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Abstract: *Positions in the ongoing debate regarding rhetorical epistemology can be typified by a continuum with objectivists at one end and intersubjectivists at the other. This essay suggests that a middle position may better serve the communication discipline. The authors provide an overview of the debate, then present three common uses of the term "reality" (objective reality, social reality, and intrapersonal reality) as guides for understanding the positions of the debaters. New labels for these uses of "reality," combined with a discussion of the vital role of intrapersonal processes in epistemology, provide a position that emphasizes the significance of both symbols and their referents. Such a position satisfies the demands of the rhetorical and social science approaches to the study of human communication.*

Perspective:

1. Do you agree with the authors' assertions that the neglected umpire is the one that best fits the communication discipline? Why or why not?

2. From your knowledge of articles published in communication journals, which umpire best describes the kind of research typically conducted by communication scholars? Which umpire should be describing communication scholarship? Defend your answer.

3. What role(s) do you think communication plays in the way human beings learn and discover?

During recent conventions of the Speech Communication Association, it has been interesting to hear scholars of diverse stature and sub-division discussing issues related to epistemology. A variety of presentations have directly or indirectly proclaimed the demise of either postmodernism or objective reality. The debate has not been restricted to official panels; a somewhat-heated discussion was overheard in a coffee shop at one convention between two professors clearly new to the debate. One presented cogent arguments for the pursuit of objective reality, the other held fast to the notion that the self-reflexive nature of personal knowledge precludes direct contact with whatever may be "out there." Despite the funeral pronouncements, it appears that both positions are alive and active within the discipline.

One of the most frustrating aspects of this debate is the lack of definitional clarity for the term "reality." Rather than developing different words to help us distinguish between varying meanings, scholars have assigned radically different meanings to the same word. "Reality" is used as suits the rhetor's purpose with the assumption that others both share and agree with that person's definition. Such assumptions blur rather than facilitate our dialogue on this important topic. This essay will propose some definitional guidelines to assist our communication.

We will offer new descriptors for three prominent ways "reality" is used in our scholarship, discussing each term's position in the debate. Ultimately, we will make the case that one of these positions—the one that accounts for our intrapersonal perceptions—is most useful for understanding and articulating the link between rhetoric and epistemology.

The Present Debate

There is a rather well-defined debate within communication regarding the role of rhetoric in epistemology. Scott's (1967) seminal piece, "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic," established rhetoric as the creator of what is "real" and placed it at the core of all that is known. Scott asserted that reality is socially constructed through rhetoric. The assignment of meaning gives existence substance and significance. Some recent theorists, most notably Cherwitz (1977), Cherwitz & Hikins (1982), Hikins (1989, 1990), Hikins and Zagacki (1988), and Orr (1978), have disputed that position and moved rhetoric to a place of prominence, but one that falls short of reality-creation.

A well-known analogy is used here to help define and illustrate the positions in the debate:

The story goes that three umpires disagreed about the task of calling balls and strikes. One said "I calls them as they is." The second one said, "I calls them as I sees them." The third and cleverest umpire said, "They ain't nothin' till I calls them" (Simons, 1976, p. 29).

The poles of the debate continuum are typified by the first and third umpires: "I calls them as they is" and "They ain't nothin' till I calls them." Which umpire do we, as a discipline, want to put behind the plate? We must first understand each umpire's approach to calling balls and strikes.

The Objectivist Umpire

At one pole in the debate is the umpire who states, "I calls them as they is." This end of the continuum, here simply titled the "objectivist" position (sometimes equated with "logical positivism" or "logical empiricism"), holds that reality is knowable and quantifiable. Scholars in this position are said to be pursuing laws which govern human behavior, with the goal of grasping the cause-and-effect nature of observed events (see Fisher, 1978). The intended meaning of the term "reality" for those espousing such a position might best be labeled "OBJECTIVE REALITY." Objective reality is that which exists separate and distinct from human conceptualizations of it. The discovery of this reality's "brute facts" is the focus of scientific study.

Exaggerated versions of this position (i.e., *all* human behavior is governed by laws; *all* that is "out there" is readily accessible) are used in arguments against objectivism, though, few in our discipline would ascribe to such extremes. Many, however, employ scientific methods that are consistent with this approach.

The Intersubjectivist Umpire

The opposite pole in the debate is represented by the umpire who says, "They ain't nothin' till I calls them." This position, labeled "intersubjectivism" by Orr (1978) (most closely related to the current "postmodern" perspective), locates reality within and among human interactants. Meanings determine existence, and ontological characteristics are both irrelevant and unknowable. Objective reality is either inaccessible to us, or it does not exist at all (Watzlawick, 1981). What is known is "known" only through the interaction of symbol systems. There is no objective Truth or standard by which to judge existence except consensus and utility. There may be a

physical world, but knowledge of it can only be derived through intersubjective agreement.

Intersubjectivists use the term "reality" quite differently from objectivists. The intersubjectivist meaning for the term might best be labeled "SOCIAL REALITY." Social reality assigns reality-creating power to societies. Berger and Luckmann (1967) captured this idea in the title of their well-known work, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge.* While their book is often cited to support the intersubjectivist position, it seems apparent from their title and introduction that Berger and Luckmann were *not* asserting that people create reality; rather, in their social interactions, they act as though what they believe is real. Thus, their book might better be titled "The Construction of Social Realities." In any case, the notion that all is constructed through social interaction remains a common application of the term "reality"—one that works well for intersubjectivists.

Social realities, according to the intersubjectivists, are created through communication (thus the appeal of this position for rhetorical scholars; see Orr, 1978). Through symbolic interaction, individuals co-create the things of the world. Rather than objective reality operating as the standard by which we measure, consensus and utility serve that function. Extreme applications of social reality can be found in the works of intersubjectivists such as Brummett (1979), who contends, "rhetoric creates all of what there is to know. . . .Furthermore, no reality that humans experience exists apart from human values, perceptions, and meanings" (p. 5. Cited in Croasmun & Cherwitz, 1982). From this position, social reality precludes access to objective reality. Our given symbol system serves to erect an impassable barrier between us and anything else that might be; therefore, it inhibits, even blocks entirely, our access to objective reality.

The existence of an objective reality is not denied by most communication theorists, whatever their position in this debate. Watzlawick (1976), though unquestionably an intersubjectivist, discusses what he calls "first-order reality": "Let us, therefore, use the term first-order reality whenever we mean those aspects which are accessible to perceptual consensus and especially to experimental, repeatable, and verifiable proof (or refutation)" (p. 14). Bateson (1979), another intersubjectivist, has what he calls "a box" for things like sticks, stones, and billiard balls, though he chooses, admittedly, not to deal with them. The key distinction here is *access*. Intersubjectivists

believe humans have no access to objective reality; objectivists believe humans have direct, unlimited access to it.

The Neglected Umpire

The positions just presented represent polar extremes in the current debate. These positions might be placed on a continuum:

Objectivist——————Intersubjectivist
First Umpire——————Third Umpire
Objective Reality————Social Reality
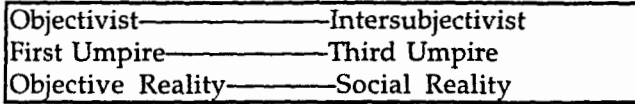
On such a continuum, however, one of the umpires in our illustration is not being considered. The umpire who said, "I calls them as I sees them" has been neglected. It is the contention of this essay that this umpire holds the key to resolving the debate. Despite the accolades of both Simons (1976) and Weick (1979) calling the third umpire the "cleverest" because he "correctly asserts" that "They ain't nothin' till I calls them," it is the second umpire ("I calls them as I sees them") who provides the only epistemological position that offers something to all scholars across the discipline of communication.

The approach in the literature that best typifies the neglected umpire's perspective is Orr's (1978) "critical rationalism." This position has objectivist underpinnings in that it maintains reality is "out there" separate from human thought or design. Reality is objective, able to be discovered by human beings, and not dependent on the human mind for its existence. Critical rationalism also affirms intersubjectivity as it acknowledges the vital importance of interaction in ascribing meaning to the world. Meaning is significant in that it plays a sense-making role—but not a reality-creating role. Human beings have access (albeit limited) to objective reality via the senses and experimentation. Meaning is attributed and sense is made of experience through the use of learned symbols assigned to actual referents. While all of reality cannot be known by a single individual, an individual's beliefs about the world have a standard by which they can be measured—objective reality.

This third position, located between the poles on the debate continuum, recognizes a neglected dynamic that can be labeled "INTRAPERSONAL REALITY." Intrapersonal reality is, in essence, the view of the world within each of us. It is the perception of reality that people construct for themselves. It involves "the physiological and psychological processing of messages that happens within individuals at conscious and non-conscious levels as they attempt to understand themselves and their environment" (Roberts, Edwards, & Barker, 1987). Although it is substantively influenced by interaction with others, it is as unique as a fingerprint and continually growing and being reshaped. When we hear people say "That is her reality" (regardless of their intended meaning), we are hearing people refer to intrapersonal processes. Those intrapersonal processes are the locus of meaning (Cronen, Pearce, & Harris, 1982) and provide the impetus for action. Toward that end, our unique, individual world-views form the basis for our behavior. Your intrapersonal reality is giving meaning to these words and is the cause of the response you have as you read them.

Before we discuss intrapersonal reality further, it is essential that we adjust our use of terminology. As we contended earlier, one of the problems in the present debate is the way people use (and abuse) the word "reality;" therefore, relabeling is crucial for moving forward. Henceforth, we will retitle "social reality" "NEGOTIATED PERCEPTION" and "intrapersonal reality" "INTRAPERSONAL PERCEPTION." The word "reality" will then be reserved for "objective reality"—the world that is "out there."

"Negotiated perception" involves the interaction of individuals who assign meaning and understanding to the world around them. Reality is not created by negotiated perception; rather it is given meaning through consensus. That meaning is verified and revised by a continual process of testing and retesting. If the meaning attributed does not match what is known or found in reality, it is adjusted or replaced. "Intrapersonal perception" takes a similar course. Our individual perceptions do not create reality, but rather give meaning to the world around us (including to the "negotiated perceptions" of groups with which we interact). We act on the basis of how we view the world, but neither reality nor the negotiated perceptions within which we live tolerate all views equally well. Standing in the path of an on-coming train, regardless of the meaning attributed to the locomotive, carries certain verifiable consequences. Similarly, holding a meaning that differs dramatically from that of the surrounding negotiated perception carries societal consequences.

Relabeling these terms returns "reality" to its general and familiar definition and reinstates meaning as a matter of perception (individual and/or negotiated) about the real world. With these terms and definitions in hand, we return to exploring the domain of the neglected umpire,

whose intrapersonal perception allows him to "call them as he sees them."

Intrapersonal Perception

Our intrapersonal perception begins with our sensory contact with the real world. Our visual, aural, olfactory, oral, and tactile encounters with reality stimulate intrapersonal sense-making. Reality is "out there," igniting our intrapersonal processes. Our sensory contact with reality and with those who live in it creates meaning for us, but our meaning does not create reality. Those things to which we have not yet assigned meaning still exist in the world; it is not our sense-making that brings them into being. To believe that things which we have not perceived do not exist is to limit our capacity for change or learning. If there is nothing beyond those things to which we have attached meaning, then what is there that is not already known? By what manner could we learn symbol systems or adopt new views of reality?

Additionally, the world we encounter with our senses has distinct, consistent patterns and characteristics. If it did not, we would have no reason to redefine our intrapersonal perceptions except for whimsy. The earth would still be flat and the universe would continue to revolve around it! Moreover, this objective world must be at least minimally accessible and stable for there to be consistency within our intrapersonal perceptions and overlap across perceptions. Those who profess consensus as the creator of that overlap must struggle with the question of the existence of those who share the consensus. Do the others with whom we agree exist within us, or do they exist "out there" in a world that is separate from us? There is an inherent circularity in professing direct contact with other symbol holders while denying contact with the world in which they live.

Reality also serves to validate or invalidate our perceptions. For instance, the negotiated perception that the earth was flat did not hold up to the measure of objective reality. While some might contend that consensus about the earth being flat made it so for those who believed it, it is doubtful those same theorists would say the earth changed its shape from flat to spherical just about the same time consensus shifted. Reality also impinges on such events as people arguing about a disputed "fact." Two individuals may argue and debate from their own intrapersonal perceptions to no apparent end, but when one pulls out a handgun and fatally shoots the other, reality becomes undeniable. The death of one arguer and the resulting incarceration of the other (as a result of a jury's negotiated perception of the law and the behavior) become elements of reality difficult to debate.

Thus far, we have claimed that intrapersonal perceptions result from sensory interactions with the real world. It might seem as though we are discounting the role of communication in shaping those intrapersonal perceptions. We have done so purposefully to emphasize the impact and import of reality as external and objective phenomena. We suspect that few in our discipline need to be convinced of the importance of communication in shaping our intrapersonal perceptions. Without question, negotiated perception plays a vital role in the creation and molding of our intrapersonal perception. Through communication, we share with one another our negotiated and intrapersonal perceptions. We use our symbol systems and our ability to attribute meaning in the negotiation of shared understanding. The shared understanding that exists in society is imparted to us from our very first moments of life. We learn the symbol systems, negotiating their meaning with those around us as we develop values, attitudes, and beliefs that are shared with others. Also, we establish our self-concepts, in large measure, through the input of others (see, for example, Mead, 1934). That self-concept becomes a foundation for the way we make sense of our actions, our society, and reality.

Our intrapersonal perception may vary in minimal or significant ways from the negotiated perceptions of society because of our own unique neuronal, sensory, and perceptual processes, as well as our life-experiences. Heroes, rebels, and martyrs often find their intrapersonal perceptions at odds with the negotiated perceptions of the societies in which they live. The difference may be so significant that the individual is eliminated or the negotiated perception is radically altered. While some individuals or groups may develop very similar perceptions, those perceptions are never completely shared—some differences are always present. Negotiated perceptions may shape and mold our intrapersonal perceptions, but those intrapersonal perceptions are ultimately unique. While the contribution of our society is vast and fundamental, the individual still distinctly shapes that contribution.

Pulling It Together

So which umpire is the cleverest? The first umpire claims he "calls them as they is," failing to recognize that what "they is" is a matter of negotiated perception (as baseball fans know, the

strike zone has changed many times in the sport's history). The third umpire claims "they ain't nothin' till I calls them," failing to acknowledge that regardless of his call, there *is* a baseball traveling through space (that will remind him of its reality if he steps in front of it). The second umpire, however, recognizes that he has sensory contact with a real baseball in a real world. His perception doesn't create the baseball or its trajectory, but it does create meaning. That meaning is determined by his sensory acuity and negotiated perceptions of the strike zone. Others may disagree with his judgment, but it's based on the best information he has. After all, he calls them as he sees them. All the participants—the umpire, the players, the fans—will now communicate about their intrapersonal and negotiated perceptions of a very real pitch.

It seems logical and functional to consider the interaction of all three elements—reality, intrapersonal perception, and negotiated perception—as we study communication. There are real communicators interacting within a real world using their intrapersonal perceptions in combination with their negotiated perceptions to create meaning. In acknowledging all of these elements, communication researchers can do their work in a world of real communication events created by actual communicating beings. We may find that those whom we study hold perceptions of reality (either individual or negotiated) that are different from our own. We must either accept or challenge those differences, measuring them against our best understanding of reality.

In 1991, Berger made a call to the communication discipline for "big questions." One such question might be "What does the discipline of communication believe about its role in epistemology—in the knowing about knowing?" By taking a stand in the middle of the epistemic continuum, embracing the wisdom of the second umpire, we can provide an answer that works for all of us. Yes, objectivists, reality is out there and we have at least minimal access to it. Yes, intersubjectivists, we assign meaning to—literally make sense of—that reality through symbolic interaction. Both can be true at the same time when we acknowledge that we calls them as we sees them.

Two key implications of such a stand present themselves:
First, the acceptance of a diversity of methodologies and methods becomes both possible and necessary. The need for approaching scholarly questions from quantitative, qualitative, *and* rhetorical critical perspectives is emphasized when adopting an "I calls them as I sees them" view. There are important questions that each methodology can answer about every communication event. The interaction of reality and perceptions—negotiated perceptions of a baseball game's importance, intrapersonal perceptions of winners and losers, and the baseballs and strike zones themselves—present all types of scholars with opportunities to contribute substantively to our understanding of the function and effect of communication.

Second, the role of the discipline of communication in the academy can be more clearly and carefully defined. Cronkhite's (1986) assertion that communication scholars study human symbolic activity effectively provided the discipline a "niche" of our own. Applying an "I calls them as I sees them" perspective helps further define the discipline's role. It is our assertion that communication functions in the gaps between reality, intrapersonal perceptions, and negotiated perceptions. In the meeting of an individual and reality, in the meeting of individual perceivers, and in the meeting of collectives there is the symbolic activity we call communication. Human symbolic activity is the only means toward cooperative activity (beyond chance) and the key to developing and framing knowledge in useful manners. Communication scholars study the interaction of reality and perception with the countless pursuant variables and contexts. Acknowledging that "we calls them as we sees them," communication scholars find a place in the academy that is neither disconfirming of other academic pursuits nor weak and indefensible. Our discipline serves to study the glue that binds human beings together with one another and the world in which they live.

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Response from Leonard J. Shedletsky

Johnson and Proctor make a neat division between three points of view concerning reality. First, the Objectivist position: Objective reality is knowable—it is separate and distinct from human conceptualization of it. Second, the Intrapersonal Perception position: Reality is what we construct for ourselves from our perceptions—our perception. Third, the Intersubjectivist position: Reality is only knowable by means of intersubjective agreement. People act as though what they believe is real.

The position that is especially problematical is the Objectivist position. Johnson and Proctor assume that we have access to objective reality, that there are times when we call upon it to neatly resolve a debate. They write: "Reality also serves to validate or invalidate our perceptions. For instance, the negotiated perception that the earth was flat did not hold up to the measure of objective reality." If that were the case, then I think that umpire #1 should get a lot work and #'s 2 and 3 could do some clowning during the seventh inning stretch.