

- (2) JNA oslobadja Cavtat i Dubrovnik
(The Yugoslav People's Army liberates Cavtat and Dubrovnik)
(*Politika*, taken from Bugarski, 1995: 92)
- (3) Branioci Mirkovaca oslobadjaju Vukovar
(The defenders of Mirkovci liberate Vukovar)
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(1) to (3) are illustrations of attempts to win public support for new legislation, (1), for the shelling of Cavtat, Dubrovnik, (2), and Vukovar, (3), as well as for the armed intervention in the village of Mirkovci, (3). In each case the approval seemingly depends on the readers' acceptance of some dubious premises, such as:

- (1') Thugs, football hooligans, people who man picket lines and take part in marches belong in the same group in that they are prone to unlawful violent conduct.
- (2') Cavtat and Dubrovnik were controlled by an occupying force of some sort.
- (3')
 - a. The village of Mirkovci was attacked and needed to be defended by force.
 - b. Vukovar was controlled by an occupying force of some sort.

A range of assumptions about the desirability of new legislation (in (1)) and about the righteousness of the military interventions (in (2) and (3)) are communicated as conclusions which depend on some premises like (1') to (3'). Hence, one might expect that readers should have paid attention to these premises, and that at least a significant proportion of them should have raised questions such as: *What exactly makes people who man picket lines similar to hooligans (so that their behaviour ought to be regulated by the same law)?* or *Who/what did Cavtat, Dubrovnik and Vukovar need liberating from?*. But, on the whole, few questions were asked and not many people (in the target readership) asked them. The question is: *Why?*. Typical answers mention, and sometimes examine in considerable detail, a whole range of contributing factors (cf. van Dijk 1988; Wilson 1990; Fowler 1991; Fairclough 1992, 1995), but there is no reasoned explanatory account of the way the resources normally exploited in rational communication are involved in spreading irrational ideological beliefs. This paper is an attempt to show how such an account might begin to take shape. I argue that the dissemination of irrational ideological beliefs is parasitic on human communication and cognition – parasitic in that it exploits their mechanisms to achieve effects which are diametrically opposed to their proper function (i.e. to bring about improvements in the belief system).

2. Dispositions and susceptibilities

The problem presented by examples like (1) to (3) can be examined fruitfully in the context of Sperber's (1996) distinction between dispositions and susceptibilities:

Human, genetically determined cognitive abilities are the outcome of a process of natural selection. We are entitled to assume that they are adaptive: that is, that they helped the species survive and spread. This is not to say that all their effects are adaptive.

Some of the effects of our genetic endowment can be described as dispositions, others as susceptibilities, although the distinction is not always easy to draw. Dispositions have been positively selected in the process of biological evolution; susceptibilities are side-effects of dispositions.

...

Homo sapiens, for instance, has a disposition to eat sweet food. In the natural environment in which the species developed, this was of obvious adaptive value in helping individuals to select the most appropriate nutrients. In the modern environment, in which sugar is artificially produced, this brings out a susceptibility to over-consumption of sugar, with all its well-known detrimental effects.

(Sperber, 1996:66-7)

Human cognition is geared towards the formation of reasonably faithful representations of the world, for which it relies largely on perception and communication. The adaptive value of such a cognitive system can hardly be questioned. But the cognitive system of the *Homo sapiens* is also susceptible to the formation and acceptance of irrational beliefs. A good way to try to understand this susceptibility is to consider it in the context of the related disposition. For one thing, the disposition may already be reasonably well understood. For another, if the relation between the susceptibility and the disposition remains unobserved, significant generalizations are likely to be overlooked.

3. Relevance in Cognition and Communication

One of the main obstacles to explaining human irrationality has been the lack of insight into our belief-formation processes. For example, Botterill and Carruthers (1999: 107-8) point out that these “should be relativized to our needs as situated finite *enquirers after truth*” [italics - VŽ] and that the rationality of these processes “should be assessed in relation to both *reliability* and *fecundity* (truth and speed)”. Of course, reliability and fecundity do not easily come together. A cognitive system geared towards truth is reliable only if its inferential processes take a great many belief assumptions as inputs and yield a great many true belief-assumptions as outputs. It is not clear how a cognitive system whose main (if not the only)

concern is for truth could operate efficiently within the time constraints within which humans seem to operate when they are communicating and going about their daily lives in the usual way.

Within pragmatics this problem has been addressed directly by Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) [S&W hereafter]. They argue that human communication and cognition share a goal: maximizing cognitive gain (through the processing of incoming stimuli against already held beliefs). As is the case with any thing defined in terms of its function, the operation of human cognitive and communicative mechanisms should be characterized in terms of an efficiency measure, a cost-benefit relation of some sort. The analogy with purposeful artifacts is rather suggestive in this connection:

Efficiency is some measure of benefit divided by cost. The benefit of a pot could be measured as the quantity of water that it holds. Cost can conveniently be measured in equivalent units: the quantity of material of the pot itself. Efficiency might be defined as the volume of water that a pot can hold divided by the volume of material that goes to make the pot itself.

(Dawkins, 1996: 7)

Since the function of both communication and cognition is to bring about improvements in individuals' belief systems, cognitive gain constitutes the benefit side of the equation. As humans have finite cognitive resources and have only limited time for reasoning, planning and decision making, it seems plausible to assume that processing effort is the cost parameter in the cognitive efficiency measure. S&W call this measure relevance and define it as follows:

Relevance

A phenomenon is relevant to an individual:

- (a) to the extent that the cognitive effects achieved when it is processed in context are large, and
- (b) to the extent that the processing effort required for achieving the effects is small.

(adapted from Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995: 153)

On S&W's view, the effect-effort ratio is not measured by mapping values on a numerical scale. People's estimates of effect and effort are based on the monitoring of symptomatic physico-chemical changes, and, when they are represented mentally, they take the form of judgments which are intuitive and comparative, rather than consciously calculated and absolute. These intuitive judgments are not merely retrospective but prospective: people have intuitions about how relevant the processing of a phenomenon is likely to be, not merely about how relevant a

phenomenon which has been processed has turned out to be (cf. S&W 1986/1995: 130-131). This characterization of relevance provides the basis for the following law-like generalization about human cognition:

The Cognitive Principle of Relevance:

Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance.

(Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 260)

In evolutionary terms, the cognitive principle of relevance is a useful design feature: the ability to weigh up the processing effort (likely to be expended) against the cognitive effects (likely to be achieved) is advantageous, because it enables decision-making in any situation in which the survival and prosperity of the species depend on the allocation of limited cognitive resources. On this approach, communication gives the search for cognitive effects a big boost. Most of the time a vast range of stimuli impinge on our senses at a fairly high rate. Some of these stimuli pre-empt our attention, thus creating an expectation that processing them will yield some significant cognitive effects. Finally, some attention pre-empting stimuli are designed to create - and to be recognized as designed to create - the expectation that they are worth paying attention to. This last type of stimuli are called ostensive stimuli, and their use in conveying information is called ostensive-inferential communication. It follows from this that ostensive-inferential communication involves two levels of intention:

Ostensive-inferential communication

a. **The informative intention:**

The intention to inform an audience of something.

b. **The communicative intention:**

The intention to inform the audience of one's informative intention.

(Wilson and Sperber 2002: 255)

On this approach, an act of communication can succeed in two ways: (a) the audience recognizes what it is that the communicator intends to inform it of (but does so without accepting the belief-assumptions being communicated), and (b) in addition to (a), the audience accepts as beliefs the assumptions the communicator intends to communicate. This distinction is important because communicators may have different goals. For example, if – say, in response to your question during a casual conversation over dinner - I told you what I thought about the firemen's strike in Great Britain in November 2002, my main aim would be to share my thoughts with you, rather than to convince you that you should accept my opinion. In other

attention in a way which makes their irrationality (i.e. irrelevance) as evident as that of Soliony's remark in (4). A closer look at the relevance-theoretic characterization of the comprehension strategy involved in ostensive-inferential communication makes this point quite clear.

Ostensive-inferential communication involves the production and interpretation of stimuli which come with a tacit promise that they are worth paying attention to. The cognitive principle of relevance makes it possible to characterize explicitly the conditions under which this promise has been honoured: an act of communication is worth paying attention to, provided that doing so will yield enough cognitive effects to warrant at least some attention, without gratuitous expenditure of processing effort. These observations on ostensive-inferential communication are more formally captured by S&W's communicative principle of relevance:

The Communicative Principle of Relevance:

Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

(Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 260)

Presumption of Optimal Relevance:

- (a) The ostensive stimulus is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's while to process it.
- (b) The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.

(Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 270)

The principle of relevance provides the basis for the following **comprehension strategy**:

Upon bearing/reading an utterance, follow a path of least effort and consider the cognitive effects in their order of accessibility; stop when the expected level of relevance is achieved (or appears unachievable).

A plausible relevance-theoretic analysis of (1) to (3) must take account of a number of further factors, crucially: (a) the superseding of linguistic meaning by social function (see Malinowski 1923; Jakobson 1960) in the use of words such as *ordinary folk*, *liberate*, and *defend* amongst others, (b) the importance of faith in the communicator, (c) the role of implicit (i.e. presupposed) assumptions, such as (1') to (3') in utterance comprehension, and (d) the possibility of holding mutually exclusive beliefs without detecting contradictions. Let me consider these points briefly.

3.1 Social function takes precedence over linguistic meaning

Arguably, when a person expresses agreement with an utterance which includes such a linguistic item (say *liberate* in (2)), what they accept is a socially ratified system of beliefs and actions, rather than the linguistic meaning of the item in question or the utterance as a whole. For example, *liberate* and *defend* may signal by social convention that the utterances in which they appear call for solidarity with a common cause (perhaps the response to the threat presented by the prospect of social and political change). This would take us some way towards understanding why the presupposed assumptions (1') to (3') were largely ignored: their relevance is entirely dependent on that of the propositional contents of the utterances (1) to (3). But, if the propositional content of the utterance (which builds on its linguistic meaning) is presumed to be virtually irrelevant, the presupposed assumptions too will not seem relevant enough to be worth paying attention to. The relevance-driven comprehension strategy predicts that the interpretation of linguistic items with a standardized/conventionalized social function (such as the words *liberate* and *defend* in (2) and (3)) will only exceptionally involve the exploitation of their linguistic meanings (and the accessing of the presupposed assumptions such as those in (2') and (3')). If the standardized/conventionalized meaning is accessed first and seems consistent with the principle of relevance, then the reader will not be justified to go beyond this level and will not explore the propositional content of the utterance, because doing so would entail the expenditure of greater processing effort than is necessary for arriving at an interpretation which seems (although it actually may not be) consistent with the principle of relevance.

3.2 Authority of/faith in the communicator

Ostensive stimuli are presumed to come from a source which is helpful in that they communicate the presumption that they are worth paying attention to. This guides the cognitive system's search for effects and therefore boosts its efficiency. However, if we are disposed to presume that in ostensive-inferential communication information comes from a helpful source (helpful in the special sense introduced here), then we are also susceptible to being misguided by communicators who are less than helpful. As is well known, the ideological manipulation of the readership by the press often involves setting up and then exploiting a kind of consensus between the communicator and the audience about all sorts of things regarded as important: aspirations, moral values, and so on. Examples like (1) have been much discussed:

- (1) [1] Home Secretary Leon Brittan yesterday declared war on thugs who bring
[2] terror to ordinary folk. He announced that police are to be given tough
[3] new powers to deal with soccer hooligans, picket lines, marches and
[4] racial hatred.

(*The Sun*, taken from Fowler, 1991: 139)

Within the framework of relevance theory consensus can be characterized in terms of *manifestness*, the degree of disposition for belief representation: consensus has been established when it is *mutually manifest* (informally, *evident*) to the communicator and the audience that they share a particular set of belief-assumptions. Example (1) is a good illustration of the way this can be achieved. In line [2] the expressions *thugs* and *ordinary folk* identify two broad social categories. By setting up these categories the communicator suggests that they are more relevant for the interpretation of the text that follows than any other social divisions (whether mentioned later or not). If the communicator and the audience share the belief that they belong in, or identify with, the same social category (say, *ordinary folk*), various assumptions about their shared interests, values, and so on, will also be strengthened without the need for representing them mentally. Moreover, the acceptance of this binary social categorization will give rise to specific expectations about the relevance of the text that follows. For instance, they should, at the very least, be consistent with the polarized division suggested in lines [1] and [2]. Once readers accept the social categories of *thugs* and *ordinary folk* as providing the relevant context, the intended cognitive effects of the text that follows in lines [2] to [4] will immediately become more manifest, roughly: *the new law is needed to help protect the good guys, i.e. ordinary folk*. This effect can be derived without much attention being paid to who the allegedly bad guys are: *soccer hooligans, those who man picket lines and take part in, marches*. Provided the readership is gullible enough, these assumptions are likely to be accepted without being checked for consistency with other already held beliefs (e.g. *People may have perfectly legitimate reasons for taking part in strikes and peaceful demonstrations, whereas all forms of hooliganism are reprehensible*).

The acceptance of belief-assumptions on the grounds of faith in/authority of the communicator is also interesting from a social-psychological perspective. As is commonly known, children learn by taking on board without questioning many assumptions which are not self-evident. This is obviously advantageous, as it allows learning to proceed at a reasonably fast rate. However, it means that, under some circumstances, adults too may remain childlike in their gullible acceptance of communications coming from institutions or individuals whose

authority they perceive as unquestionable. Therefore, it is easy to envisage how one might approach the dissemination of irrational ideological beliefs by investigating both the cognitive and the social factors which have led significant numbers of people to preserve a child-like naivety in taking for granted whatever their political leadership and/or the media wanted them to believe.

3.3 Relevance, truth and rationality

I now turn to the further question of how irrational beliefs may come to be accepted as faithful representations of the world without being compared with and contradicted by already held true, or at least better evidenced, belief-assumptions.

3.3.1 Relevance, reasoning and truth

Relevance is defined in terms of cognitive effects and processing effort. As a belief system can only be improved by the addition of assumptions which are reasonably faithful representations of the world, only true assumptions count as cognitive effects. So, truth has an important place in relevance theory, despite the claim that human cognition is geared towards relevance (rather than towards truth). Relevance entails truth, but truth does not entail relevance:

We agree that, at least in most cases, a hearer expects to be informed of something when he attends to an utterance. We agree with Grice that “false information is not an inferior kind of information; it just is not information” (Grice 1989: 371). So, yes, hearers expect to be provided with true information. But there is an infinite supply of true information which is not worth paying attention to. Actual expectations are of relevant information, which – because it is information – is (redundantly) true information.

(Wilson and Sperber 2000: 253)

S&W’s (1986/96) view that human cognition is geared towards relevance has some important implications for explaining the (ir)rationality of reasoning. Our belief formation processes patently fail to meet some well established criteria for rationality. They often lead to the formation of beliefs which are not true, they are not the most reliable processes available to us (if they were, they would be too time consuming to use) and they do not always rely on valid inference patterns. This last point is famously illustrated by people’s performance on the Wason Selection Task (see Wason and Johnson-Laird, 1972) which shows that our ability to reason about problems involving conditional rules, i.e. rules of the form *if p then q*, varies widely depending on the context in which the rule is embedded. Cosmides and Tooby (1992) argue that

people are best at evaluating conditional rules in the context of monitoring the observance of social contracts and that through natural selection human reasoning evolved to be domain specific: “human reasoning is well designed for detecting violations of conditional rules when these can be interpreted as cheating on a social contract.” (Cosmides and Tooby, 1992: 205). Their solution has been both praised and challenged. One of its notable merits is that it unifies work on the Wason selection task giving it direction and offers “testable answers to questions about why subjects perform well with some contents and poorly with others” (Shapiro, 1998: 253). However, Sperber, Cara and Girotto (1995) put Cosmides and Tooby’s (1992) cheater-detector hypothesis to the test (see Allott 2002). They argue that Wason selection task findings receive a more natural and more general explanation on the assumption that human cognition is geared towards relevance. On their analysis, people tend to perform poorly on the Wason selection task due to the lack of a context in which the correct solution is manifestly relevant. Their account – as it turns out, correctly – predicts that subjects will perform better not only on cheater-detection versions of the task, but also on others in which the reasoning task is embedded in a context that provides adequate clues about the relevance of the task. Their findings show that it is possible to manipulate the context in a way which boosts the reliability of the reasoning processes, but they also suggest how the opposite outcome can be achieved in the same fashion.

Utterance interpretation often involves some kind of backwards inference, in other words, inference which goes from conclusions to premises. Consider the following example (discussed by Wilson and Sperber (1986) in connection with a different point):

- (5) a. Peter: Is George a good sailor?
- b. Mary: ALL the English are good sailors.

(Wilson and Sperber, 1986: 21)

Let us assume that Peter is unsure about George’s nationality (George is an English name, but it could be French and Peter knows that George’s surname is French). Let us further assume that Peter finds Mary’s answer optimally relevant only on the assumption that she is implicating that *George is a good sailor*. Peter’s reasoning might then be described as follows: if George is French, Mary’s utterance is manifestly irrelevant; if George is English, Mary’s utterance is optimally relevant: it communicates both that George is a good sailor, and Mary’s grounds for believing this. Moreover, Peter has no reason to doubt that Mary is aiming at giving an optimally relevant answer. If Mary is sincere, there is no harm done: Peter now believes that

George is English and that *he is a good sailor*. However, Peter's inference is not valid. He starts from the implicated conclusion: *George is a good sailor* (Q); this assumption is warranted only if another assumption (an implicated premise) is true: *George is English* (P). From this Peter concludes that *George is English* (P) is true. His reasoning exemplifies a well-known fallacy:

$$(6) \quad \begin{array}{ccc} Q & & \\ \frac{P}{P} & \rightarrow & Q \end{array}$$

Note that the syllogism in (6) is not intended to represent the steps involved in Peter's reasoning. The point is that, whatever heuristic strategy Peter employs, the resulting interpretation cannot be supported by a valid deductive inference so long as the premise: *George is English*, depends on the conclusion: *George is a good sailor*. It is also worth noting that in reliable reasoning processes, premises have to be stronger, i.e. better evidenced, than the conclusions which follow from them. In this case, the premise is weaker than the conclusion, since the main evidence for the premise is that it supports a conclusion which seems relevant. In other words, the rationality of Peter's interpretation is entirely dependent on whether his expectation of relevance is justified, and this expectation crucially depends on what Peter can presume about Mary's intentions, abilities and preferences. This means that the communicator is in a very powerful position: if she can convince the audience that she can be relied on, she is likely to be able to convey successfully even the most implausible assumptions. In example (5) Peter will not question the assumption: *George is English* for two reasons. On the one hand, the context which is readily available to him does not include any assumptions which contradict it. On the other hand, the assumption: *George is English* is intended to be relevant only in so far as it supports the assumption *George is a good sailor*. In other words, the main relevance of Mary's answer (where by *main relevance* I mean the majority of cognitive effects) lies with the implicated conclusion (*George is a good sailor*), rather than with the implicated premise (*George is English*). Hence, the former (*George is a good sailor*) will receive greater attention than the latter (*George is English*). In general, the main relevance of genuine communicative acts tends to lie with implicated conclusions, rather than with implicated premises. Hence, if the salience (more technically, *manifestness*) of the implicated conclusions is increased without a step by step inference process, a plausible interpretation may be arrived at even without mentally representing and exploiting the premises on which the implicated conclusions depend. What does this tell us about the examples (1) to (3) and the implicated premises (1') to (3')?

Clearly, we should expect the gullible reader not to bother with checking the implicated premises, but rather to focus on figuring out the possible implicated conclusions, such as: *The new legislation is a good thing and deserves our wholehearted support*, (1), *The actions of the armed units are commendable*, *Our country is under threat*, (2) and (3), and so on.

3.3.2 Reflective beliefs and (ir)rationality

A cognitive system geared towards relevance may be an adaptive disposition for improving the organism's belief system under some significant cognitive constraints (such as limited memory and processing capacity) and some significant environmental constraints (such as limited time available). This disposition also makes humans susceptible to the formation of false beliefs under the sorts of circumstances that I have described. However, to form a false belief is one thing and to accept it (and to act on it) as true is quite another. A rational creature must have some method for checking the beliefs it adds to its database for consistency with other beliefs. But examples like (1) to (3) show that under some circumstances people readily accept as true beliefs which contradict some of those that they already hold. Consider (2) and (3) again:

- (2) JNA oslobadja Cavtat i Dubrovnik
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A belief-assumption can be integrated in an individual's overall encyclopaedic knowledge in one of two ways: directly as a factual belief, or embedded under some higher-level description, such as a propositional attitude (see Sperber, 1974; 1996; 1997). Assumptions which are represented directly as factual beliefs are readily compared with other already held beliefs; those which are embedded under some higher-level description, may be insulated, as it were, by the content of that description. The argument that (2) and (3) are examples of the latter category seems worth spelling out.

What happens when one pays attention to an utterance? The linguistic input system automatically decodes it into a logical form, a blueprint for a proposition. It stands to reason that the logical form of the utterance cannot be integrated with the addressee's encyclopaedic

knowledge (i.e. general world knowledge) without some sort of modification. Incomplete, semi-propositional representations should not be treated as true beliefs, if for no other reason, then because they could not be systematically compared with existing beliefs, and various inconsistencies would be likely to remain undetected. This would spell disaster for any organism whose survival relies on rational decision making. Hence, the logical form of the utterance needs to be pragmatically (i.e. inferentially) adjusted in one of two (or both) ways before it can be fully integrated with an individual's world knowledge (see Carston, 2002). First, it can be developed into a fully-fledged proposition, a description of a determinate state of affairs. In this form, it can be stored directly in a format appropriate for storing belief representations which is assumed to be pre-wired into the architecture of the human mind (often referred to as a *belief box*). Second, a representation may be embedded under some description, such as a propositional attitude predicate. Thus, Peter's belief: *It is raining* would be contradicted by his belief: *It is not raining*, but not by his belief: *Mary believes it is not raining*. This sort of mechanism provides for the possibility of integrating representations which are semi-propositional (or even false) with other beliefs, without a threat to the rationality of the belief system as a whole. For example, my concept of *black hole* (used as an astronomical term) is certainly not fully propositional. When I come across it in an utterance like: *There are many black holes in the Universe*, I am able to understand it to some extent, even though I could not be said to know what *black holes* are. So, I treat this term in what could be described as the mental equivalent of quotation marks. In other words, I metarepresent it. When I think or say *black hole* I mean roughly: *What astronomers who know about black holes mean when they say 'black hole'*. Hence, my concept of *black hole* is reflective, rather than intuitive. Lexical borrowing also provides examples of reflective concepts. When the words *glasnost* and *perestroika* were first introduced into English, they were represented reflectively in comprehension (roughly, *glasnost/perestroika* = *whatever people in the Soviet Union mean when they say glasnost/perestroika*). This enabled discussions of political issues to proceed, using words which were not properly understood, just as having a reflective concept of *black hole* enables me to engage in conversations about black holes, to think about them without knowing what they are and, hopefully, to further my existing knowledge. By the same token, if one has enough faith in the communicator, one may be inclined to treat words like *liberate* and *defend* in (2) and (3) reflectively, rather than intuitively. The concepts labelled by these words are embedded under some representation which indicates that the propositions whose constituents they are come from an undisputable source and should be treated as faithful representations of

reality. This circumscribes rather narrowly the range of assumptions which are input to the interpretation of an utterance with one or more such words, thus preempting the risk of cognitive overload and reducing the time and effort required for the interpretation. In such cases the search for relevance is oriented towards contexts in which the fact that the utterance comes from higher authority is more relevant than its propositional content.

Another feature of human cognition which affects reasoning is its modularity. The central thought processes involved in utterance interpretation are non-modular (in the sense of Fodor 1983): they integrate freely information from different domains. However, Sperber (1996: 119-150) argues that central processes too are modular in the sense that they are inferentially encapsulated: once the input is fixed, the inference process no longer has access to further inputs. This has important implications for the analysis of (1) to (3). Through tacit social conventions associated with them words like *liberate* and *defend* indicate that they are relevant by virtue of their social function. The utterances in which they appear come with the stamp of unquestionable authority. Such beliefs are accepted as true without ever being fully integrated with other beliefs for as long as they are embedded under the descriptive comment which insulates them, as it were, from other already held beliefs which might contradict them. This might account for people's polarized views on (2) and (3): they either tended to take them as obvious truths (if they subscribed to the official dogmas and meta-represented them, so they were insulated from other existing beliefs which might contradict them) or as absurdities (if they interpreted them as utterances expressing factual assumptions and allowed them to be processed with free access to encyclopaedic knowledge).

4. Conclusion

The mechanisms of human communication and cognition, whose proper function is to bring about improvements in the belief systems of individuals, are firmly grounded in rationality. Despite this, they play an important role in the spreading of irrational ideological beliefs. Hence, a pragmatic theory which explains how successful (rational) communication is achieved, should also have something to say about the way irrational beliefs are conveyed. In this paper I have tried to bring together some concepts of relevance-theoretic pragmatics in a way which brings us closer to an understanding of the relation between ostensive-inferential communication and ideological manipulation through the dissemination of irrational beliefs.

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