

Some Ideas towards a Non-dualism-Compatible Theory of Science

Franz Ofner • University of Klagenfurt, Austria • franz.ofner@uni-klu.ac.at

> Purpose • The paper tries to explore the possibility of developing a theory of science that is compatible with the non-dualizing way of speaking. **> Problem** • The difficulty of developing a non-dualism-compatible theory of science consists in the difference of the perspectives of the theory of science and the non-dualizing way of speaking. The non-dualizing way of speaking deals with descriptions as results of inquiries, whereas science theory thematizes the process of gaining descriptions in empirical research. If we want to reach compatibility between these different perspectives, we are led to the question of what kind of relationship exists between inquiry and description and what is the source of attaining knowledge. In respect of social sciences, there is the additional problem that a great deal of their objects are text; therefore the relationship between text and interpretation is relevant for the empirical research process of social sciences. **> Findings** • George Herbert Mead's theory of action and communication allows a productive approach to the above-mentioned problem to be found. Mead conceives of speaking as potential acting, as action that is initiated but not carried out. In this way, describing and inquiring can be connected non-dualistically. The source of gaining knowledge and descriptions is, however, according to Mead's action theory, practical activities. Objects are not presupposed, but are results from action. New experiences and descriptions come from inquiries that are stimulated by action problems and action inhibition and the endeavor to overcome the inhibition. **> Implications** • The result of the argumentation is that Mead's conception of action and language can serve to develop a theory of science that is compatible with non-dualizing thinking. The reason for this is that in Mead's conception, acting and speaking, experiencing and describing are not conceived of as categorical differences but are related to each other as executed and initiated. **> Key words** • Pragmatist action, communication theory, Mead, research, discourse.

Introduction

Ultimately, Josef Mitterer's critique of truth claims comes to say that the participants of discourses presuppose, ex-post, their own descriptions as the language-different object and use them as the touchstone of truth and error of other descriptions. The context of Mitterer's critical analysis is the discourse, where various descriptions that have been provided face each other. However, following scientific discussions, we can see that the participants of discourses not only set their descriptions against those of others but also justify them as results of empirical research and theoretical constructions.¹ They not only discuss the results of

1 | Truth does not exist directly for us. Rather we need methods, instruments, and procedures appropriate to lead us to truth and justify our convictions. However, we do not have totally trustworthy means, which is why it is possible that our convictions can be false (cf. Grundmann 2008: 223). Gadenne (2010: 23) regards knowledge as a process that proceeds in three steps: the scien-

research but also the process of research, its methods, the data, and the possibilities of their interpretation.

The reference to the process of empirical research in discussions does not alter the dualistic procedure of how truth is claimed. That is to say that the descriptions of objects that have been created in the research process are presupposed, ex-post, as language-different objects. However, the question arises as to whether there is a concept of empirical research that is compatible with the non-dualizing way of speaking and what advantage could be gained from such a concept. According to the dualistic theory of science, empirical research is carried out by addressing language-different objects: research provides information on reality which, then, is transformed into descriptions. Thus, language-different objects are

tist observes certain events, proposes hypotheses about the conditions under which such events take place, and tests the hypotheses by further observations.

the source of knowledge, according to the dualistic self-understanding.

In my paper, I pursue the question of whether it is possible to conceptualize a theory of science that is compatible with non-dualistic thinking. What follows makes sense only for those who are interested in linking empirical research to the non-dualizing way of speaking. I would like to consider some issues relevant for such a conception.

The role empirical investigations of objects have in Mitterer's non-dualistic concept refers to the examination of diverging or contradictory descriptions of an object (Mitterer 1992: §§46–50). As an example, he uses the descriptions of a table as round or square. He compares the dualistic way of examination with the non-dualistic one. Both versions have in common that investigations are the basis of examination. That is, the procedures of investigation do not differ between the two versions. Investigations consist, for example, of the participants looking precisely at the table, moving their hands along the edge of the table feeling for

column 1

column 2

column 3

column 1

1 corners, and using a pair of compasses. The
2 two versions of inquiry do not differ in their
3 methods but in the opinions of how the ex-
4 amination of the descriptions takes place:
5 dualists take the view that descriptions are
6 checked against the language-different ob-
7 ject, non-dualists say that the reference ba-
8 sis of the examination is a new description
9 completed jointly by the participants.

10 What I am interested in is the relation
11 between inquiry and description within the
12 non-dualistic way of thinking. Mitterer says
13 that, according to the non-dualistic way of
14 speaking, it is not the object that can be the
15 arbiter between the descriptions. Neverthe-
16 less, he says that "the table is inquired into
17 in terms of what shape it has – if it is shaped
18 round or square or otherwise" (Mitterer
19 1992: §49, my translation). He points out
20 that "descriptions are not taken from no-
21 where," but are rather "based on inquiries"
22 (ibid, my translation). Does this mean that
23 in the context of inquiries, language-differ-
24 ent objects are presupposed but not in the
25 context of descriptions?

26 Thus, the question arises as to what is
27 meant from the standpoint of the non-du-
28 alizing way of speaking by inquiring empiri-
29 cally into an object. Is the activity of inquir-
30 ing identical with that of describing or is it
31 another kind of activity? And if inquiring,
32 as the activity of attaining knowledge, is an-
33 other kind of activity than describing, what
34 is its relation to the activity of describing?
35 And how are its results transformed into de-
36 scriptions?

37 A second question relates to the kind
38 of objects that are empirically investigated.
39 Of course, this question is closely associated
40 with the character of the activity of inquir-
41 ing. According to Mitterer's non-dualizing
42 way of speaking, descriptions start from
43 objects that are themselves descriptions. If
44 empirically inquiring is identical with de-
45 scribing, then the research object, i.e., the
46 object from which the investigation starts,
47 has the character of a description. If empiri-
48 cal inquiring is another kind of activity, then
49 the question arises as to what character the
50 research object has and what is its relation to
51 the object of description.

52 Finally, I will address a topic that is spe-
53 cific to social-scientific research. Social-sci-
54 entific research deals with texts (interviews,
55 discussions, and data), and their interpreta-

column 1

column 2

tion is one of its central tasks. Analogous to
the relation of object and description, Mit-
terer (2013) distinguishes a dualistic way of
determining the relation between text and
interpretation from a non-dualistic one. Of
course, this question is of great relevance
to a conception of social-scientific research
that is compatible with non-dualistic think-
ing.

Empirical researching and the activity of describing

The process of inquiring into an object
may be the content of a description and
this description is, according to the non-
dualizing way of speaking, the continuation
of the description/object already made. For
example: the description "the table is located
in the corner" is continued into "the table lo-
cated in the corner is inquired into in terms
of its shape." In the context of empirical re-
search, however, I am not interested in the
description of an object as being inquired
into but in the process of inquiring as pro-
ducing new content as material for describ-
ing an object, for example producing the
description "round." Does it make sense to
think that inquiring is a linguistic activity?

I have approached the topic of the dif-
ference and relationship between inquiring
and describing in two previous articles (cf.
Ofner 2008: 148–152, 2010: 64–76). My
argumentation was that the production of
new contents that are added to the descrip-
tion already made is an activity that is dif-
ferent from the activity of describing. Of
course, new description contents are added
to description already made by describing.
However, if the producing of new contents
were itself an activity of describing, we
would have to assume that the new contents
come from language. How should we imag-
ine such a process? Do we render language
an object and select a certain description out
of it in order to add it to the description al-
ready made? And if so, what kind of activity
should selecting be? An activity of describ-
ing, too?

There is a further argument for the dif-
ference between describing and inquiring as
a practical action. When someone *says* to us
that he moves his hand over a rough surface
or when we tell this to other people, there

column 2

column 3

is a significant difference from *carrying out*
that activity. The difference is that we have
sensory experiences when we carry out the
activity and mental images when speaking
of it.

When we conceive of inquiring as dif-
ferent from describing, the question arises
as to what relationship exists between the
two kinds of activities and how the results of
inquiries are transformed into descriptions.
On the one hand, it would be a contradic-
tion in the non-dualizing way of speaking to
conceive the results of inquiry as language-
different objects that then are described.
On the other hand, inquiring should not be
conceptualized as an activity of describing,
as argued before.

The problem we have to solve is to con-
nect practical action and linguistic describ-
ing in a way that is compatible with non-du-
alistic thinking. That is, to connect them as
not categorically different from each other.
As I have pointed out in previous papers, the
language theory of George Herbert Mead²
offers the opportunity to conceptualize act-
ing and describing as different but not cat-
egorically different activities: as two kinds of
activities that are connected with each other
(cf. Ofner 2008: 148–152, 2010: 64–76). Ac-
cording to Mead, linguistic utterances are
gestures initiating actions that are, however,
not carried out. Thus, there is no categori-
cal difference between speaking and acting
because speaking is itself a kind of acting
but is initiated or potential acting. We have
sensory experiences when acting practical-
ly: distant experiences (color, sound, odor,
taste, temperature, body movement) and
tactile experiences (solidity, mass, surface
character). The action character of speak-
ing lies in its activating of past sensory ex-
periences, but activating them as images.
Linguistic utterances can be conceived of

2| Mead is not an exponent of classical be-
haviorism: he explicitly distances himself from
J. B. Watson (cf. Mead 1934: 2). The designation
of Mead's psychology as social behaviorist stems
from Charles W. Morris, who was a student of
Mead and edited diverse student notes on Mead's
courses under the title "Mind, Self, and Soci-
ety from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist."
Mead himself only says that his approach starts
from the social behavior or conduct of individu-
als.

column 3

column 1

1 as descriptions in the sense of Mitterer's
2 non-dualizing way of speaking. They have,
3 however, a further dimension, as far as they
4 indicate experiences and impulses to act. As
5 components of linguistic activities, images
6 have an expectation value: they indicate a
7 certain behavior and experiences attached
8 to them that would appear if the behavior
9 were carried out.

10 Mitterer does not define in detail the
11 meaning of his concept of "description."
12 Especially, he does not explain its relation-
13 ship to mental dimensions. The simplest and
14 most general definition may be that descrip-
15 tions are linguistic utterances that appear in
16 discourses. In the center of the non-dualiz-
17 ing way of speaking is the critique of truth
18 claims: Mitterer's non-dualism does not deal
19 with the processes by which descriptions are
20 produced, but only with the results of such
21 processes, that is, with descriptions. Mit-
22 terer is not fixated on the terminus "descrip-
23 tion" even though he prefers this terminus.
24 Additional to the concept "description," he
25 mentions some other terms to indicate the
26 mechanism of dualizing (cf. Mitterer 1992:
27 11–12, §6, §16, §30; 2001: §8): conscious-
28 ness, perception, observation, knowledge,
29 opinion. These notions could be summa-
30 rized by the term "mental." In connection
31 with Mead's theory of language, I prefer the
32 notion "imaginary," and particularly the
33 term "idea" for the image of action.

34 The adequate notion to characterize the
35 mental dimension of action is "experience:"
36 it is of sensory quality. According to the
37 non-dualizing way of speaking, the object or
38 the event in regard to which we attain fur-
39 ther experience is present as an experience
40 we have already had. Attaining experience
41 means attaining experience additional to
42 the experience we have already had. When
43 we find a certain wine tastes flowery and has
44 peppery notes on the finish, we have previ-
45 ously experienced drinking wine.

46 The relationship between action and de-
47 scribing corresponds to the relationship be-
48 tween sensory experience and the image of
49 that experience. This relationship is not rel-
50 evant for the non-dualistic critique of truth
51 claims because this critique addresses only
52 the categorical separation of object and its
53 description in discourses. Every discourse
54 participant may have his perceptions, expe-
55 riences, images, ideas, and knowledge but

column 1

column 2

in the discourse, this mental dimension is
not relevant for the other participants. It is
the descriptions that are exchanged. How-
ever, with regard to the question of whether
empiricism can find a position in the non-
dualistic way of thinking, the relationship
between the mental phenomena of acting
(sensory experiences) and those of describ-
ing (images and ideas) is indeed relevant
because the results of empirical inquiry are
attained in those forms.

Mead's language theory allows activities
of empirical inquiry and activities of de-
scribing to be connected in a non-dualistic
way. Practical action and linguistic activity
are coupled together. The start of a practi-
cal activity triggers a certain linguistic ut-
terance (a gesture) and the images and ideas
that are merged with this utterance; and
these images and ideas indicate experiences
that have been had in the past. Those past
experiences triggered by the perceptions in
the present situation of action are expressed
linguistically and describe the present situa-
tion of action. In this sense, the discourse is
the forum where (different) past experiences
are exchanged.

Objects of experience and attaining new experiences

The integration of the dimension of ac-
tion and experience into the non-dualistic
conception leaves open the question of
what the source of attaining knowledge is
and how the process of attaining knowledge
can be conceived. Whereas dualists think
that inquiring is directed at the object, it is
not clear what the object of inquiring in the
non-dualistic perspective is. As has been
noted above, the object is ruled out for *ex-*
amining descriptions. Mitterer writes: "If
we abandon the assumption of a language-
different object, the examination of descrip-
tion cannot take place by addressing the
object." (Mitterer 1992: §48, my translation).
Mitterer, however, means that it is the *object*
that is inquired into: "The examination of
the description of the table is done by in-
quiring what shape the table has..." (ibid:
§49, my translation) Additionally, Mitterer
writes that descriptions are not "taken from
nowhere" but have come about by inquiring
into the table (ibid).

column 2

column 3

If inquiries are the basis of descriptions 1
and language-different objects are not pre- 2
supposed, of what kind, then, are the objects 3
that are inquired into? Are language-dif- 4
ferent objects presupposed when inquiries 5
are carried out and are language-different 6
objects not presupposed when they are de- 7
scribed? 8

Discourse as the perspective of the non-dualizing way of speaking

I think we would leave the perspective 12
of Mitterer's non-dualizing way of speaking 13
if we asserted that nothing *exists* other than 14
descriptions. It is the term "description" it- 15
self and the term "interpretation," respec- 16
tively, that Mitterer deals with in the article 17
"On interpretation" (Mitterer 2013), which 18
shows the perspective the non-dualizing 19
way of speaking assumes. Mitterer concep- 20
tualizes the relation between text and inter- 21
pretation, analogous to the relation between 22
object and description, as the relation be- 23
tween interpretation so far and interpreta- 24
tion from now on (ibid: §12). In contrast to 25
this, dualistic thinking makes a sharp sepa- 26
ration between the level of text and the level 27
of interpretation and ascribes the function 28
of referee to the text, which decides whether 29
a certain interpretation is true or false (ibid: 30
§5). Mitterer, in contrast, argues that we al- 31
ways start from an interpretation and cannot 32
distinguish between text and interpretation 33
because we are in the situation of interpreta- 34
tion just as we try to distinguish (ibid: §16). 35
We can make distinctions between the text 36
and the interpretation of another person 37

3

only when we use our own interpretation as 38
the basis for judgments (ibid: §17), that is, 39
when we presuppose our interpretation as 40
the text. 41
Both terms, "description" and "inter- 42
pretation," stem from the dualistic way of 43
speaking. They require that there is some- 44
thing that is described or interpreted but 45
is not itself a description or an interpreta- 46
tion, that is, a language-different object or 47
an "interpretation-different" text. Mitterer 48
uses these terms with the critical intention 49
of showing that we cannot reach the referent 50
the dualists presuppose without getting into 51
logical difficulty (infinite regress). I think 52
we would also get in logical difficulty if we 53
ontologized the non-dualizing way of speak- 54
ing. By "ontologizing the non-dualizing way 55

column 3

column 1

1 of speaking,” I mean the assertion that nothing exists that is different from description, 2 or interpretation. Such an assertion would 3 transgress the boundaries of the non-dualizing way of speaking and its critique of 4 truth claiming. The non-dualizing way of 5 speaking is conceptualized in respect of the 6 discourse of opinions and research results: 7 these results are communicated linguistically 8 and can be communicated only linguistically. 9 The assertion that nothing *exists* other 10 than descriptions, or interpretations, would 11 lead us into an infinite regress as well. If describing an object or interpreting a text is the 12 continuation of a description or interpretation already made, then the question arises: 13 The continuation of the description of what 14 or the continuation of the interpretation of 15 what? And we could play this game again 16 and again. Additionally, we would fall into 17 a logical contradiction between description 18 and interpretation if we ontologized the 19 term “interpretation” and asserted that there 20 only existed interpretations. The description 21 made by another person is a text and is 22 present for me in the discourse as my own 23 interpretation. Thus, if only interpretations 24 existed, no text of another person would 25 exist for me, only continuations of my own 26 interpretations. If texts of other persons did 27 not exist, interpretations would not exist either. This dilemma appears in the following 28 formulation of Mitterer: “The text of Kant, 29 which the non-dualist professor presents to 30 the students for interpretation, forms a common starting-base for follow-up interpretations” (Mitterer 2013: §12). Does, then, the 31 un-interpreted text of Kant exist after all?

The perspective of action and experience

32 These considerations of ontologizing 33 the objects of descriptions lead me to the 34 conclusion that the perspective of a non-dualizing way of speaking as developed so 35 far by Mitterer does not allow us to find an 36 answer to the question of what the source of 37 new descriptions is. We have to proceed to 38 the conception of practical action and integrate the conception of the non-dualizing 39 way of speaking into it. I think the distinction between object and description is a secondary act in the context of communication: 40 it is a result of differences between opinions 41 in problematic situations when doubts appear. Linguistic utterances do not become 42 assertions until a problematic situation occurs.

column 1

column 2

43 Only then does the desire appear to 44 define the object, that is, to find out to what 45 extent different descriptions correspond to 46 each other. The corresponding parts become 47 the object of the descriptions in question. 48 The inquiries that have led to the different 49 descriptions have been finished at that 50 time. The inquiries can be made accessible 51 to other people via descriptions but they are 52 above all activities that create experiences, 53 not only descriptions. They are actions that 54 create experiences, which for their part can 55 be indicated in linguistic form.

The result of my considerations is that we leave the perspective of Mitterer’s non-dualizing way of speaking when we address the issue of the source of attaining knowledge and continuing descriptions. Addressing this issue, we change to the perspective of action. How can attaining knowledge and continuing descriptions be conceptualized from the perspective of acting?

In the same way as the object of description is itself a description, the object about which we attain experience is itself an experience, the experience that we have attained in previous action. This means that when we attain new experience about an object, we continue the experience we have already attained. We would fall into the same trap as in the case of descriptions and interpretations if we asserted that nothing *exists* other than experience. What we can say is that we cannot refer to objects independent from acting as the process by which we attain experience.

Experiential objects structure our actions: they form our action field.³ They are things as far as we have tactile experiences, they have diverse sensory characters as far as we make distant experiences, they are located distant from us as far as we move to get tactile experience. In this way, we get experience of space and time. Our behavior with objects is their meaning for us. That is, their meaning is the relevance they have for our actions. In linguistic activities, the diverse sensory experiences and the meaning of objects are stimulated in terms of images.

3| The following considerations connect to Mead’s concept of object and his conception of experience process. For more about the notion “object,” see Mead (1909: 404f; 1912: 401f); about the process of attaining experience and knowledge, see Mead (1938: 26–62).

column 2

column 3

56 In this way, Mitterer’s notion of the object 57 of description is extended by the dimension 58 of sensory experience and meaning. The 59 difference between Mead’s empiricism and 60 the traditional one is that he does not simply 61 conceive of experience as an effect produced 62 by an external object in the percipient 63 individual but that experience is embedded 64 in action. According to the non-dualistic 65 conception extended by the dimension of 66 action, we can distinguish between two 67 situations: practical action and communicative 68 action. Practical action is connected with 69 sensory experience and, as far as it is accompanied by speech, images of experience.

Communicative action takes place only 70 as a linguistic activity. The process of communication is characterized by indicating 71 actions, by exchanging descriptions – which 72 are, according to the presented conception, 73 experiences in terms of images – and by 74 discussion of opinions. Practical action is 75 introduced by sensory experience (e.g., visual, acoustic, olfactory) that is merged with 76 an impulse to act and with linguistic utterances. According to Mead’s language theory, 77 linguistic utterances indicate experiences 78 that have been obtained in the past in exerting the impulse to act.

George Herbert Mead’s conception of research

79 Speaking, then, is nothing other than 80 stimulating past sensory experiences obtained in past acting. The experiences obtained in a past action are called “object” by Mead and the action is the meaning of the 81 object. So actions are not separated from 82 objects and are not directed to objects but 83 are united with objects. The descriptions 84 that are associated with action impulses and 85 indicate experiences can be conceived of as 86 expectations as well: experiences may stem 87 from the past but indicate what experiences 88 will take place when the impulses are carried out.

The next step of practical action is carrying out the impulse. When the experience obtained in carrying out the impulse answers the expectation initiated by the 89 impulse, the object may be perceived as 90 real and independent of us existing in “the 91 world out there.” The character of reality 92 disappears, however, when the expectation 93 is not fulfilled. Then we are confronted with

column 3



FRANZ OFNER

has a PhD in pedagogy, sociology, and psychology from the University of Vienna (1984). Between 1980 and 1985 he carried out research for various projects on new technologies, organisational and social change, and qualification requirements. Since 1985 has been a member of the University of Klagenfurt, from which he obtained his postdoctoral qualification (habilitation), in the sociology of the economy. Now the managing editor of the *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie (Austrian Journal of Sociology)*, his research focuses on the status of communication, power, and social recognition in social theory, and industrial relations and the welfare state.

16 a problem: our behavior is inhibited and the
17 object disappears. In such a situation, the
18 opportunity arises to start a process to solve
19 the problem. To Mead, action problems are
20 those situations that stimulate creativity and
21 lead to new experience. Mead stresses that
22 we do not lose all our past experience when
23 a problem appears. We do not fall into the
24 bottomless void because problems are al-
25 ways limited. A reduced object always re-
26 mains in every problem situation. When we
27 leave the supermarket and cannot find our
28 car in the car park, the whole world does not
29 disappear: the car park and its surroundings
30 remain, where we can look for our car, and
31 the police remain for us to make a report.
32 The reduced object consists of those experi-
33 ences that are not called into question in
34 that situation. This does not exclude that
35 some of these experiences might very well
36 be called into question in a later situation,
37 with the consequence that the object is fur-
38 ther reduced.

39 In Mead's conception of research, the
40 phase of analysis follows upon action in-
41 hibition. Mead characterizes this phase as
42 follows: attention to the object and its sur-
43 rounding is intensified, the object and its
44 surrounding are broken up into elements,
45 and impulses responding to the elements
46 are activated. This is the way to discover the
47 reduced object, that is, to find out what im-
48 pulses can be carried out and what experi-
49 ences are to be expected. Furthermore, solv-
50 ing a problem requires trying new activities
51 and attaining new experiences. In this way,
52 the spectrum of options for action is broad-
53 ened. According to Mead, speech has a cen-
54 tral role in the process of analyzing objects
55 because language is the mode individuals

use to indicate options for action and experi-
ences to themselves and to other persons.

If analyzing the object and its surround-
ings succeeds, then the phase of synthesis
and assuming hypotheses can follow. This
means that the diverse impulses found in
the process of analysis are joined together
to an action that promises that the inhibited
action can be carried out. Hypotheses are
imagined actions that are assumed to carry
out the action. Also in this phase, language
plays a central role because the imagining of
action takes place in terms of descriptions.
Creating hypotheses is the process that
Charles Sanders Peirce calls "abduction."

The research process is completed by
testing the hypothesis; that is, by trying to
carry out the action sequence that was lin-
guistically conceptualized. If this is success-
ful, new experiences and new knowledge are
attained and the reduced object is extended
or, in Mitterer's words, the description of
the object is continued. Mead notes that the
conceptualized action sequence need not re-
late to only sense-perceivable elements but
can also contain thought-constructs. This
is, for example, the case in the construction
of atom models: these models contain di-
verse particles that cannot be perceived by
our sense organs but are assumed to exist
because of changes in energy when certain
manipulations are made. Such constructs are
also relevant to social sciences when, for ex-
ample, dispositions and different personality
structures dependent on the class member-
ship of persons are assumed to explain their
behavior. In the sense of Mead, the relevance
of such constructions is that they are con-
nected with action consequences that are
observable.

The difference in Mitterer's non-dualizing way of speaking

The presented phases of attaining knowl-
edge show a relationship between object and
description that is different from Mitterer's
non-dualizing conception. In Mitterer's con-
ception, the object as the description so far
is the starting point of further descriptions
– of descriptions from now on. In the ver-
sion presented above, in the beginning there
is simply a description together with experi-
ences, there is no object of description. If no
problem arises, there is no reason to change
the current description. When, however, a
problem occurs, then a reduction of experi-
ences takes place; the reduced experiences
then form the object of new experiences and
descriptions. This change of temporal rela-
tionship between object and description is
the consequence of the conception accord-
ing to which problematic situations necessi-
tate defining the object as the starting point
for inquiries.

A special action problem is that which
Mitterer considers, namely that different
descriptions are presented in the discus-
sion of research results and different views
are taken by the participants. According to
the approach of action and language devel-
oped above, the participants in discourse
present to each other the research methods
they have used, the experiences they had in
past situations, and their new experiences.
Language enables them to participate in the
activities and experiences of the others, to
present their own actions and experiences
to others, and to formulate objections. It is
possible to discover linguistic misunder-
standings (e.g., differences in the definition
of notions) by describing in detail different

column 1

1 actions and experiences attached to them,
2 and to make suggestions to modify research
3 designs. Of course, this procedure does not
4 guarantee consensus in respect of the result.
5 However, it has the advantage that the dis-
6 cussion is moved from the research results
7 to the research methods and the process of
8 producing results.

Social science research and interpretation

14 In contrast to natural sciences, so-
15 cial science research is based on linguistic
16 sources, on information provided by per-
17 sons in interviews and on texts of various
18 kinds. The work of scientists is to infer be-
19 havior and social practices as well as societal
20 changes and problems of social association
21 from that information. Thus, interpretation
22 of linguistic utterances has a central role in
23 social research. Hence Mitterer's thoughts
24 regarding interpretation are relevant to the
25 work of social sciences (cf. Mitterer 2013).

26 Above, I have indicated the difficulties
27 of the non-dualizing way of speaking, es-
28 pecially if we assert that there are no inter-
29 pretation-different texts but only interpre-
30 tations. What we can say is that we cannot
31 refer to texts independent from our activity
32 of interpreting. This means, however, that
33 the texts of other persons are the sources of
34 our interpretations.

35 In the context of social sciences, the in-
36 terpretation problem appears as the prob-
37 lem of understanding each other and reach-
38 ing agreement. The linguistic utterances of
39 the members of communication processes
40 are present to each other as interpretations.
41 Thus, communication is principally sub-
42 jected to the risk of misunderstanding. We
43 could even go as far as saying that the partic-
44 ipants cannot be sure to agree even though
45 they think that their interpretations coin-
46 cide. This is relevant to social research inso-
47 far as a large part of research material con-
48 sists of interviews and written documents.
49 Thus, social scientists cannot distinguish
50 their interpretations from what their in-
51 formants said and the informants interpret
52 possible requests of the social researchers as
53 well. This problem reminds one of of Niklas
54 Luhmann's problem of double contingency
55 in communication (cf. Luhmann 1985: 156).

column 1

column 2

If we confine our theoretical concep-
tion to pure linguistic processes, I can-
not see how a fairly reliable understanding
among communication partners should
come about – and reaching agreement as
to the object is a condition of the possibility
of discussing differences in their interpre-
tations. The chances for understanding are
bettered when we integrate – as supposed
in this article – action and experience into
non-dualizing thinking. According to this
conception, linguistic utterances are embed-
ded in or merged with impulses to act and
experiences. Impulses and experiences are
activated in the listener as well. However,
they need not correspond to those of the
speaker. Impulses to act and experiences
cannot be observed by other persons. When,
however, linguistic utterances are linked to
observable acts or when the communica-
tion partners address different action situa-
tions to indicate their experiences, then the
chance of understanding each other is im-
proved. Naturally, there is no way to remove
misunderstanding completely because ob-
served action results can also be interpreted
differently. A further aspect we should take
into account in this respect is that language
and meaning of linguistic symbols develop
in the context of joint activities that lead to
shared experiences. Joint activities are the
basis of understanding.

Conclusion

Exchange of descriptions in scientific
discourses does not suffice for the develop-
ment of a conception of empirical research.
Such a conception needs to be comple-
mented by an idea of how experience and
knowledge are produced. Mitterer's non-
dualizing way of speaking requires a re-
search conception that differs from the tra-
ditional ones, which are based on dualistic
thinking. A research conception that is to
be compatible with non-dualistic thinking
is confronted with the question of what
kind of relation between inquiries and de-
scription exists and what is the source of
attaining knowledge. In respect of social
sciences, there is the additional problem
that their objects are texts (interviews, doc-
uments, statistics etc.) that are to be inter-
preted by the researchers.

column 2

column 3

My dealing with this problem builds on 1
Mead's theory of action and communica- 2
tion. Mead conceives of speaking as poten- 3
tial acting, as action that is initiated but not 4
carried out. Description can be understood, 5
thus, as actions and experiences made in the 6
past and stimulated due to actual percep- 7
tions that correspond to those of the past. 8
Inquiries are a special kind of actions that 9
are carried out in problem situations and 10
may provide new experiences. 11

The attempt to develop a theory of 12
science that is compatible with the non- 13
dualizing way of speaking poses the tricky 14
question of what is the source of empiri- 15
cal knowledge and where additional de- 16
scription contents come from. On the one 17
hand, non-dualistic thinking forbids the 18
assumption of language-different objects 19
that are the source of knowledge to dual- 20
istic thinking. On the other hand, we get 21
into logical difficulties if we ontologize the 22
non-dualizing way of speaking by assert- 23
ing that nothing *exists* that is different from 24
language. According to the conception de- 25
veloped, description and interpretations are 26
results of actions in which experiences are 27
attained. Objects of experience come from 28
practical activities and we are able to refer to 29
objects only via action. Objects always have 30
a linguistic character. However, as objects of 31
experience, they have an additional dimen- 32
sion: they are embedded in actions and are 33
sensory perceptions. As descriptions, they 34
are images of sensory perceptions. 35

From the view point of action-based 36
thinking, inquiries are stimulated by action 37
problems and action inhibition may lead to 38
new experiences. Thus, actions in this sense 39
are a source of attaining knowledge that ex- 40
ceeds already existing knowledge. The ques- 41
tion remains of whether there is something 42
that is different from action and experi- 43
ence and is in addition a source of attaining 44
knowledge. If we answer this question in 45
the affirmative, it would not be compatible 46
with non-dualistic thinking to say that there 47
are action- and experience-different *objects*. 48
This would mean that there exists a world 49
that is independent from our actions and 50
is, then, the referee for true experience with 51
regard to description. I see two justifica- 52
tions for the assumption of a language- and 53
experience-different world. One justifica- 54
tion has been mentioned above: it concerns 55

column 3

column 1

column 2

column 3

1 the logical difficulty that arises when we
2 presume that nothing exists other than de-
3 scriptions. The same difficulty appears in
4 respect of experience. The second justifica-
5 tion concerns the significant difference we
6 experience between speaking and acting. In
7 carrying out actions, we are confronted with
8 resistance, as problematic situations and
9 inhibitions show especially. I do not mean
10 resistance in the sense of tactile experience,
11 but difficulties in carrying out the ideas we
12 have and the modifications and adaptations
13 we have to make. As mentioned above, such
14 difficulties are the sources of new experi-
15 ences and indicate that there is something
16 that is set against our ideas. Such resistance
17 does not exist in speaking. We can say with-
18 out linguistic difficulties that we can fly like
19 a bird, that we met a unicorn in the forest,
20 that the father of the gods, Zeus, turned into
21 a bull and begot three children by Europa.
22 If we have resistance to such utterances, it
23 comes from experience, not from language.
24 Saying "I build a table" needs only a second,
25 but building a table is a complex process and
26 needs manual skills.

27 The assumption of a language- and ex-
28 perience-different world in the sense I ex-
29 plained above – that is, not as objects but as
30 counterpart of action – does not contradict
31 non-dualistic thinking if we assume that we
32 ourselves, as acting individuals, belong to the
33 world as well. Then we are not categorically
34 different from the world and acting would
35 be an interaction process within which we
36 experience various objects among which
37 we are as acting persons, too.⁴ This concep-
38 tion is not in contradiction to non-dualistic
39 thinking insofar as objects are not presup-
40 posed but are results of interaction, results
41 as experiences. This means that descriptions
42 and experiences cannot be examined against
43 the external world. Thus, the external world
44 is not relevant to the truth game: it does not
45 change the logical difficulties we get into
46 when we try to refer to language-different
47 objects in discourses.

48 The consequence of my argumentation
49 is that Mead's conception of action and in-
50 quiry can serve as a suggestion and inspi-
51 ration to develop a theory of science that
52

53 4| The basic idea of this position corre-
54 sponds to John Dewey's conception of knowledge
55 (cf. especially, Dewey 1998: 27f.).

column 1

is compatible with non-dualistic thinking.
According to this conception, the failure of
an action is the condition for the process of
attaining new experiences and descriptions.
At first, inhibition of action leads to a reduc-
tion of the object. The attempt then starts to
find opportunities to carry out the initiated
action. In this way, new experiences may be
attained by new actions and connected with
the experiences that create the reduced ob-
ject. If this succeeds, we have acquired a new
description that is relevant from now on –
relevant until a problem arises anew. Lan-
guage has a central role for the analysis of
objects and the synthesis of action elements
to a complete action because language al-
lows imaginary action.

References

- Dewey J. (1998) Die Suche nach Gewissheit. Eine Untersuchung des Verhältnisses von Erkenntnis und Handeln. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main. Original publication: Dewey J. (1929) The quest for certainty. A study on the relation of knowledge and action. Minton, Balch & Comp. New York.
- Grundmann T. (2008) Analytische Einführung in die Erkenntnistheorie. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Gadene V. (2010) Sucht die Wissenschaft nach Wahrheit? In: Aulenbacher B. & Ziegler, M. (eds.) In Wahrheit... Herstellung, Nutzen und Gebrauch von Wahrheit in Wissenschaft und Alltag. StudienVerlag, Innsbruck.
- Luhmann N. (1985) Soziale Systeme. Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main. English translation: Luhmann N. (1995) Social systems. Stanford University Press, Stanford CA.
- Mead G. H. (1909) Social psychology as counterpart to physiological psychology. Psychological Bulletin 6: 401–408. Retrieved from http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Mead/pubs/Mead_1909a.html on 28 December 2003.
- Mead G. H. (1912) The mechanism of social consciousness. Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods 9: 401–406. Retrieved from http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Mead/pubs/Mead_1912a.html on 28 December 2003.
- Mead G. H. (1938). The philosophy of the act. Edited by Charles W. Morris with John M.

column 2

- Brewster, Albert M. Dunham and David Miller). University of Chicago, Chicago. Retrieved from http://www.brocku.ca/Mead-Project/Mead/pubs2/philact/Mead_1938_toc.html on 28 December 2003.
- Mitterer J. (1992) Das Jenseits der Philosophie. Wider das dualistische Erkenntnisprinzip [The beyond of philosophy: Against the dualistic principle of cognition]. Passagen, Vienna. Republished in 2011 with a new afterword by Velbrück Wissenschaft, Weilerswist.
- Mitterer J. (2001) Die Flucht aus der Beliebigkeit [The flight from contingency]. S. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main. Republished in 2011 with a new foreword by Velbrück Wissenschaft, Weilerswist.
- Mitterer J. (2013) On interpretation. Constructivist Foundations 8(2): xxx–xxx (this issue). Available at <http://www.univie.ac.at/constructivism/journal/8/2/xxx.mitterer>.
- German original: Über Interpretation. In: Riegler A. & Weber S. (eds.) (2010) Die Dritte Philosophie. Velbrück, Weilerswist: 286–296.
- Ofner F. (2008) Action and discourse. Some thoughts concerning a non-dualizing conception of experience. Constructivist Foundations 3(3): 148–152. Available at
- Ofner F. (2010) Beschreiben und praktisches Handeln. Eine nicht-dualisierende Konzeption von Erfahrung im Anschluss an Josef Mitterer und George Herbert Mead. In: Riegler A. & Weber S. (eds.) Die Dritte Philosophie. Kritische Beiträge zu Josef Mitterers Non-Dualismus. Velbrück Wissenschaft, Weilerswist: 64–76.

RECEIVED: 5 SEPTEMBER 2012 39

ACCEPTED: 14 FEBRUARY 2013 40