

Headington Hill
Oxford, ENGLAND
19 March 1971

Dear Mr. Mondadori,

Last things first: OK with me (under certain conditions) to have an Italian translation of my "Languages and Language" in Aut-aut. (What does "aut-aut" mean?) In fact, I think that's exactly what it's good for: to provide a brief introduction to my line for someone to whom Convention is somewhat inaccessible for reasons of language or otherwise. Conditions: the translation must be done by someone who not only knows English but understands the philosophy. If you're the translator, fine; if not, you must vouch for the translator's ability at philosophy as well as at translation. Further conditions the article is to appear in a future volume of Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science. Legally, I don't know who has the rights for the article; morally, the Minnesota Center for Philosophy of Science does, and in particular Keith Gunderson, who ran the conference and will edit the volume. Write to him. I expect you'll find him favorably inclined. Final condition: I don't know whether you have a copy with all known typos corrected, so if you want to go ahead I'll send such a copy to you (or your translator) later.

The objection you and Koethe have to counterparts is a counterpart to an objection someone at Bedford College, London made to my theory of counterfactuals. I claim a counterfactual is true if, roughly, the consequent is true in every antecedent-world closest (i.e. maximally similar) to our world. The objector said: counterfactuals aren't about other worlds; they're facts about our own world. You and Koethe say (if I'm not too much distorting your meaning by paraphrase): de re modal predictions aren't about unactualized possible inhabitants of other worlds; they're facts about actual inhabitants of our own world. Our Cicero, not his counterparts. I have no theory of aboutness, but I reply as best I can without one, thus: counterfactuals are facts about other worlds, and also about our own world; de re modal predictions are facts about unactualized possible inhabitants of other worlds and also about the actual people (or things) they are counterparts of. For we are dealing with similarity, of worlds or of inhabitants of worlds; and two things are similar because of the character of both of the two things. It is a fact about Oxford that it has properties such as to make Cambridge, Mass., resemble it more than anyplace else in the US. (Imagine that this is so; maybe it is.) It is the character of our world (to with the fact that I have no penny in my pocket) that makes the most similar worlds to it out of those where I just looked in my pocket (rather, where my counterpart did so!) be worlds where I found no penny; it is this fact about

our world that makes the counterfactual 'If I had looked in my pocket, I would have found no penny' true. It is the character of our Cicero that makes him have among his counterparts some non-denouncers of (counterparts of) Cataline. He has the counterparts he does because he is the way he is. There's a good discussion of this (for counterfactuals, not counterparts) in the final section of Stalnaker, "A Theory of Conditionals" in Rescher, Studies in Logical Theory (American Philosophical Quarterly supplispectanytimes) with little comment on the rest. I don't in general identify necessity with a priori knowledge; there are matters of necessity in math -- is the continuum hypothesis true? -- which we don't know a priori. (And maybe can't ever know at all.) But I do want very much to say that it is not only not known a priori but also not necessary that electricity is not a stream of protons -- when we formerly didn't know whether it was or not, that was because we didn't know which sort of world we lived in. (This is connected with my desire to understand scientific method in terms of subjective probability of propositions (= sets of worlds); I admit that this is done under the false idealization that we're mathematically omniscient, but you must think there's more wrong with it than that.)

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xxx Concerning the future of our correspondence: I'll be traveling for the next few weeks, back here 25 April - 15 June, traveling again, and in Princeton after 16 September.

Yours,