Karol Matuszkiewicz*

SELF-REFERENCE IN PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENTATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRAGMATICS

Abstract

This paper argues that pragmatics can yield interesting insights into the nature of paradoxes of self-reference. These insights help us understand that self-referential questions in philosophy do not necessarily lead to antinomy. First, the article summarizes the results of the traditional, formal-semantic approach to antinomies and determines which kind of attempts at resolving them has led philosophers to reject all self-referential sentences as nonsensical. Next, it presents two pragmatically-oriented attempts at solving the Liar paradox. Critical examination of these attempts makes it possible to distill the specific features of the pragmatic approach and to use these features in an analysis of several self-referential utterances. Accordingly, the paper proposes a classification of pragmatic self-reference, which is then used to analyze the argument from self-referential inconsistency against skepticism. The paper closes with a summary emphasizing that, in light of pragmatic analysis, self-referential arguments in philosophy are not affected by paradox, which shows that the inadmissibility thesis is unjustified.

Keywords: argumentation, self-reference, pragmatics, the Liar paradox

Questions about self-referential consistency are among the basic instruments of philosophical argumentation. Doesn't a skeptic believe that the thesis of skepticism is true? Can relativism be sustained without turning into absolutism? Does acceptance of pragmatism have desirable practical effects? Questions of this kind usually arise at an early stage of examining a philosophical theory and it seems reasonable to expect its author to be able to address them if the theory is to be regarded as sound and valuable. Yet this whole class of questions is sometimes deemed inadmissible in philosophical argumentation. Self-reference can famously lead to paradoxes that are often considered to render rational thinking helpless. Thus, exploring the consequences

* Institute of Philosophy, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wrocław, Koszarowa 3, 51-149 Wrocław, karol.matuszkiewicz@uwr.edu.pl.

of self-reference in order to undermine a philosophical theory is likely to get the critic out of the frying pan into the fire, as the problems generated by self-reference seem to outweigh any potential advantage they may confer.

1. FORMAL-SEMANTIC ANALYSES
OF THE ANTINOMIES OF SELF-REFERENCE

The so-called Liar is the most famous paradox of self-reference. It is traditionally ascribed to the Cretan poet Epimenides. In the *Epistle to Titus* (1: 12-13), Saint Paul mentions Epimenides, a prophet who scolds Cretans by calling them liars:

> One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. (Scofield, Rikkers 2002: 1660)

Epimenides is himself a Cretan. If his condemnation is interpreted as applying to all Cretans, he is also referring to himself, and thus calling himself a liar. Semantic analysis of the Epimenides sentence reveals that it is genuinely paradoxical on the following two conditions. First, it has to be stated by a Cretan. Second, all the Cretans must indeed always "lie," i.e., their statements must always be false. If there are some Cretans that happen to utter a true sentence, then Epimenides' statement is simply false (and no logical antinomy is involved). If, instead, the two conditions are satisfied, Epimenides' proposition can be simplified to the following familiar form:

(*)　　　　　This sentence is false.

Is (*) true or false? If (*) is true, then it is true that (*) is false, and so (*) is false. If (*) is false, then it is not true that (*) is false, and so (*) is true. Assigning any of the values of the two-valued propositional calculus to the Liar sentence leads to a contradiction. There is no intuitive interpretation of the sentence on which it would not be self-contradictory. Moreover, we cannot simply dismiss the sentence as false, because the consequence of its being false is its being true. This is one of the strongest paradoxes encountered by human thinking.

The Liar paradox and other antinomies of self-reference[1] were studied by a number of prominent logicians in the twentieth century. Among the numerous attempts at providing a solution, one can find theories that construct a hierarchy of languages (Russell, Whitehead 1925, Tarski 1956), accounts

---

[1] For a comprehensive list of paradoxes, see, e.g., Haack 1978: 135-138.

that define the truth predicate as either partial (Kripke 1975, van Fraassen 1968) or unstable (Gupta 1982, Herzberger 1982), and theories that abandon the law of noncontradiction and analyze the Liar sentence using paraconsistent logic (Priest 1979). For the purposes of this paper, it is important to realize that only the first approach implies the inadmissibility of arguments that invoke self-reference.

Russell's ramified theory of types (Russell, Whitehead 1925) was introduced in order to resolve semantic antinomies of self-reference in a manner similar to the way the simple theory of types eliminated the paradoxes of set theory. Despite the formal complexity of the theory, the idea behind the solution is simple. Propositions (closed sentences) and propositional functions (open sentences) are divided into a hierarchy of types. A sentence can only refer to sentences that are directly below it in the hierarchy. At the lowest level (level 0) are sentences that refer only to objects that are not sentences (objects in the natural world, numbers, etc.). At level 1, sentences can refer to sentences from level 0. Sentences from level 2 can be about sentences from level 1, etc. Sentences that fall outside this strict hierarchy are treated as syntactically incorrect and thereby have no meaning. Among these sentences is the Liar statement, which refers to a sentence from its own level, namely to itself.

Thus, the solution proposed by Russell is simply to block self-reference as violating the rules of sentence construction. According to the type theory, "This sentence is false" is a string of characters devoid of meaning. The paradox fails to arise because semantic analysis of this syntactically incorrect string cannot even begin.

Russell's solution eliminates the Liar paradox from theories couched in terms of formal languages that satisfy the proposed constraints, but Russell went on to claim that natural language is subject to much the same limitations[2] (Russell, Whitehead 1925: 37). However, if Russell's account applies to philosophical discourse, then questions about self-referential consistency of philosophical theories, including those cited at the beginning of this paper, are invalid and have no place in philosophical argumentation. Moreover, the very theories attacked by those questions are also devoid of meaning, as they contain self-referential theses (e.g., "No sentence can be known to be true or false," "The truth of all sentences is relative to a language game"). In order for the theory to remain meaningful, the self-referential thesis has to be weak-

---

[2] This is also why the theory of types, rather than the more popular Tarskian approach, is used in this paper as an example of a language hierarchy solution to the paradox. Tarski explicitly limited the application of his theory to formal languages.

ened.[3] This step, however, deprives the theory of the ability to strive for maximum generality, which has long been a traditional aim of philosophical inquiry. It is also undeniable that questions about self-referential consistency seem meaningful and, what is more, exploring them may allow us to discover some fundamental features of the theories under consideration. Hence, it is clear that the constraints imposed by the theory of types (and any other hierarchy theory) are too strict when applied to philosophical argumentation. In subsequent sections, I will argue that the pragmatic approach can provide a more fine-grained analysis of the antinomies of self-reference, which shows such limitations to be unnecessary.

2. THE PRAGMATIC APPROACH

In the second half of the twentieth century, a new approach emerged to the analysis of the paradoxes of self-reference. Inspired by Wittgenstein's theory of meaning as language use, Strawson's theory of truth and reference, and Searle's theory of speech acts, several thinkers focused their research on the pragmatic aspect of language as crucial to understanding the antinomies. Under the formal-semantic approach, the object of analysis was a simple and coherent sentence, treated as unambiguous and independent of external context. In the pragmatics-oriented investigations, the units of analysis are utterances. These are understood as complex objects, built on the basis of sentences. For research on the antinomies of self-reference, the type of utterance that is of particular interest are statements. A person uttering a statement uses a sentence to communicate a proposition. The result of this performance, the communicated content, depends not only on the sentence and its meaning understood as what is directly stated by the language expressions it consists of, but also on the manner in which the act of stating is carried out and its context, including, among others, previous utterances, the recipient's expectations, and the conventions of language use accepted in given circumstances. When these pragmatic factors are taken into account, significant new insights into the nature of the paradoxes can be gained.

---

[3] This is usually done by formulating the thesis in the metalanguage, i.e., a language at a higher level in the hierarchy, so that the thesis refers to all the other sentences accessible to the theory, but not to itself.

3. THE LIAR AS A PRAGMATIC PARADOX

The pragmatics-oriented approach was taken by A. P. Martinich in his paper *A Pragmatic Solution to the Liar Paradox* (1983). The title of the article promises not only an analysis, but also a solution to the antinomy. Indeed, Martinich tries to demonstrate that the pragmatic approach reveals the paradox, to which no satisfying solution has been proposed after decades of semantic and logical research, to be a harmless illusion originating from erroneous assumptions. These assumptions are that (1) truth is a semantic notion and (2) the antinomy arises as a result of an incoherence of the ordinary concept of truth (1983: 63). Martinich proposes to replace these false theses with the following — as he calls it — heuristic principle:

> The so-called semantic paradoxes are not semantically based but pragmatically based and require a pragmatic solution. (Martinich 1983: 63)

In applying the principle, Martinich examines not the Liar sentence (as in traditional semantic analysis), but the statement built on top of that sentence. The analysis of this complex object should, according to Martinich, start with an evaluation of whether the statement is fulfilled, i.e., if the person who utters the Liar sentence is successful at making a statement. If not, the paradox does not arise, as the "liar" (or whoever else is uttering the Liar sentence) has not communicated anything, and there is no proposition whose truth value could be examined. As Martinich argues, this is exactly the case. To demonstrate this, he appeals to Searle's speech act theory. In his account of illocutionary acts, Searle (1969: 54) identifies a set of conditions necessary for the "successful and non-defective performance of the act" of promising, requesting, or making a statement. One of them is called the essential condition and applies to the intentions of the speaker in a given illocutionary act. For instance, the essential condition of a promise is that the speaker wishes to undertake an obligation, whereas the essential condition of a question is that the speaker intends to acquire some information, etc. (Searle 1969: 66). The essential condition of a statement is the speaker's intention that his interlocutors will take what is being said to be a representation of an actual state of affairs. When uttering the Liar sentence, one cannot, according to Martinich, have this intention. Therefore, at least one of the necessary conditions for successfully making a statement is not satisfied, and so nothing is stated: "There is no paradoxical speech act to be accounted for" (Martinich 1983: 64).

As Martinich himself immediately notices, this solution is not effective against the class of contingent antinomies, which arise only in specific em-

pirical circumstances, independent of and/or unknown to the speakers. In the famous example developed by Kripke (1975: 691):

(J)   Jones: Most of Nixon's assertions about Watergate are false,

(N)   Nixon: Everything Jones says about Watergate is true,

both Jones and Nixon intend to represent an actual state of affairs. The essential condition (as well as all the remaining necessary conditions identified by Searle) is satisfied: the speakers succeed in making a statement. Yet in some circumstances, of which the speakers may be unaware, their statements are paradoxical and form a so-called Liar circle. Suppose that Nixon's assertions about Watergate, not including (N), are evenly divided between true and false. If, at the same time, (J) is Jones' only statement about Watergate, or there are also other statements by Jones about Watergate, but all of them are true, then (J) and (N) are paradoxical. Martinich does not try to solve this paradox, but he points out that the pragmatic approach has a certain advantage over semantic analysis in the case of contingent antinomies. Semantically-oriented analyses were based on assumption (2): that the antinomy stems from a problem with the concept of truth. However, the paradoxicality of Kripke's example is no different from the purely pragmatic paradoxicality of speech acts that are not statements and do not contain truth predicates, e.g., "I order you not to obey any orders" or "I promise not to keep any promises." These examples also have contingent counterparts:

Prince: I promise to do what Machiavelli says,

Machiavelli: Don't keep any of your promises.

As indicated by the above examples, paradoxicality does not arise due to an incoherence of the notion of truth. According to Martinich, the problem is a more general one. A speech act of each type: an order, a promise, or a statement, is an action, and actions are risky and may fail (Martinich 1983: 67).

Avrum Stroll (1988) put an even greater emphasis on the pragmatic aspect of language in his analysis of the Liar paradox. Like Martinich, Stroll suggests a breakthrough already in the title of his paper, "The Liar: What Paradox?". Stroll agrees with Martinich's thesis that the Liar statement does not satisfy Searle's conditions, but he proposes a different account, which is also intended to resolve contingent paradoxes.

Carrying out the promise expressed in the title, Stroll begins his analysis with a claim that the Liar paradox "was never a paradox to begin with" (1988: 71). According to Stroll, it is obvious that Epimenides in his condemning speech did not refer to all the Cretans, and he certainly did not scold himself.

He did not state that he is a liar and, hence, he did not express a paradox. Moreover, even if Epimenides did perform the highly unlikely act of self-condemnation, the antinomy would arise only if he had adopted a peculiar meaning of the word "liar," which is not the denotation language speakers think of when using the word in regular communication. By calling someone a liar, we do not usually claim that they never tell the truth. What we usually mean is that the person has lied in a specific situation or that she is known to have lied on a remarkable number of occasions and can therefore be suspected of lying again. The interpretation of the word "liar" which the paradox stems from is significantly different, hence — as Stroll argues — attributing something paradoxical to Epimenides is "unquestionably wrong" (1988: 71). The paradoxicality of the simplified Liar sentence ("This sentence is false") is called into question in a similar manner. As Stroll points out, the sentence is not inherently self-contradictory, as, for example, "Some husbands are unmarried" is. One can imagine many situations where the sentence "This sentence is false" is used in a statement that is true and free from ambiguity; for instance, it can be uttered while pointing at the sentence "Snow is green." The antinomy arises only when we, language speakers, treat the sentence as self-referring. In what situation would we do that? In Stroll's opinion, only one possible situation comes to mind: a lesson or lecture during which a teacher is trying to explain what a paradox is (1988: 73). Nobody would use language in such a peculiar way in any other situation. Such a use would be pointless and absurd. Therefore, in Stroll's opinion, "This sentence is false," just like Epimenides' statement, should not be considered paradoxical.

Focus on the pragmatic aspect of language is also supposed to enable Stroll to solve the contingent antinomies of self-reference. Instead of citing Kripke's examples (which are mentioned in the paper), Stroll formulates his own, as he argues, generalized version of the contingent antinomy (1988: 73). He proposes to imagine three classrooms and three blackboards: A, B, and C, one in each classroom. On blackboard A, the following sentence is written: "The only sentence on B is true." On blackboard B: "The only sentence on C is true." Finally, on blackboard C: "The only sentence on A is false." This is a Liar circle, with additional emphasis on the empirical aspect: the sentences are written in places that are separated from each other and it is possible that someone will read or write one of the sentences without knowing the content of the remaining sentences. Lack of knowledge about the truth value of a sentence, the falsity of which one states, may, as noticed by Martinich, result in making a paradoxical statement in good faith (i.e., without violating Searle's conditions). Stroll reverses this line of reasoning and asks: would someone who wanted to communicate an actual state of affairs indeed write

on blackboard A that the sentence on blackboard B is true, without first checking what is on blackboard B and, further, on blackboard C? Someone who has the intention of making a true statement would rather look at the remaining blackboards and, having realized that his sentence would close the antinomic circle, would refrain from writing it.

Stroll's observation is accurate, but it has to be pointed out that his example with blackboards in the classrooms is, in fact, not a generalization of Kripke's example, but rather its artificial and simplified version. Artificial, because it is difficult to imagine why (apart from a purely educational context) someone would want to write on a school blackboard a sentence about a blackboard in a neighboring classroom. Simplified, because the person who is standing in front of blackboard A with a piece of chalk in her fingers intends to state something only about one sentence. In this situation it is obvious that she should not do that without knowing that sentence. By contrast, Nixon and Jones make general statements about a potentially large corpus of deliverances that concern a complex phenomenon — the Watergate scandal. It would be unrealistic to demand that one of them refrain from assessing the credibility of the other because the act of assessment, in conjunction with a possible but unlikely statement made by the other, can lead to paradox. Hence, the solution to the contingent antinomies proposed by Stroll is not convincing. Kripke applied his remark that paradoxes can stem from contingent circumstances independent of the speakers to realistic cases of everyday language use and provided a plausible example of such use. The artificiality of Stroll's example is out of step with the pragmatic approach.

The pragmatic approach, according to Martinich's and Stroll's declarations, was supposed to provide a solution to the antinomies of self-reference through an examination of those aspects of language that are inaccessible to traditional formal-semantic analysis. Martinich's article does indeed turn a spotlight on the question of fulfillment (or, in Austin's terminology, felicity) of self-referential statements, which falls outside the scope of formal-semantic analysis. His argument regarding the violation of Searle's necessary conditions for making a statement by the Liar is sound — it convincingly demonstrates that the Liar is unable to communicate anything. Stroll is right as well when he remarks that the paradox arises only when the statements are interpreted in an unorthodox manner. However, a closer study of these attempts reveals that the above observations are not sufficient to rebut the paradox. First and foremost, even if we endorse Martinich's and Stroll's thesis that the classic antinomy is merely an illusion, their analyses do not solve the contingent paradoxes. Secondly, these analyses are brief and they do not provide a detailed examination of the underlying mechanisms. For instance, the

similarity between the Liar antinomy and the pragmatic paradoxes of promises and orders, acknowledged by Martinich, stems from self-dependence of the example language acts, as explained by John Mackie.[4]

The solutions proposed by Martinich and Stroll only apply to selected examples and are thus partial. Martinich is aware that the necessary conditions for making a statement may be fulfilled in Kripke's example (Martinich 1983: 64). This makes his solution ineffectual against the contingent paradoxes. His reply to this objection is that we should not expect a unified treatment that would encompass both the traditional Liar paradox and the Kripke sentences (1983: 64). Stroll, when claiming that the antinomy arises from an odd interpretation of the Lair sentence, remarks that there are situations of language use where such an interpretation is made. But these are, as he calls them after Wittgenstein, cases of language gone on a holiday (Stroll 1988: 73) and as such do not pose problems that demand resolution. Martinich acknowledges that the paradoxes do sometimes occur, but they should be understood as failed attempts at communication, and "attempts may fail" (1983: 66). These conclusions indicate that Martinich and Stroll have taken an attitude that is fundamentally different from the logicians' approach to antinomies. Unlike thinkers such as Russell, Tarski, and Kripke, Martinich and Stroll do not aim at constructing a coherent model that would encompass all of the examined phenomena under a rational rigor of some sort. They prefer to observe human activity (in this case: acts of language), as Mackie put it, "in the wilderness" (1973: 239) and examine tools that enable us to function there. Imperfection of these tools is a natural, trivial phenomenon. The fact that language fails in some of its applications does not entail that it should be modified or replaced by some superior tool. It proves effective in the remaining situations, which is perhaps even more astonishing and worthy of research than the examples of its failure.

Of course, Martinich and Stroll are not the first philosophers to take this pragmatic attitude. Their approach fits in with the tradition of language research that emphasizes the essential difference between natural and formal languages in terms of their applications and — by the same token — the requirements we set for them. D. A. Whewell argued:

---

[4] Mackie explains that the Liar is self-dependent with respect to truth: the truth value of the Liar sentence depends on nothing more than the truth/falsity of that very sentence. This is made clear when we try to "unpack" the content of the sentence and end up with an infinite chain: "It is false that it is false that it is false that..." (Mackie 1973: 286). This was also pointed out by Gilbert Ryle in his excellent analysis (Ryle 1950). Similarly, the promise of not keeping any promises depends on keeping that very promise, etc. This will be explained in more detail in section 4.

> A language is not a theory, which must, of necessity, be internally consistent in order to function as a theory, but a vehicle of communication, and as long as the rules we use do not change too drastically from one area to the next, this end may be achieved. When the incoherence is such that it makes communication impossible, then it may be disposed of on an *ad hoc* basis. (Whewell 1987: 37)

Karl Popper, in an article written in the form of a Platonic dialogue, recommends, via Theaetetus:

> Just avoid them [i.e., paradoxical statements], as nearly everybody does, and don't worry about them. … For ordinary language and for ordinary purposes this is both sufficient and safe. (Popper 1954: 167)

This permissiveness of the pragmatic approach can be regarded as its advantage over formal-semantic analysis. In Stroll's and Martinich's accounts, the thought that self-reference is a taint which should be removed from language never emerges. Their research does not conclude with suggestions to bar self-reference from philosophical argumentation (or from any other type of discourse or language), but rather with a determination of the scope of its harmful effects. The proposed solutions, if accepted, entail a change in our understanding of how language expressions acquire meaning, but are not based on the radical premise that self-reference eliminates meaning. But this permissiveness and openness to the practices of everyday natural language can also make one eager to accept solutions that do not address the root of the problem (Whewell explicitly mentions *ad hoc* solutions). Martinich's and Stroll's declarations that they have resolved the paradox (or revealed that it was an illusion), together with the fact that their solutions fail to account for Kripke's example, may make one inclined to think that they have not avoided this threat.

4. TYPES OF PRAGMATIC SELF-REFERENCE

Even if Martinich and Stroll have not provided satisfactory solutions to the antinomies of self-reference (and, it has to be said, none of the thinkers who had been trying to find a solution since antiquity has), their focus on utterances, rather than sentences or propositions, reveals a significant phenomenon which is not taken into account in formal-semantic analysis. When an utterance is made, self-reference can occur not only in the proposition that the utterance is supposed to communicate. There is also pragmatic self-reference (or, as it is also called, performative self-reference), in which the speaker refers to the speech act she is performing.

We can divide pragmatically self-referential utterances into several classes. First, let us consider statements like "This sentence is being whispered," "I am not saying 'cake.'" These statements refer to the physical aspects of their own acts of being communicated. The truth value of the propositions they express will depend on the empirical qualities of these acts. The first proposition will be true if it is indeed being whispered. In order to determine its truth status, we need a basic empirical examination of the act in which the proposition is communicated. If the features of the act are as stated in the proposition, then the proposition is true. In the remaining cases (also including situations when it is being written or merely thought, etc.), there will be a contradiction between the proposition and the act of expressing it, but no paradox will arise. The proposition will simply be false. The same holds for the second example. The person tells us she is not saying "cake," but we can hear that she is pronouncing the word. The proposition is therefore false. We can call the first two statements cases of *empirical* pragmatic self-reference.

Let us now examine a second pair of examples: "I can't say 'cake'" and "I don't remember anything." The first statement, if it was uttered, and not written or merely thought, must be false. The speaker pronounced the word "cake" even though she declared she was unable to do so. To assess the truth value of the proposition she expressed, we need to take into consideration the fact of her having pronounced the word (a simple empirical examination, like in the first class of examples) and additionally the conditions of possibility for that fact. The proposition is false, as there is an evident contradiction between the fact and the proposition that explicitly states that the conditions of possibility for that fact are not satisfied. The truth value of the second proposition, "I don't remember anything," also depends on the conditions of possibility of the act of communicating it, though the dependence is initially not so clear. The speaker (or the person who writes or even thinks this sentence) does not directly state that she is unable to perform the act. Instead, she claims that she does not have a mental capacity that seems necessary to perform the act (and, for that matter, any language act) — memory. Under the assumption that, in order to form a sentence, one needs to at least remember the words that sentence consists of, and also some rudiments of grammar, the statement "I don't remember anything" clearly expresses a false proposition.

Evaluating whether a statement denies the conditions of possibility for its being performed involves, as we can see, assumptions that can be complex and debatable. Still, once we identify these assumptions, the task of determining the truth value of such self-referential statements is fairly straightforward. What is even more important for the purposes of this paper is that such statements (let us call this type *transcendental* pragmatic self-reference) do not

lead to paradox either. If the content of the statement denies the conditions of possibility of making that statement, and the statement has been made, then the content, i.e., the proposition, is clearly false. There is no risk of its being trapped in the paradoxical deadlock like that observed in the Liar case.

But the deadlock does appear in the pragmatically self-referential utterances of the third class. Let us, after Martinich, consider the promise "I promise not to keep any promises" and the order "I order you not to obey any of my orders." Can the promise be kept? It would clearly have been broken if the person who had made it subsequently made and kept different promises. But what if this is her only promise or if she has broken all the remaining ones? In this case, the situation will be exactly the same as with Epimenides' statement reduced to the simplified Liar sentence. Just as the truth of the Liar sentence requires the falsity of that very sentence, so the keeping of this promise requires the breaking of this very promise. Similarly, to obey the order, one would have to disobey it. At the basis of the paradox in these examples (let us call them examples of *self-dependent* pragmatic self-reference, or simply *pragmatic self-dependence*) lies a negative self-dependence of the utterance on its aim: achieving the aim requires not achieving it and so is impossible.

Still, the possibility of achieving the aim of a positively self-dependent utterance is also highly questionable. Utterances like "I promise to keep this promise," "I order you to obey this order," "I bet I win this bet," are, due to their total self-dependence, empty. The keeping of the promise consists in keeping that very promise, obeying the order requires obeying that very order, winning the bet requires winning it. The situation is essentially the same as when utterances with negation are in play. The lack of negation transforms contradictions into pleonasms, but it is still impossible to achieve the aims of the utterances: win the bet or obey the order. These examples are therefore no less paradoxical than their negative counterparts.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the above examples can yield several important conclusions. First, pragmatic self-reference can have the same consequences as self-reference which occurs in the proposition. A pragmatically self-referential statement can be, as a result of the self-reference, true, false, or paradoxical. Second, determining the truth value of such a statement always requires an examination of the very act of uttering that statement and is therefore necessarily involved in various assumptions regarding speech acts (e.g., does the

phrasing of a meaningful utterance in a language require an understanding of its grammar? Is the act of uttering some words necessarily a sign of remembering them? Does the act of uttering some words imply that the speaker can say them?). Determining the truth value of a pragmatically self-referential statement also entails all the concomitant complications of empirical research (perhaps the person who said "cake" was not able to utter the word at the beginning of the act of saying, but has somehow acquired the ability later on; perhaps we have misheard and she in fact did not say "cake"). This can be used to discredit arguments based on pragmatic self-reference as based on incorrect assumptions.

Third, pragmatic analysis seems to confirm an important thesis regarding the nature of the antinomies: it is not self-reference alone that leads to paradox or the impossibility of determining the truth value of the statement. Self-referential statements "I can't say 'cake'" and "I don't remember anything" are not paradoxical, but simply false. Due to the combination of self-reference and negation in these sentences, there is an inconsistency between their content and the very act of uttering them. This inconsistency is quite simple to diagnose, since the objects of these sentences are observable states of affairs, such as the sound of an utterance or the contents of the speaker's memory. In turn, statements "I promise not to keep this promise" and "I order you not to obey this order" as well as their counterparts without negation, "I promise to keep this promise" and "I order you to obey this order," are paradoxical. Extending the analysis from statements to utterances of different types thus provides a good illustration of the thesis that what lies at the root of the most serious problems related to self-reference is not contradiction, but self-dependence.

Finally, let us ask ourselves the most important question: what type of self-reference do we usually deal with in philosophical argumentation? Is it pragmatic self-reference or the kind that Russell was trying to block? Does it lead to paradox? With the conclusions of the above analysis in mind, let us consider a widely known philosophical argument from self-reference. The thesis of epistemological skepticism in one of its standard formulations is: "It is impossible to know anything." It can be attacked as follows: "If it is impossible to know anything, then it follows that it is impossible to know that it is impossible to know anything." What does this argument from self-reference demonstrate?

It definitely does not show that the thesis of skepticism is antinomic. The assumption that the thesis is true does not entail that it is false; the assumption that the thesis is false does not entail that it is true. Therefore, the skeptical thesis is not a case of the Liar paradox. Nor is it self-dependent. The fact

that the truth value of all propositions can or cannot be known depends on factors independent of the truth value of the proposition about that fact (it depends on our cognitive abilities, properties of language, available experiences enabling us to verify the truth of propositions, etc.). However, a weaker dependency can be observed. It seems that, in order to state a thesis, one must assume the knowability of that thesis. According to the analysis presented in the previous section, we are thus dealing with a case of transcendental pragmatic self-reference. The skeptical thesis is not inherently contradictory. There is only an inconsistency between its content and the conditions of possibility for stating it. This inconsistency stems from the condition of possibility of making a statement: it is assumed that, in order to assert any proposition, one has to consider its truth value to be knowable.

The skeptic may call this assumption into question. She may argue that her notion of assertion is weaker, or even that she does not state anything. Pragmatic self-reference, as characterized in the previous section, is difficult to use as an ultimate, decisive argument. Attacking skepticism with a self-referential argument has only started a discussion which is potentially interesting. If we were to obey the ban on self-reference imposed by the language hierarchy theories, the discussion would never have started. Let this be an argument for the contention that self-reference can and should be used in philosophical argumentation, for it does not necessarily lead to antinomy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gupta A. (1982), "Truth and Paradox," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 11(1), 1-60.

Haack S. (1978), *Philosophy of Logics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Herzberger H. G. (1982), "Naïve Semantics and the Liar Paradox," *The Journal of Philosophy* 79(9), 479-497.

Kripke S. (1975), "Outline of a Theory of Truth," *The Journal of Philosophy* 72(19), 690-716.

Mackie J. L. (1973), *Truth, Probability, and Paradox: Studies in Philosophical Logic*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Martinich A. P. (1983), "A Pragmatic Solution to the Liar Paradox," *Philosophical Studies* 43(1), 63-67.

Popper K. (1954), "Self-Reference and Meaning in Ordinary Language," *Mind* 63(250), 162-169.

Priest G. (1979), "The Logic of Paradox," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8(1), 219-241.

Russell B., Whitehead A. (1925), *Principia Mathematica*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ryle G. (1950), "Heterologicality," *Analysis* 11(3), 61-69.

Scofield C. I., Rikkers D. W. (2002), *The Scofield Study Bible: New King James Version*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Searle J. (1969), *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stroll A. (1988), "The Liar: What Paradox?," *Argumentation* 2(1), 63-75.

Tarski A. (1956), *The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages* [in:] *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics: Papers from 1923 to 1938*, J. H. Woodger (trans.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 152-278.

van Fraassen B. C. (1968), "Presupposition, Implication, and Self-Reference," *The Journal of Philosophy* 65(5), 136-152.

Whewell D. A. (1987), *Self-Reference and Meaning in a Natural Language* [in:] *Self-Reference — Reflections on Reflexivity*, S. J. Bartlett, S. Suber (eds.), Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 31-40.