominant because it is the whole point of, e.g., apologizing to express sorry and regret. If somebody does not just express his feelings, but *in* expressing them refers to a certain state of affairs in the world, as it is usually the case in apologies, there is also an implicit claim to truth. Someone who says "I apologize for stepping on your foot" not only expresses a feeling but also states that he stepped on your foot - and this statement may be plain wrong. In Searle's (Speech Acts. Cambridge, 1969, p. 63, 66f.) terminology: it may be the case that the prop-

ositional content condition is not fulfilled.

- (5) Ibid., p. 57, 94.
- (6) I. Kant: Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen. In: Werke in zehn Bd.en. Ed. W. Weischedel. Darmstadt 1968. Vol. 7, p. 637-641.
- (7) See Note 1, p. 418: "Etwas anders verhält es sich mit der *Universalität des Richtigkeitsanspruches*. Dagegen lässt sich einwenden, dass sich aus der Bedeutung nichtregulativer Sprechhandlungen ein Bezug zu normativen Kontexten nicht entnehmen lässt. Dennoch sind Mitteilungen manchmal 'unangebracht', Berichte 'fehl am Platz', Geständnisse 'peinlich', Enthüllungen 'verletzend'."
- (8) Of course, the objection that it was "inappropriate" might be wrong, because something appropriate was said but then the demand for normative rightness is still there and was fulfilled, although this remained unnoticed.
- (9) All sentences can be criticized under the aspect whether they start with the Latin letter "A" or not. Of course this criterion is absurd, but it's universally applicable.
- (10) Logic and Conversation. In: Cole, P. & Morgan, J. L. (eds.): Speech Acts (= Syntax and Semantics. Vol. III). New York 1975. p. 41-58. Further Notes on Logic and Conversation. In: Cole, P. & Morgan, J. L. (eds.): Pragmatics (= Syntax and Semantics, Vol. IX). New York 1978. p. 113-127.
- (11) Intentionality. Cambridge 1983. p. 9.
- (12) Ibid.
- (13) Speech Acts (see Note 4). p. 33-42.