SEEING 'TIS KNOWN IN CONTRARIES

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By

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ABSTRACT

The combination of empirical rigour and intuitive, aesthetic insight in Sapir's thought has been amply documented (cf Lowie 1965), but an assessment of the compatibility of the two, infused as they are in his theoretical formulations, has been lacking. Metaphorically, Sapir's approach may be said to oscillate between two types of vision: the empirical caution to see what is given to the senses, and an intuitive sense of implication--"the chronic inability to see just what is there". The present examination shows, in a more systematic fashion, how in various dimensions, Sapir's underlying epistemology evinces central inconsistencies reflective of this oscillation.

The findings should be important for current anthropologists following on Sapir's ideas. It is also suggested that at a more general level, research of this type is necessary for informed, self-critical development in anthropological theory.

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Oft did I marle, how in thine eyes
 Water and fire did dwell together,
Seeing 'tis known in contraries,
 Each seeks the hurt and spoil of either.
But fire and water there may mell
 Where Love and Hate together dwell.

Thomas Tomkins,
from Songs or Madrigals,1622

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is frequently the case that the contemporary cultural anthropologist with a specialized interest in a particular study, say in hermeneutics, has a well-developed understanding of the theoretical claims it asserts positively. Quite often, however, one finds a critical, systematic examination of its fundamental assumptions within a broader philosophical context to be lacking. In the case of our hermeneut, this may be due to his profound concern for the experiential reality of the individual, or his interest in the dialectical interplay between informant and ethnographer, etc. From this "post-critical" perspective, such a systematic attempt to suspend judgment would, among other things, detract from the atmosphere of understanding which it is the aim of the hermeneut to create. Other fields of specialization can be equally dismissive. To my mind, however, the lack of a broad philosophical awareness in current anthropology is a critical problem.

In Man, Mind and Science Murray Leaf (1979) identifies this malaise as "tradition-centrism":

> Theories form traditions when they differ in detail, but make the same fundamental assumptions in their treatment of these basic issues, together with whatever other issues may be seen as equally basic from time to time. Debate becomes tradition-

> centered when scholars form the habit of defending their own specific theory only against others in the same general family, arguing over fine points but not defending, often not even explaining, the basic assumptions. Eventually in such debates, some scholars lose sight of their roots entirely and assume that the problems of their tradition are problems of knowledge in general (Leaf 1979:4).

I would add that the tendency to accept or reject the words of a prominent anthropologist without assessing their internal or general consistency is another common feature of this problem. One such recipient of this kind of uncritical appreciation has been Edward Sapir (cf. Modjeska 1968:344). The following paper is an attempt to contribute to the contravention of these tendencies.

There is both a specific and a general need for such a contribution. Specifically, one witnesses a tendency to accept Sapir's thought as a broad but homogeneous orientation to anthropology. In the following examination it will become evident that such a view of Sapir is fallacious and misleading. For those who appropriate Sapir's ideas in their own anthropological perspective, and believe that progress in the directions in which he was pointing is possible (cf. Geertz 1973; Percy 1961), this type of critical awareness is of central importance.

Secondly, and more generally, the tendency to "tradition-centrism" appears to be shared among other theoretical approaches to anthropology. I would strongly suggest that a critique of the formative ideas of other major

anthropologists would be productive in revealing their underlying epistemological bases and in clarifying their ambiguities. The limits of the present work make this general aim impossible to explore here. Rather, they serve to highlight the need for more research of this nature.

Sapir is said to have claimed that "individual adjustment colors your philosophy of society" (Sapir as cited by Smith 1936-37:28). It becomes clear that Sapir "adjusted" to a virtual rainbow of philosophical colours, and that this flexibility accounts, to a substantial degree, for his general scepticism of philosophy. For the present context, however, it is important to consider independently, and take more seriously the contents of the philosophical orientations he appropriated, as substantial and perduring histories of ideas in themselves. Thus, while one might have some sympathy for the notion, it is not possible here to accept Sapir's reduction of philosophy to personality dispositions at face value. Rather, the notion itself will have to come under examination.

This thesis then, proposes to examine the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying Sapir's wide-ranging interests in culture, language and personality. There is much to be gained in a careful, critical scrutiny of his work for the stated aims of this paper. Sapir emerges as a man with deep-running currents of conflicting interests, and enveloping epistemological inconsistencies difficult to reconcile with one another. My concern in this analysis and

interpretation is not merely to present Sapir as a man of contradictions, but as one whose theoretical inconsistencies were to some degree, deliberately imposed. Tradition-centrism was certainly not a problem in his day. Rather, Sapir seems to have wanted to straddle two traditions. On the one hand, he was committed to empiricism, submitting himself rigourously to data in their subtle detail. On the other he remained speculative, and cultivated a vivid intuitive sense of "implication", which he himself described as "the chronic inability ever to see just what is there" (Sapir as cited by Smith ?1936-37:26).[1] Thus it is not surprising that the combination could result in epistemological discontinuities. The responsibility of the present work is to clarify and assess these discontinuities, in what Sapir would call a "surgical, but not hostile" fashion. It is no original observation to add, however, that much of the perduring fertility of Sapir's ideas derives from his refusal to seek intellectual security in a single mode of awareness.

The immediately following chapter has been divided into four sections, each of which takes up a major theme in Sapir's thought, and which contribute to an understanding of his philosophy. The first section will deal with Sapir's early preoccupation with the criteria for a properly empircal historical science. It is significant for two reasons. On the one hand it indicates the empirical rigour of his approach to the reconstruction of historical sequences.

On the other hand, however, it shows that from the beginning, history was for Sapir not merely a descriptive science, but that it could make larger generalizations about the psychological origins and nature of cultural phenomena (and this in spite of himself at times). Section 2 traces the development of Sapir's interest in psychology for a projected theory of "form" in culture, the potential conflicts it posed for his theory of history, and the ways in which he sought to resolve these conflicts.

The third section focuses directly on the notion of form in Sapir's anthropology. As his approach broadened and matured, he tened to see in culture, as in language, the operation of an "innate sense of form". This issue is critical for the kinds of conclusions he drew as to the possibility of explaining behaviour in these terms, the nature of culture as a whole (which also bears on his concept of history), and finally, the methods by which one could come to know such phenomena.

In the final section of chapter II, I trace the development of Sapir's theoretical interest in personality. It is here that the "bifocal" character of Spair's approach to culture becomes the most transparent. The separation and crystallization of personality and culture into two relatively independent levels of analysis had the desired result of granting the individual a more dynamic, creative agency in Sapir's theory of culture process. On the other hand, the

relations which could be said to hold between these two levels of organization became problematic.

On the basis of the observations made in Ch. 2, the subsequent chapter examines the ontological status of the entities peopling Sapir's theoretical anthropology. The chapter begins by offering a brief precis of the issues as they have been presented in philosophical history. In the subsequent analysis I argue that Sapir adopted a largely conceptualist view of culture, but that this was an ultimately unsatisfying conclusion. I suggest that in his increasing engagement in the study of personality, Sapir envisioned the potential ground for a discipline based on a realist foundation. Sapir was by no means unaware of the ontological issues (cf. Sapir 1923c), but where his interest was programmatic, his concern for consistency in such matters seemed to diminish.

The concluding chapter consists of a critical discussion of the "philosophy of society" which emerges from this reading of Sapir. It focuses on the explanation of behaviour as the point of departure for examining two fundamental epistemological issues. The first addressed concerns the epistemological basis for making explanations of human activity. I argue that Sapir embraced both a naturalist view of the possibility of such explanation, along with an idealist phenomenological conception of behaviour as resistant to scientific explanation, but open to "understanding" as the

aim of such explanations. Subsequently I take up the question of holism and individualism. The synthetist in Sapir is again apparent here. In both cases, I conclude that while Sapir's attempt at resolution is admirable, there are characteristic weaknesses in his orientation and methodology which prohibit its full realization.

CHAPTER II

THEMES IN SAPIR'S WORKS

2.0 Introduction

This chapter traces the principal aspect of Sapir's thought as they developed through his writings. It provides the descriptive substance for, and orients the reader's awareness to the epistemological themes which will be discussed and critically assessed in the following chapters. For the present, though, I will be concerned primarily with presenting an adequate thematic description of his spheres of interest.

Though I will acknowledge them, I will not discuss in much detail the historical sources of many of his formulations on language and culture. A further treatment would require a separate thesis. Rather I will dwell on ideas as they recur and evolve throughout his work, and where applicable, I will indicate their conflicting or inconsistent premises. For my purposes, then, I will not always distinguish linguistics, for example, as a distinct category for investigation. My decision, in this respect, has the advantage of being theoretically consonant with Sapir's understanding of language as having interdisciplinary importance. By contrast, the value of treating his works chronologically is obvious.

Given the thematic approach I am taking, which may require the occasional leap through time to substantiate certain ideas as prefigurations, and to draw out conflicting conceptions, I will respect this requirement as faithfully as possible, otherwise.

I have organized the issues addressed here around Sapir's pervading interests in and conceptions of the relations between history and psychology in culture studies, including linguistics. Within this orientation, I have selected four areas for intense investigation, as noted in Ch. I. Let us turn to the first.

2.1 Historical Reconstructionism and Empiricism

The first area to be discussed involves Sapir's early interest in history and its relations to empiricism in the study of language and culture. Though not exclusively, the selected statements will largely concern the subject of language history, since Sapir's first scholarly writings were primarily philological and linguistic. First, I will present material in which he contrasted the "evolutionist" and "historical" orientations to language and offered his view of acceptable criteria for a true historical science. This was the basis of his historical reconstructive method. The present aim will be to draw out the assumptions of these criteria or principles for his concept of history. The other issue I wish to address in this section concerns his interest in psycho-physics and experimental psychological method.

While this was not an area in which he wrote extensively, his statements suggest a similar attitude toward the uses of empiricism in the reconstruction of language history. It is, thus, important to examine those statements for the epistemological assumptions they may yield.

One of Sapir's earliest publications, his master's thesis in philology (1970), is a relevant starting point, not only because of its obvious chronological priority, but because his treatment of the chosen subject does not accord with the expectation one might receive from a reading of Sapir's association with linguistic relativism. His topic was Herder's (1772) prize-winning essay, "Ursprung der Sprache", an important work in the development of early German linguistic relativism. On the one hand, Sapir indicated an agreement with certain central aspects of Herder's thesis, such as when he spoke of Herder's "remarkable intuitive power [in grasping] some of the most vital points both in psychology and language" (1907:136). Further, he admired his "rationality" of approach in that essay (1909:137-9).[1] Indeed, Sapir respected Herder's awareness of the determinism involved in the equation of thought with language. Still, it appears that Sapir was then much less interested in arguing or expanding on that issue, than in pressing for a naturalist[2] understanding of "time perspective" in the study of the origin of language. Thus, he concluded his essay with the statement that the future of such investigation lay in evolutionist directions:

> We should not only try to imagine to what beginnings the present state of language reaches back, but also to reconstruct an ideal picture of the evolution of howls and cries, under the favouring conditions, whatever they were, into less rude forms of audible expression. Perhaps the ends of the two series can be bridged over?
>
> (Sapir 1907:142).

In terms of those early theorists, including Herder and von Humboldt, Sapir's suggestion would have been untenable. As Miller has argued:

> [U]nder the influence of Darwinian naturalism... the inseparability of Geist and Sprache, upon which Humboldt had insisted, was replaced by a tendency to regard language as but another episode in nature, as accompanying, but not fundamentally altering our intuition of experience (Miller 1968:11).

As evolutionary and comparative approach, Miller says, suited studies in historical phonetics and morphology where Darwinism encouraged the belief that language was a natural adaptive outgrowth in the development of the species. Among other avenues of research, it is also fostered a psycho-physical, experimental approach to language, Miller claims. The development of this perspective was based on an epistemology which viewed "things" as existing independently of language. In contrast, relativist studies emphasized the effects of the "inner form" of language on man's conceptions of nature, and thus presupposed a different view of knowledge in which "things" were constructed and acquired meaning only through language (Miller 1968:35-6).

Thus, in Sapir's appeal for the study of the origin of language to proceed in terms of the "reconstruction of an ideal picture" of how language emerged in the course of natural evolution, we can easily recognize certain of the naturalist epistemological premises on which evolutionism was based. It seems that Sapir did not oppose the ends to which linguistic and cultural evolutionists worked as much as he did the lack of empirical rigour in their treatment of historical evidence.

The urge to develop methods of reconstruction persisted, at least until the appearance of "Time Perspective in Aboriginal American Culture" in 1916 (see also Sapir 1912, 1913). In that paper, his aim was to provide criteria, based substantially on linguistic evidence, by which one could infer both an hypothetical prototype, and the temporal emergence of unknown aboriginal cultures. Thus, for example, Sapir maintained that there were two ways in which linguistic data could contribute to the reconstruction of cultural history: either, one could study the "linguistic elements" in relation to their cultural association and geographical distribution, or, one could take a "language or linguistic group as such" and deduce historical facts from its differentiation into smaller units (Sapir 1949 [1916a]:434). Each of those ways was then substantiated with examples from a variety of languages.

Here we have an example, from a very early stage, of a way of conceptualizing phenomena at different levels of organization, which became characteristic of Sapir.

He referred to this habit as a healthy source of "contrastive perspective" (Sapir 1921a:205). We will have occasion to observe this tendency again in other contexts. What is significant for the present discussion, however, is the notion which seems to be implied, that regardless of the way in which one chose to approach the matter, the conclusions one reached, and the ideal picture one received from those various types of data, would ultimately coincide. Thus, one's analysis of cultural development, whether through a micro- or macroscopic analysis of language, would confirm the assumption that there existed a single history, which rigourous empirical attempts at reconstruction on the basis of accepted principles of inference, would come more or less to approximate.

Sapir admitted that this criterial method of explanation derived from that used in comparative philology. Now, however, as Radin has pointed out, cultural and linguistic facts alike were treated like "physical facts or mathematical concepts", to be manipulated by various functions in order to see what inferences they might provide (Radin 1933:60). Radin identifies an inconsistency in Sapir's concept of an historical science, as expressed in the "Time Perspective" essay. On the one hand, he says, Sapir aimed expressly to provide the groundwork for an historical science of culture whose emphasis would be on the "personal and individual". Yet, the following sentence indicated Sapir's concurrent urge to devise principles by which one could formulate a method of

historical investigation of unknown cultures which would "only deal with generalized events and individualties" (Sapir 1949 [1916a]:392; emphasis added). This, Radin argued, was a piece of faulty logic; that Sapir was violating his own conception of history as a particularizing science in attempting to present a method by which to understand an unknown past in terms of generalizations. What Radin was objecting to was the application of what amounted to a nomothetic or generalizing appraoch to matters of cultural history, fostered by Sapir's use of linguistic methods of analysis. Radin's point was that if the approach had been applied only to the self-contained linguistic data of phonetics and morphology, it would have retained its validity.[3]

By 1921 Sapir absolved himself of his prior interest in reconstructionism as he had argued for its application to the study of the origin of language, in 1907:

> It would be vain to speculate as to whether or not we shall ever be able to demonstrate that all languages stem from a common source. Of late linguists have been able to make larger historical syntheses than were at one time deemed feasible, just as students of culture have been able to show historical connections between culture areas or institutions that were at one time believed to be totally isolated from each other. The human world is contracting not only prospectively but to the backward-probing eye of culture history. Nevertheless we are as yet far from able to reduce the riot of spoken languages to a small number of "stocks"... As for the single or multiple origin of speech, it is likely enough that language as a human institution (or... "faculty") developed but once in the history of the race, that all the complex history of language is a unique cultural event. Such a

> theory constructed "on general principles" is of no real interest, however, to linguistic science. What lies beyond the demonstrable must be left to the philosopher or the romancer (Sapir 1921a:153-4).

From this quote, however, one cannot surmise that he levelled this same criticism of the use of "general principles" at the practice of reconstructing unknown cultural history from linguistic and cultural data, both direct and inferred.

By 1933, in his article "Language", Sapir does seem to have sharpened his categories of application when discussing the state of historical linguistic affairs. Firstly, in that article, he restricts the applicability of the method to the classification of languages only, and not to other culture categories. Secondly, he distinguishes between actual, historical--genetic--connections among languages based on direct evidence, and "structural" classifications which aim, on the basis of the reconstructivist-method, to arrive at a theoretical hierarchy of the appearance of languages from a presumed "prototype" (Sapir 1949 [1933a]:21). This second observation is important because it indicates that he has clarified for himself the ambiguity he seems to have felt about the boundaries of historical science. Also, it suggests that Sapir's interest in the reconstructive method persisted, though in increasingly restricted fields of application, until fairly late in his published work.

This suggestion is further substantiated when one examines Sapir's work in the area of psycho-physics, or more specifically what he called "unsocialized symbolisms",

particularly in phonetics (Sapir 1949 [1929a]:72). The experimental method he devised by which to test his hypothesis is prefigured in 1927, and realized in "A Study in Phonetic Symbolism" (Sapir 1949[1929a]). What is remarkable about this work, for the present discussion, is the relatively late date of appearance of this interest, along with its reconstructivist implications.

In 1921, Sapir refused to acknowledged any significance to the psycho-physicist's position and experimentation regarding speech. From that point of view, Sapir said,

> [w]e may seem to be making an unwarrantable abstraction in desiring to handle the subject of speech without constant and explicit reference to its physiological or psychological basis. However, such an abstraction is justifiable. We can profitably discuss the intention, the forms and the history of speech, precisely as we discuss the nature of any other phase of human culture ...as an institutional or cultural entity, leaving the organic and psychological mechanisms back of it as something to be taken for granted. Accordingly, it must be clearly understood that this introduction to the study of speech is not concerned with those aspects of physiology and physiological psychology that underlie speech. Our study of language is not to be one of the genesis and operation of a concrete mechanism; it is rather, to be an inquiry into the function and form of the arbitrary systems of symbolism that we term languages (Sapir 1921a:11).

In other words, Sapir, at that time, was interested only in the outcomes of strictly linguistic activity, not in its psycho-physical origins. Contrast this with his theory of the "nature and development of speech" in "Language as a Form of Human Behavior" (Sapir 1927a:430). In that article he attempts to account for both the organic nature of speech

and its symbolic function by hypothesizing its beginning in "auditory gestures, directly symbolizing various types of adjustment to the environment" (Sapir 1927a:429). He conjectured, on this basis, that:

> Once an expressive symbolism had been fixed by social habit, it could lose its expressive content and take on a denotative one...and that finally...the actual sounds used for any symbol of difference would, in course of time, depart so widely from their original form as to obscure the whole mechanism of gesture symbolism which gave rise to the speech process in the first place (Sapir 1927a:430).

Speech symbolism has taken on a second stratum of significance for Sapir, in the distinction which he made between "expressive" and "referential" types of symbolism. "Referential symbolism" was essentially synonymous with Sapir's earlier understanding of all linguistic symbols, namely, the arbitrary or conventional association of sound with meaning. "This completely dissociated type of symbolism is...of the very essence of linguistic form" (Sapir 1949[1929a]: 61). "Expressive symbolism", on the other hand, was a new motion which suggested that a "more fundamental, psychologically primary sort of symbolism" existed.[4] It required the "feeling" of symbolic suggestiveness of different vowels and consonants, regardless of their associations in the context of meaningful words.

The experiment which he conducted was to test this second, hypothesized phenomenon, which he confirmed. His conclusion is interesting:

> It is believed that studies of this type are of value in showing the tendency of symbolisms to constellate in accordance with an unconscious or intuitive logic, which is not necessarily based on experience with the stimuli in their normal, functional aspect. In the realm of articulate sounds...it is believed that the experiments here referred to give cumulative evidence for the belief that unsocialized symbolisms tend to work themselves out very definitely, and that the influence of specific, functional language factors need not be involved to explain these symbolisms (Sapir 1949[1929a]:72).

Though other influences are, by this time, also implicit in this work, one can see persistent aspects of his interest in the reconstruction of the origins and development of linguistic behaviour.[5]

This leads one to derive certain conclusions about his efforts in this direction. Hymes (1970) has distinguished between "reconstructive" and "developmental" explanation in linguistics and ethnology, and I suggest that this distinction could apply here. The difference is that "reconstructive" forms of explanation, like evolutionist ones, attempted to "trace the origins" of phenomena; "developmental" explanations tried to understand their outcomes, or, as he claimed, "disclose the diverse provenience of the elements in question, the processes by which they had come to be given a contemporary coherence and common significance, and the patterns or orientations in terms of which coherence, significance was assigned" (Hymes 1970:257). In the present context, then, one would have to disagree with Hymes' assumption that Sapir, being

a student of Boas, focused only on the developmental type of explanation in linguistics and anthropology. The foregoing has substantiated the claim made here that Sapir's theoretical interest in language was more eclectic than Hymes' claim would suggest. Ultimately, one will have to ascertain whether--and to what extent--the epistemological assumptions underlying these different interests were consistent with one another, or mutually antagonistic.

2.2. Psychology in History

This section will concern Sapir's claims as to the capacity of psychology for making interpretative and explanatory statements about (sequences of) historical events. That the pronouncements vary so considerably during the period between 1917 and 1925 indicates two things. On the one hand, it means that by "psychology" Sapir was referring to his opinions of different schools of modern psychology. In this respect one must observe that for personal as well as intellectual reasons this was an exploratory period of great formative value for Sapir's developing interests (Preston 1980, Handler, n.d.). Expectably then, his statements are not to be viewed as refined, nor will they necessarily be found to correlate well with one another. On the other hand though, it suggests that his understanding of history in its relation to psychological explanation was changing as well. Where his often contemporaneous shifts not approached explicitly, or adequately reconciled with one another, it is suggested that more pervasive epistemological conflicts may be at work.

The section will be organized as follows. Each of the strains of psychological theory to which Sapir referred will be identified in turn, and those aspects from each developed, which he seems to have appropriated as most congenial for his own purposes. In each case, I will attempt to disentangle the important presuppositions regarding the place of psychological explanation in anthropology, which are implied there.

Specifically, I will discuss three distinct areas of "psychology". First, I will present the material in which Sapir states his views of "orthodox psychology". These statements, dating from 1917 to 1921 are largely negative in tone, and employed in the explicit task of identifying those types of psychological explanation of cultural phenomena to which he was opposed. Consequently, he expressed his conscious epistemological beliefs explicitly, and lucidly. Subsequently I will examine what Sapir's reviews and articles reveal about his interest in psychoanalytic theory, and gestalt psychology. Already in 1917 Sapir was writing favourably about the former orientation (Sapir 1949[1917a]: 522-25). With regard to Gestalt theory, prefigurations of his disposition occur in 1921 (Sapir 1949[1921b]:525-28. His first reference to one of its proponents however, did not occur until 1925.[6] In these two cases, where his writing was much more constructive and programmatic than critical, it seems he no longer systematically examined the implications they had for his epistemology.

After describing Sapir's interest in these three areas of "psychology" and investigating the ramifications of his view of each as an explanatory principle in historical studies, I will conclude this section by briefly outlining the issues to be explored in the final two sections of this chapter.

2.2.1. "Orthodox Psychology"

Given the ambiguity which, in the preceding section, was seen to pervade Sapir's early understanding of evolutionism, it is not surprising to find him making a similar variety of statements with regard to the place of psychology in historical explanation. In fact, we will begin with one of the early statements he made which associated evolutionist theory with psychological explanation explicitly. In his 1920 reviews of Lowie's Primitive Society, Sapir claimed to object to all forms of purely psychological explanation of history, of which, he said, evolutionism was one. His objection was emphatic:

> [W]ith the psychological falls also the evolutionary point of view. The latter, applied to the social sphere, is really but an extension or corollary of the former. It adds to the principle of psychological determinism in the history of society the further principle of necessary sequence. A certain institution of belief is not only held to be directly traceable to a universal psychological determinant, but to have followed inevitably or typically, a certain other institution of belief, itself due to some psychological determinant that is supposed to flow naturally from a still more primitive type of mentality (Sapir 1920:378).

Aberle has pointed out that the psychology to which Sapir objected involved the tendency of some psychologically minded anthropologists (historians) to explain cultural phenomena through recourse to certain stipulated "universals of the human mind" which Sapir saw as characteristic of "academic psychology" (Aberle 1957:17).[7] Sapir gave examples of the work of such a mentality "in the Freudian explanations

of folk belief and usage...in the social psychology of Wundt and the mechanical determinism of Spencer. It is a perfectly intelligible attitude", Sapir states, "It is but the untiring effort of the naively scientific mind to seek unity, consistent principle in the vast flux of social history" (Sapir 1920:378). Finally, as early as 1917 Sapir acknowledged his disinclination toward what he felt was a shallow objectivity in behaviourist psychology (Sapir 1917c:505).[8]

Thus the varieties of "pure psychological explanation" of cultural phenomena to which Sapir was opposed at this time were derived either indirectly, from evolutionist theory, or directly, from what he referred to as either "orthodox psychology",[9] or "individual psychology".[10]

In making his argument against them, Sapir sided strongly with Boas in his particularist conception of history as consisting of unique unrepeatable sequences of events. As Boas expressed it in its more extreme forms, this conception allowed for no statements of generality to be deduced from the observation of similar sequences among different sets of historical events. In fact, that view clearly distinguished history from science on this basis. Thus, Sapir wrote that generalizations were abstractions which belonged to the realm of the "conceptual sciences", of which psychology was one. History, on the other hand, in dealing with individual unique events, could abstract from the experience of those events, whether direct or inferred,

without doing great damage to their nature.

> Any social datum is resolvable, at least theoretically, into psychological concepts. But just as little as the most accurate and complete mastery of physics and chemistry enables us to synthesize a science of geology, does an equivalent mastery of the conceptual science of psychology - which by the way, nobody possesses or is likely to possess for a long time to come - enable us to synthesize the actual nature and development of social institutions or other historical data. These must be directly experienced and...selected from the endless mass of human phenomena according to a principle of values. Historical science thus differs from natural science, either wholly or as regards relative emphasis, in its adherence to the real world of phenomena, not, like the latter, to the simplified and abstract world of ideal concepts. It strives to value the unique or individual, not the universal (Sapir 1917b:446).

Aberle, in the article referred to above, wanted to show that Sapir subsequently contradicted his own particularist position of placing psychology among the "conceptual" instead of the "historical" sciences (Aberle 1957:17ff). He claimed that in fact Sapir turned to "psychology in history" as early in 1919 with the earliest publication of what was to become "Culture, Genuine and Spurious" (Aberle 1957:17). Another critic, Swartz approached the same problem with regard to the Boasian view of history as non-generalizable, but to argue a more general point. He maintained that in this approach, like any other, inhered some theory of history, explicitly or otherwise. In the case of the particularist concept of history then, he argued that there must be an implicit appeal to regularities by which unique events could be related. These

he found, in Boas' own words, in "social or psychological causes" (Boas, quoted in Swartz 1968 [1958]:271). These "causes" accounted for the "internal dynamics of culture", the regularities of interaction between individual and society which, Swartz pointed out, the particularist view required beyond the contents of its explicit notion of history. The notion of "internal dynamics" was required, he said, to account for the fact that while history so conceived "presents" phenomena to a culture, they are "accepted, integrated and changed" in characteristic ways by that culture (Swartz 1968 [1958]:271).

In the following paragraphs then, where we will discuss the ways in which Sapir turned to psychology for the causal conditions of culture, we will not accept at face value that Sapir was flatly contradicting himself, as Aberle has claimed, without closer examination of the contents of his actual statements. Further, such fluctuations and contradiction of opinion as encountered, may also be seen in a different light. If we can accept, for the present purpose, Swartz' claim that the two types of particularist statement[11], can, indeed must be complementary aspects of a single view of culture (and ultimately of an epistemological orientation) then it is also important to observe Sapir's comments closely, in their sequence, to determine to what extent he realized this relation explicitly. This is by no means to deny that there may be inconsistencies in this view however, though their

examination must be left until the following chapters.

2.2.2. Psychoanalysis

We have seen that Sapir opposed "orthodox", evolutionist and Freudian psychological explanations of culutre, during the late 'teens, as assuming unwarranted universal psychological determinants. Still it was also shown in the first section that Sapir was actually ambivalent about the concept of evolution, and that he employed empirical experimental methods in his own psycho-linguistic research. Thus it is not altogether surprising to find that in the same year as he classed it among the undesirable types of psychological explanation as applied to culture, Sapir began to write favourably about Freudian theory (Sapir 1949[1917a]). Until 1921 he remained explicitly critical of indiscriminate applications of the theory beyond the disciplinary boundaries of psychology. "The really valuable contribution of the Freudian school seems to me to lie in the domain of pure psychology" (Sapir 1949[1921c]:529). Specifically, he saw that contribution in the concept of the unconscious, and in its place in the organization of the mind as it was conceived by Freud. Sapir accepted the notion of the "unconscious" life as the most primitive level of mentality, out of which the higher, more conscious forms gradually developed and differentiated (Sapir 1949[1917a]:523). Further, he appreciated the coherence which the Freudian scheme gave to the disparate contents of the individual mind,

and for the dynamic, developmental nature the unconscious mental processes were credited as having. Lastly, for the present purpose, it is important to note that Sapir found elements of "pure psychology" in the "typical psychic mechanisms"[12] which psychoanalysis offered (Sapir 1949[1921c]: 529,[1932]:513). He repeatedly reacted against the specific psychic contents which Freud attached to certain symbols and behaviours. Still, I suggest that in fact it is the notion of "psychic contents" more generally conceived in terms of pan-human experiences in the world which sustained Sapir's appeal for the recognition of "psychic mechanism" as a powerful psychological tool. Thus we see in that same year, in a review of a work on mythology, that Sapir argued for a "psychological understanding of mythology - of other phases of culture as well" which, far from being incompatible with the historian's understanding, "will some day underlie the study of all culture history" (Sapir 1949[1921b]:527).

A closer examination of this last statement reveals two things. On the one hand it leads to the recognition that Sapir was not referring to psychoanalysis per se, but to its supersession by what he conceived to be a "more general psychology", not yet existent, which would take social, psychological "forms" into account, as well as their psychic significance or function as given by psychoanalysis (Sapir 1949[1921b]:527). Now, about Sapir's conception of a psychology of "forms" we will have more to say in the

paragraphs below, but it is significant to recognize that he saw this "social psychology" as a synthetic science which would ideally accommodate both the historian's and the psychologist's points of view.

This leads to the other issue I wish to raise which is the question as to whether Sapir was taking a substantial step away from his espoused particularist conception of history as not amenable to generalization by psychological explanations. On the one hand, it could be argued that Sapir was making a radical shift from a position which was essentially empiricist but conventionalistic in its approach to history, to one which was essentially naturalistic. On the other hand, if one approached the issue in the spirit of Swartz, one might suggest that the particularist view in fact required an appeal to causal regularities of a social or psychological nature in order to account for cultural continuity. The former argument would proceed along the following lines.

In 1917, in his critique of the concept of "super-organic", the experienced "data" of history, and the "concepts" of psychology were separated by an irreconciliable "yawning abyss". By the 1921 article, the approaches of history and psychology, in their then current states, were still recognized as distinct: "...[T]he successful application of the psychological formulas, Wundtian or Freudian, to any myth structure tacitly depends on the withholding of a preliminary historical critique" (Sapir 1949[1921b]:525). Similarly the historian's approach was appraised as being equally limited, i.e. that "it

is none of history's business to ferret out the buried psychological determinants of the significant elements of a culture, that these determinants are at last analysis highly variable phenomena of individual psychology, [and] that it is hopeless to disentangle them at a remove of hundreds or thousands of years" (Sapir 1949[1921b]:526). Still, Sapir was arguing for a reconciliation of the two approaches. While he recognized that "psychology is still too weak to know how to go about the task", he argued that "it seems...reasonable to suppose that ...the history of myth can be chiefly understood from the more general psychology of form-trends" (Sapir 1949[1921b]:527-28).

From the latter viewpoint, Sapir was merely stating explicitly, and considering as potentially accessible to study, what he conceived to be the nature of the regularity or dynamics in culture, which Boas had assumed, but for whatever dispositional or other reasons, had neglected to develop. To be valid, this approach would require to show that Sapir did see himself to be maintaining, throughout his work, the notion of history as concerned with the individuality of events. References to this effect do persist (cf. Sapir 1928a, 1932, 1938a) and argue for a more complex assessment of Sapir's epistemological development.

Further assessment of this problem of competing points of view vis-a-vis naturalistic and conventionalistic approaches to explanation in history will continue below in Ch. IV, sec. 1.

2.2.3 Gestalt Psychology

Sapir indicated his interest in Gestalt psychology first in a letter to Ruth Benedict in 1925, where he referred to a work by Kurt Koffka, one of the leading proponents of that school:

> I've been reading Koffka's 'Growth of the Mind' ...and it's like some echo telling me what my intuition never quite had the courage to say out loud. It's the real book for background for a philosophy of culture, at least your/my philosophy, and I see the most fascinating and alarming possiblities of application of its principles express and implied, mostly implied, to all behavior, art, music, culture, personality and everything else...(Sapir to Benedict in Mead 1959:177).

For another neglected reference see Sapir (1928).[13]

By 1929 he referred to Gestalt psychology again, this time in connection with the relation he had begun to conceive between linguistics, psychology and the study of culture patterns.

> It is probable that a really fruitful integration of linguistic and psychological studies lies still in the future. We may suspect that linguistics is destined to have a very special value for configurative psychology ('Gestalt psychology'), for of all forms of culture, it seems that language is that one which develops its fundamental patterns with relatively the most detachment from other types of cultural patterning. Linguistics may thus hope to become something of a guide to the understanding of the 'psychological geography' of culture in the large. In ordinary life the basic symbolisms of behavior are densely overlaid by cross-functional patterns of a bewildering variety. It is because every isolated act in human behavior is the meeting point of many distinct configurations that it is so difficult for most of us to arrive at the notion of contextual and non-contextual form in behavior.

> Linguistics would seem to have a very peculiar value for configurative studies because the patterning of language is to a very appreciable extent self-contained and not significantly at the mercy of intercrossing patterns of a non-linguistic sort (Sapir 1949[1929a]:164-5).

This quote indicates that Sapir saw the need for a fairly direct progression of influence from the methods and insights of linguistics through a "more general psychology of form-trends" to a theoretical framework by which one could come accurately to apprehend culture patterns.[14] Specifically Sapir's vivid apprehension of self-contained forms found in linguistic materials was compatible with the appreciation of two important tenets of Gestalt psychology.

First there was the claim that perception always tended to be of well-formed wholes or configurations, as opposed to the incoherent sense-data of the associationist view. In fact, the gestaltists argued that the individual elements of a configuration were not perceived in isolation from, but rather in relation to one another, in terms of the larger whole. As such, the gestaltist approach was sensitive to contextual factors in behaviour, as well as to the selective effect of the perceiver's organizational framework on his/her perceptual patterns (Hamlyn 1951:507).

Secondly the Gestalt psychologists claimed that this sense of form was innate, most evident where "external", environmental factors were weakest, and thus not primarily dependent on learned experience or convention (Hamlyn 1961: 53-54). Rather, in positing the innateness of such a tendency,

its universality was assumed to exist regardless of experiential variability, though most apparent among unsophisticated, "naive" perceivers. One important implication of this premise regarding the innateness of configurational perceptual tendencies, was that it was sympathetic to what Köhler called a "science of direct experience" (Köhler 1938). By this he meant that, unlike behaviourism, Gestalt theory held that one experienced the world directly, and in a way open to public scrutiny. Thus it was also claimed that one could make direct observations of such experience.

The extent to which Sapir accepted and incorporated these premises into his thoughts on the dynamics of culture seems to vary consistently inversely with his attention to the particularity of historical events and individuals, despite his effort after a grander synthesis. One of the relevant reasons for this is that the stipulation of an innate "form-sense" as a universal psychological faculty constituted for Sapir, a very important, if not the main determinant of the internal dynamics of culture[15], whereas he had wanted to reject the notion of universal psychological determinants in his theory of history. Nonetheless, his cumulative attempt to reconcile these differences is one of the significant issues in this study of contrasts.

Responding to an article by John Dewey, Sapir wrote ostensibly disparagingly of holistic interpretations of culture,

> ...that they conceive of the vast complex of human activities characteristic of a given time and place as constituting a self-contained organism, the significance of any aspect of which becomes clear from a penetrating study of all certain or the others. Historical-minded people always have a stubborn difficulty with this conception...It may be that society is gradually evolving towards some exquisite harmony of life and structure. For the present, the student of cultural history (and under this term I include the data of ethnology) humbly notes that no society is or ever was thus self-contained and self-explanatory... (Sapir 1916b:2).

Nonetheless, his point in the final paragraph was that cultural history must be seen pluralistically, at "distinct levels", for he proceeded to invoke the notion of a cultural "fabric" created by "a constant but always very imperfectly consummated tendency...towards the molding of the more or less distinct strands [of social life]" (Sapir 1916b:2). The implication of a tendency to cohesion if not harmony is unmistakable here. This "fabric" became the conceptual stuff for his "genuine culture" in its definition as a "characteristic mold of a civilization" fluttering towards the realization of "ideal form" (Sapir 1949[1924a]:314). The genuine culture, like the greater whole of a configuration

> is not a spiritual hybrid of contradictory patches of water-tight compartments of consciousness that avoid participation in a harmonious synthesis...[T]he great cultures, those that we instinctively feel to have been healthy spiritual organisms, such as the Athenian culture of the age of Pericles and, to a less extent perhaps, the English culture of Elizabethan days, have at least tended to such harmony (Sapir 1949[1924a]:315).

In 1928 Sapir completed an outline for a book which was to be entitled The Psychology of Culture in which he made clear his continued conviction with regard to "culture as history" (Sapir 1928a:4). Again his remarks indicated his scepticism for psychological conceptions of culture on the basis of their incongruity with the actually "selected" "levels of discourse" in existing groups (Sapir 1928a:4). Yet it was precisely with regard to a "more intimate understanding of culture", more appreciative of the relativity of organization and perception of the world by different cultures, that Sapir invoked the notion of the "configurative point of view" (Sapir 1928a:5).

Just one year prior, Sapir was still willing to see this view as a "non-historical study of typical forms" (Sapir 1949[1927b]:338); in the outline however, he spoke of the need "to understand the historical working out of cultural patterns" (Sapir 1928a:3). Sapir's vacillation is evident even into his later writings, where between 1934 and 1937 he made contradictory statements with regard to the validity and fruitfulness of describing cultures in terms of their psychological configurational characters. For example, in 1934 he wrote approbatively that

> [t]he socialization of personality traits may be expected to lead cumulatively to the development of specific psychological biases in the cultures of the world. Thus Eskimo culture, contrasted with most North American Indian cultures, is extraverted; Hindu culture on the whole corresponds to the world of the thinking introvert; the culture of the United States is

> definitely extraverted in character, with a greater emphasis on thinking and intuition than on feeling; and sensational evaluations are more clearly evident in the cultures of the Mediterranean area than in those of northern Europe. Social scientists have been hostile to such psychological characterizations of culture but in the long run they are inevitable and necessary (Sapir 1949[1934b]: 563 emphasis added).

Contrast this with the following:

> Certain recent attempts, in part brillant and stimulating, to impose upon the actual psychologies of actual people, in continuous and tangible relations to each other a generalized psychology based on the real or supposed psychological implications of cultural forms, show clearly what confusions in our thinking are likely to result when social science turns psychiatric without, in the process, allowing its own historically determined concepts to dissolve into those larger ones which have meaning for psychology and psychiatry. We then discover that whole cultures or societies are paranoid or hysterical or obsessive! Such characterizations, however brilliantly presented have the value of literary suggestiveness, not of close personality analysis (Sapir 1937:867).

And yet again from a set of class notes of ?1936-1937 we find Sapir claiming that

> culture pattern is always configuration... Culture is just as dynamic as human behavior. Culture should be defined as a series of human activities in a configuration (Sapir as cited by Smith ?1936-37:16).

His attempt at reconciling the incorporation of the configurative into the historical orientation toward culture is nowhere explicitly or systematically developed in Sapir's work. Nonetheless this constitutes a pivotal turn in his conception of culture and in his epistemological assumptions as to the methods by which knowledge of cultural phenomena

was accessible to the student. There are two aspects of this development which will be examined independently in the subsequent two sections of this chapter. To take the latter first, the final section will explore the development of Sapir's understanding of the nature of the "individual", as epistemological and ontological locus. While the notion of history as composed of individual persons and events in actual sequences may remain intact as a theoretical conviction, it would seem rarely practised as such by Sapir.[16] Rather it is the aspect of the actuality of the individual as personalistic or psychiatric whole which is increasingly emphasised and for which is implicitly claimed a significantly distinct status as ontological and epistemological unit. If this is the case, as I will argue there, then I suggest that the incorporation of the configurative view into the imputed determinants of perception and behaviour of actual individuals may well have facilitated this shift, and that this had implications for his understanding the concept of human nature.

The immediately proceeding section will concern Sapir's treatment of what he conceived to be the "formal" approach to culture as employing appropriate methods towards the apprehension of existent culture patterns. Recall Swartz' observation that while the Boasian students explicitly sought the determinants of history in the actual sequences of unique events, to varying degrees of implicitness they assumed "social or psychological causes" to be the determinants of internal

cultural dynamics. For Sapir whose predilection was for the psychological, and for whom the stuff of history consisted in the actual individuals comprising cultural groups, the imputation of dynamic psychological tendencies (notably this "innate sense of form") to the prime determinants of individuals' behavior was, in these terms, an easy step. By appealing to this tendency to "form-feeling" or "intuition" as a pan-human mode of apprehension and (at times) faculty of mental functioning, I will suggest that it was only a further step for Sapir to admit to the intuition of culture as a whole as a configuration, a pattern, a form, immanent in and created by the expressions of this tendency by individuals, and yet, (though he consistently downplayed the implication), transcendent of the native individual's consciousness. I suggest that in conceiving of cultural history in increasingly configurational terms, Sapir was confusing the <u>determinants</u> of history for what he saw to be the <u>shape</u> of history or culture. It is to this issue of the intuition of form that we must now turn.

2.3. Sapir's Intuition of Form

The issue of form is an interesting aspect of Sapir's epistemology for at least two reasons. The first of these concerns his vacillation between a holistic position with regard to the reality and apprehension of impersonal, emergent features of linguistic and cultural wholes on the one hand, and an individualistic position with regard to the place of the individual as active shaper of his experiences and agent in the gradual transformation of these larger formal wholes. Thus it forces one to consider the question of the characteristics of these forms, as to whether Sapir felt they could be studied reductionistically, i.e. in terms of the individuals embodying them, or whether they should be studied holistically, as real entities in themselves, in order that the understanding of their nature would not be eclipsed.

The second and not unrelated issue concerns the nature of the explanations he sought to give, which also seems to oscillate between emphasizing the naturalistic principles underlying the origins of form in culture, and the conventionalist appreciation of the unique aesthetic "genius" of particular cultural products. A brief look at what Sapir understood by the term "form" is in order first. This will lead to the examination of the evidence on which Sapir based his assertion of the reality of formal phenomena. It will be found that the basis of this evidence was largely intuitive. The problem here consists in the method of validation of the

evidence which Sapir provided. Specifically, one must ask, what was the place of consciousness in his understanding of "intuition" and "feeling" on the one hand, and "knowledge" on the other? Finally, I suggest that this type of formulation lent itself to an imagistic if not teleological approach to the history of language and culture processes, which (considering his methodology) was difficult to reconcile with his allegiance to individuals as the determinants of history.

The notion of form is a pervasive thematic interest throughout Sapir's entire corpus of writings. In order to understand what meanings the term had for him, I will examine briefly the personal characteristics, and some of the external sources of influence which he incorporated into it.

2.3.1. Aesthetic features

One important feature of this preoccupation is that it seems to have been spurred by, if not derived from a profound personal aesthetic sensibility. I suggest that this quality was characterized by a classical appreciation of structure, as well as by a lively sense of organic process. For an early example, in a letter to Lowie from 1916, Sapir contrasted his "scientific spirit" with an equally strong "aesthetic will or craving". About the latter he wrote:

> I find that what I care most for is beauty of form, whether in substance or, perhaps even more keenly, in spirit. A perfect style, a well-balanced system of philosophy, a perfect bit of music, a clearly conceived linguistic organism, the beauty of mathematical relations --these are some of the things that, in the sphere of the immaterial, have most deeply stirred me (Sapir in Lowie 1965:20-21).

Notice the classical emphasis on balance and structure he expressed in this context. Elsewhere it was the potential for vitality of form in life which absorbed his attention, for example in his concept of the "genuine culture":

> For [a penetrating analysis], the highest manifestations of culture, the very quintessence of the genius of a civilization, necessarily rest in art for the reason that art is the authentic expression, in satisfying form, of experience; experience not as logically ordered by science, but as directly and intuitively presented to us in life (Sapir 1949[1924a]:327).

In some instances these two proclivities were brought together, such as in his concept of linguistic drift. Not only did Sapir attribute the nature of "drift" in language to the "groping for abstract form, the logical or aesthetic ordering

of experience", but he emphasized the importance of drift in constituting the "life" of language (Sapir 1921a:157,171). Malkiel (1981) has heavily emphasized the "haunting" metaphorical quality the term must have had for Sapir. Take for example, Sapir's account of the manner in which "drift" worked in language:

> What significant changes take place in [language] must exist, to begin with as individual variations. This is perfectly true and yet it by no means follows that the general drift of language can be understood from an exhaustive descriptive study of these variations alone. They themselves are random phenomena, like the waves of the sea, moving backward and forward in purposeless flux. The lingusitc drift has direction. In other words, only those individual variations embody it or carry it which move in a certain direction, just as only certain wave movements in the bay outline the tide (Sapir 1921a:155).

This passage is significant also in that it indicates that for Sapir, drift, as a real unconscious force in the "vertical" history of language, was to be contrasted with the "horizontal" synchronic perspective of langauge in terms of individual variations.

Moreover, Sapir suggested that in the drifts of different languages one could perceive a more universal tendency for them to pass through similar sequences of change. Drift at its deepest level showed fundamental parallelisms in the phases of development of "long disconnected languages ...[where] there could have been no dialect interinfluencing" (Sapir 1921a:172). Not only, then, were the future develop-

ments of a single language predictable from a study of the historical tendencies of that language's drift, but now Sapir was claiming that drifts of different languages could be compared and seen to follow the same sequence of development. Malkiel argues that because this last aspect of drift is nowhere else explored by Sapir that it is best to regard it as an idea he "impulsively" introduced and later "tacitly" withdrew (Malkiel 1981:566). Yet Malkiel entirely overlooks another rather sober reference to this aspect of drift:

> ...It would be too easy to relieve ourselves of the burden of constructive thinking and to take the standpoint that each language has its unique history, therefore its unique structure. Such a standpoint expresses only a half truth... [L]anguages travelling along different roads, have tended to converge toward similar forms. Moreover, the historical study of language has proven...that a language changes not only gradually but consistently, that it moves unconsciously from one type towards another and that analogous trends are observable in remote quarters of the globe...In assuming the existence of comparable types, therefore, we are not gainsaying the individuality of all historical processes, we are merely affirming that back of the face of history are powerful drifts that move language, like other social products, to balanced patterns, in other words, to types (Sapir 1921a: 121-22).

That this was a persistent notion in Sapir's thought is evident from the following note taken in a class he held in the late 1930's, in which he was discussing the aesthetic nature of the cyclical development of patterns: "Even language forms have a cyclical development. [We] can define a set of linguistic forms which are classical" (Sapir as cited by Smith ?1936-37: 21). Regardless of the issue of theoretical sobriety however,

I suggest that this aspect of the drift concept is significant, in the present context, as illustrating Sapir's tendency to conceive of internal dynamic processes (here in language) in terms of a working towards structural completeness or formal elegance, and which, in its developmental aspect, has something of an aesthetic organicist flavour.

"Cultural drift" Sapir contended, was also an historical process, but by and large he discouraged any isomorphism between it and linguistic drift, because, he argued, the direction of cultural drifts could not be predicted from historical evidence to any extent comparable to that of language.

> One has only to think seriously of what such personalities as Aristotle, Jesus, Mahomet, Shakespeare, Goethe, Beethoven were in the history of culture to hesitate to commit oneself to a completely non-individualistic interpretation of history. I do not believe for a moment that such personalities are merely the cat's paw of general cultural drift (Sapir as cited in Malkiel 1981:567).

Cultural development, he claimed, was not amenable to characterization in terms of the "self-contained organism" which language was. Still, a notable exception follows, which Malkiel cites from the same year:

> It is not otherwise with language, with religion, with the forms of social organization. Wherever the human mind has worked collectively and unconsciously, it has striven for and often attained unique form. The important point is that the evolution of form has a drift in one direction, that it seeks poise, and that it rests relatively speaking, when it has found this poise (Sapir 1949[1921e]:382).

Another example, in which Sapir freely incorporated his artistic sensibility into a theoretical formulation, was his understanding of the relationship between language and literature. This, he admitted, derived to some extent from Croce's aesthetic (Sapir 1921a:V,222,224).[17] He maintained that there were two kinds or levels of reality which could be touched by the artist. One was of a linguistic nature, bound by the formal limitations which any languages imposed; thus, he claimed, there was a relativity of expression of thought in the literatures of different languages. The other level of reality which could be known by the artist consisted in the non-linguistic, absolute intuition of a "generalized, human experience" (Sapir 1921a:224). This intuition of reality however, was by no means the "flux of impressions" of the linguistic relativist (cf. Miller 1968:12). Rather, he described it in terms suggestive of an all-embracing reservoir (receptacle?) of potential contents. This assumed "latent content" of all languages he called "the intuitive science of experience" (Sapir 1921a:218 emphasis his). He compared it to a "scientific truth" which, he claimed, was

> in its essence untinctured by the particular linguistic medium in which it finds expression ...The proper medium of scientific expression is therefore a generalized language that may be defined as a symbolic algebra of which all known languages are translations (Sapir 1921a: 223-24).

The appreciation of impersonal, self-contained form which Sapir evinced in his statements about both kinds of reality

is matched by a certain world-in-a-grain-of-sand approach to the vital place of the literary artist in this duality:

> The artist's "intuition" to use Croce's term, is immediately fashioned out of a generalized human experience--thought and feeling--of which his own individual experience is a highly personalized selection... [H]uman expression being what it is, the greatest--or shall we say the most satisfying--literary artists, the Shakespeares and the Heines, are those who have known subconsciously to fit or trim the deeper intuition to the provincial accents of their daily speech (Sapir 1921a: 224-25).

The number of examples of this aesthetic predilection for form as both organic and "quasi-mathematical" reality, is large and colourful. For example, note another strongly organic metaphor used to describe the "genuine culture":

> [It] is not of necessity either high or low; it is merely inherently harmonious, balanced, self-satisfactory...It must be looked upon as a sturdy plant growth, each remotest leaf and twig of which is organically fed by the sap at the core (Sapir 1949[1924a]:314,316).

While Sapir never again referred explicitly to the concept of "genuine culture", he did continue to appreciate the formal aesthetic approach to culture. For instance, the final section of his projected work The Psychology of Culture was to be entitled "Society as Unconscious Artist". In it, he planned to argue that it is the imagination which is the source of form--"significant form"--in culture.[18] In characterizing culture as art, he wanted to show how "form" and "meaning" could be unified: "The struggle for significant form in culture unconsciously animates all normal individuals

and gives meaning to their lives" (Sapir 1928a:8). Moreover, in this context, he spoke of cultural forms as being "vitalized" and subject to "decay" and "renaissance" independently of conscious will. From later material this attention to "periodicity" persisted in his understanding of "progress" in culture, one dimension of which was expressed, again in explicitly aesthetic terms, as the "cyclical development of patterns" (Sapir as quoted in Smith ?1936-37:17-21).

As a final example, I suggest that there was a strong aesthetic element in his personalistic psychology. In describing his notion of an individual's "essential personality" he maintained that it has a "definite form" or "behavior configuration" which was theoretically knowable and distinct from its subsequent alterations in the process of socialization (Sapir 1928b:79). In particular, I suggest that his literary-ethnographic experimentation with life histories is evidence of an attempt on his part to address this concern in suitable form (Ratcliffe 1981; see also Nyce n.d.).

These examples then, point to the strong tendency on Sapir's part to infuse cultural materials--from one extreme of the impersonal forms of language, through the rhythmic configurations of culture, to the personalism of the individual's subjective life--with a formal approach that evinced a varying but pervasive aesthetic character. The significance of these observations for Sapir's epistemology will be explored more fully below.

2.3.2. Scientific methods of validation

Had this aesthetic sensibility been the only component in Sapir's conceptualization of form in cultural phenomena, it would be easy to relegate the efficacy of his ideas to the realm of metaphor and be done with it. Sapir seemed to have felt strongly at times, and concerning certain fields of application, however, that the reality of form in language, culture and personality could be empirically validated.

For example, it was noted above (cf. Ch. 2, sec. 1) that Sapir conducted experiments in order to test his hypothesis concerning the innateness of the feeling for sound symbolisms in speech dynamics and phonetic material. One aspect of the experiment attempted to isolate individual differences in sensitivity to sound symbolism.[19] His method was to suggest to the subject a meaning for a nonsense word, and then in altering the phonetic elements of the word, to request that the subject indicate "what difference of meaning seemed naturally to result" (Sapir 1949[1929b]:70). The results indeed varied among individuals, but did not affect his conclusion that there existed a tendency to build up a "constellated system" of meanings which was "rather obviously" the result of the operation of an "unconscious or intuitive logic, which was not necessarily based on experience with the stimuli in their normal, functional aspect" (Sapir 1949 [1929b]:72). While this system of meanings had no direct correlate in socialized patterns, its very systematic or

formal nature was what intrigued Sapir.

Another, more celebrated example is Sapir's method of elucidating evidence for his eventual concept of the phoneme. Briefly, in conducting research on the phonetic materials of several languages Sapir was struck by the tendency of informants to be dissatisfied with a literal transcription of the phonetic sounds of their language. He came to interpret their behaviour increasingly in terms of a phonological "intuition" or "preparedness" on their part which, he maintained, caused them both to misinterpret the objective quality of certain sounds, and to recognize virtually imperceptible accoustic or non-accoustic differences among others (Sapir 1921a:56, 1949[1933a]:48). He went on to argue that these sounds constituted "points in a pattern", i.e. that this "preparedness" toward a limited number of sounds was evidence of the existence of an intuitively understood, "ideal system" of sound patterns in each language which directed each speaker's phonetic habits. Moreover, the informant's ready grasp of the orthography of his own language, as taught by a "phonemically intuitive" teacher, was practical evidence of the reality of this principle (Sapir 1949[1933a]: 48 italics his). These observations reinforced Sapir's tendency to see in language the operation of a selective, psychological determinant, namely, the "innate striving for formal elaboration and expression" (Sapir 1949 [1924b]:156). What is notable in the present context is that Sapir freely

admitted that the "formal genius" of any language was impersonal and maintained an autonomy distinct from the conscious wills of individuals. The deeper the level at which lingusitic form could be detected, the more resistive to conscious attempts at control it would be, and the more unconscious of such a structure the native speaker would remain anyway.

This formulation placed the locus of language not at the level of individual speech dispositions, but in language itself as a self-contained organism.[20] Nonetheless, and this is the critical point in his validation of the psychological reality of phonemic pattern, he assumed that the intuitive "feeling for form" in the psychic dispositions of individuals was responsibe for two things: on the one hand, he attributed it to be the cause of linguistic configurations and their evolution. On the other, his experimentation suggested to him that the speaker appeared to intuit and, with some guidance, to be able to bring to consciousness the phonemic pattern of his language (Sapir 1921a:55).[21] This suggested that formal patterns were also participated in by individuals, in that the objective validation of these patterns could be found in their reports.

2.3.3 Intuition

The reality of form in language and culture was necessarily related, for Sapir, to the intuition of that form. Since it assumes the major position as both explanatory principle and methodological tool, an examination of the uses to which Sapir put the term intuition follows. I suggest that he employed it to identify at least three orders of apprehension, which varied in terms of the perspective of reality they described, and the kind of consciousness they could or did assume.

First there is his notion, described in Language of a culture-free intuition of the absolute contents of experience, unaffected by linguistic selection and formalization (Sapir 1921a:218). As described above, this level of an "intuitive science of experience" seemed to be characterized by an atomistic, but total, "algebraic" apprehension of the elements of experienced, before language and culture were able to bind them into sets of patterns or relations. This idea persisted in the notion of an "intuitive logic" which, in the context of his experimentation with phonetic symbolism, he proposed as the cause of the production of unsocialized symbolisms in language sounds.[22] As I showed in section I of this chapter, Sapir reconstructed the organic origin and nature of speech on the basis of this hypothesized universal level of apprehension. There, I also noted the naturalist, evolutionist implications of that formulation. I suggest that the

assumption concerning language as "accompanying but not [fundamentally] altering our intuition of experience" (Miller 1968:11), applies here also. In both cases, the intuition was not conscious, but some individuals, more easily than others, could convey a responsiveness to this level, in strongly "algebraic" (Sapir 1921a:224), or "geometric" (Sapir 1949 [1927a]:72) expression.[23]

The second application of the term intuition which I am considering, involves Sapir's notion of the particular type of apprehension the individual had of the relational elements of the particular linguistic and cultural forms in which he participated. In this use, Sapir was no longer referring to the apprehension of the elemental contents of experience, but rather to the kind of awareness or "knowledge" of formal relations the individual had, and which guided his linguistic and cultural behaviour:

> Why are the forms of social behavior not adequately known by the normal individual? How is it that we can speak, if only metaphorically, of a social unconscious? I believe that the answer to this question rests in the fact that the relations between the elements of experience which serve to give them their form and significance are more powerfully "felt" or "intuited" than consciously perceived...It is exceedingly difficult for [the native] to give a general rule of which...specific examples of behavior are but illustrations, though all the while he acts as though the rule were perfectly well known to him. In a sense it is well known to him. But this knowledge is not capable of conscious manipulation in terms of word symbols. It is, rather, a very delicately nuanced feeling of subtle relations, both experienced and possible.

> To this kind of knowledge may be applied the term intuition, which, when so defined, need have no mystic connotations whatever (Sapir 1949[1927c]:548-49 emphasis his).

This intuition was at once adequate and partial. For the natively experiencing individual, it was adequate in that it provided him with the capacity to function effectively within his cultural milieu (and/or the norms for his divergence from it). It was partial in that he did not or could not understand the "true" nature of the patterned whole into which the totality of individual perspectives resolved:

> No matter where we turn in the field of social behavior, men and women do what they do, and cannot help but do,...because they have found it easiest and aesthetically most satisfactory to pattern their conduct in accordance with more or less clearly organized forms of behavior which no one is individually responsible for, which are not clearly grasped in their true nature, and which one might almost say are as self-evidently imputed to the nature of things as the three dimensions are imputed to space. It is sometimes necessary to become conscious of the forms of social behavior in order to bring about a more serviceable adaptation to changed conditions, but I believe it can be laid down as a principle of far-fetching application that in the normal business of life it is useless and even mischievous for the individual to carry the conscious analysis of his cultural patterns around with him. That should be left to the student whose business it is to understand these patterns (Sapir 1949 [1927c]:558).

This brings us to the third way in which Sapir used "intuition". He implied that for the student, it was a central element, in his methodology, for the discovery and understanding of cultural and linguistic forms. Its distinction from the previous two meanings discussed is that it was not simply a

naive apprehension of the elements of experience, or their culturally significant form in one's own existential context. Rather, it involved a more conscious, relativistic perception of such patterns. Thus he wrote that "students of language cannot be entirely normal in their attitude towards their own speech. Perhaps it would be better to say 'naive' than 'normal'" (Sapir 1921a:161fn.). In linguistics the object was structural congruence with the speech facts, and theoretical predictive power. The aim in culture studies would have the further object of making the cultural (and personal) significance of patterns understandable to an unfamiliar readership:

> To what extent can we penetrate into the vitals of primitive life and fashion for ourselves satisfying pictures on its own level of reality? Can the conscious knowledge of the ethnologist be fused with the intuitions of the artist? It is difficult to think oneself into the tacit assumptions of so alien a mode of life as was that of an American Indian tribe. It is not that its patterns are elusive or unintelligible, for they are not, but that the attempt to sink these visible patterns into an atmosphere which is as unobtrusive as it is colourful demands an imagination of a particularly tolerant kind (Sapir 1949[1922]:503-4).

The importance of this intuitive, participatory flexibility for Sapir's ethnographic method cannot be underestimated. In positing the possibility of being able to discover and grasp intuitively the mode of native patterning in other cultures, he was assuming that by this means, one could come closest to direct experience of the reality of

significant form as it was expressed by the individuals in those cultures. In the full Bergsonian sense, it required that one enter into sympathy with the object to be known. Without this effort to understand the indigenous "cultural key" in terms that were "acceptable and intelligible to the natives themselves", he said, the prospect of "unimaginative and misconceiving description" of their behaviour was heightened radically (Sapir 1949[1927c]:547).

How he proposed that one discover or develop an understanding of such patterns is not exactly explicit, though neither is it a serious issue here. The problem arises when one considers how Sapir presumed to validate the evidence derived by the intuitive method. There are two faces to this problem which will be explored. On the one hand the reality of patterns so discovered was assumed to be validated by native reports to the affirmative. Given that such patterns were by nature not capable of being known consciously by the native, it is not clear what kind of response on the part of the native would constitute a rigourous criterion for discovering error in one's findings. The place of consciousness in the naive intuition of form will, in fact, be shown to be highly problematic.

On the other hand, I suggest that Sapir supported his method of direct intuition of form, in language at least, with experimental techniques to test for the operation of a generic "intuitive logic" independently of his own affirmative judgment.

Nonetheless there is another problem of rigour in his methodology which must be observed.

As for the first problem, Sapir viewed the potential for an intuitive consciousness on the part of the individual informant as a major evidential basis for validating the linguist's and ethnographer's formulations. This is problematic for at least two reasons. First, Sapir did not provide a criterion by which to judge the degree to which the student's observations approximated the reality of the informant's configurational understanding. Again, since the "true" nature of such patterns was withheld from the native, how could the more privileged objectivity of the analyst in this respect be guaranteed on the basis of the native's account?

Secondly, Sapir did not himself apply this principle consistently. On the one hand, there were certain deeper levels of formal pattern--specifically of linguistic change or drift--of which, he claimed the naive individual could not have any intuitive apprehension. Rather the individual, if presented with such an idea, would protest that such change was impossible:

> As we look about us and observe current usage it is not likely to occur to us that our language has a "slope", that the changes in the next few centuries are in a sense prefigured in certain obscure tendencies of the present and that these changes, when consummated, will be seen to be but continuations of changes that have already been effected. We feel rather that our language is practically a fixed system and that what slight changes are destined to take place in it are as likely to move in one direction as another. <u>The feeling is fallacious</u>. Our very uncertainty

> as to the impending details of change makes the eventual consistency of their direction all the more impressive (Sapir 1921a:155 emphasis added).

Here, in direct contrast to the notion of intuitive awareness as the basis for validating the reality of form, it was the total unconsciousness on the part of the individual of the working of linguistic drift which was given as evidence of its reality. In this context, Sapir maintained rather that the "feeling" of change in the patterns of one's speech was attributed to a certain unnaturalness of expression, imposed by an overly conscious attention to grammatical correctness (Sapir 1921a:156-59). On the other hand, Sapir's brand of social criticism led him to believe that an awakened consciousness of cultural patterns was, for the native at any rate, not good for the health of individual and culture:

> Owing to the limitations of the conscious life, any attempt to subject even the higher forms of social behavior to purely conscious control must result in disaster. Perhaps there is a far-reaching moral in the fact that even a child can speak the most difficult language with idiomatic ease, but that it takes an unusually analytical type of mind to define the mere elements of that incredibly subtle linguistic mechanism which is but a plaything of the child's unconscious (Sapir 1949[1927c]:549).

We have noted the strong aesthetic component in Sapir's organization of thought which appears at times to have led him to make imagistic statements about the patterns he intuited. For these types of statements he did not seem impelled to provide other types of evidence in their support. As aesthetic

intuitions they were self-evident, and it was in reference to this intuitive methodology that Sapir made the approbative comment that, as students, we should seek to express our observations in "forms at once more graceful and less discussible" (Sapir 1949[1923b]:503). Yet, as shown above, Sapir sought to provide an empirical basis for his insights. In particular, the other method to be examined here, involves the linguistic experimental techniques he developed to this end (cf. Sapir 1949[1929b],[1933b]). The inescapable problem in his methodology is the fact that the construction of his experiments did not rigourously test for the operation of an intuitive feeling for form, or natural unsocialized symbolisms, as a causal factor. Concerning the experiment he designed to test for the existence of a tendency to produce unsocialized phonetic symbolisms, his conclusions to the affirmative were too broad, in that he entertained no alternative but his own hypothesized functioning of an "intuitive logic" by which to explain his results. One has the impression that the conclusion was assumed to be as much self-evident, on the basis of any conscious reflection on one's personal experience, as it was to be proven by experimental methods. In any event, to the extent that the conclusion was already contained in the premises on which he developed the experiment, he was susceptible to the charge of circularity.

Twaddell has made a similar criticism, with regard to the lack of rigour, of Sapir's method of demonstrating the mental reality of the phoneme (Twaddell 1957:57-59). Moreover,

Twaddell's explicitly nominalist position with regard to scientific method brings out in high relief Sapir's tendency to approach a direct realist position in certain respects.[24] In his more defensive moments, Sapir's attempt to allay "a possible charge of phonetic metaphysics" or "mysticism" in his assumptions is indicative of his reaction against a strictly anti-mentalist scientific philosophy.[25]

To reiterate, Sapir's notion of "form-feeling" is both an explanatory principle and a methodology. First, as he saw it, the universal tendency in human mentality to project feeling for forms into the strata of one's linguistic, cultural and personal environments was a dynamic determinant in the origin and "drift" of their histories. Moreover, this type of explanation was not merely of the symbolic transformational order. There are those occasional references which I have cited that imply an extension of formal congruences to a "prelinguistic" and "precultural" world in a way reminiscent of the gestaltists' appeal to the existence of gestalts in nature. This is not to claim that Sapir was ultimately basing his ideas on an evolutionist appeal to the facts of nature, though as was pointed out above (sec. 1), Sapir seemed to find no serious objection to employing the view when it suited his purpose. The more important problem here concerns the place of consciousness in the intuition of form. The point is that Sapir's methodological individualist concern that the theoretical locus of all accounts of the determinants of

culture be situated at the level of the individual as embodiment and effective agent of culture--argues for the relevance of the individual's dispositions and consciousness in the demonstration of the uniqueness and indeterminancy of history. "Consciousness is the only approach we have to reality" (Sapir quoted in Smith ?1936-37:23). Yet Sapir's insights into formal regularities in the various strata of culture were conducive to the development of a more explicitly holistic theoretical orientation to the problem of determinants. Not only does this concern with structure speak to the concurrent interest in regularities in historical processes Sapir must have had, but he seems to have required the notion of the unconscious to account for the patterning of behaviour "denuded of the irrelevancies of individual sentiment" (Sapir 1921a:218), and which was not accessible to native reflection. Intuition, then, as the bridge Sapir threw between consciousness and unconsciousness as evidence of formal patterning in culture, remains an interesting, but ambiguously employed concept.

Secondly, as I see it, Sapir's feeling for form was a substantial ingredient in his methodology. Obviously, and importantly, it was not the whole of his method. Sapir would never have gained the scholarly respect he has earned had he not maintained a rigourously analytical approach toward the data of each language with which he worked, and an accomodating respect for particulars and context in his orientation to cultural anthropology. Nonetheless the mode of intuition by

which he felt the student could come most closely to the apprehension of form implied that one could have direct experience and understanding of such phenomena in their true nature. For Sapir, this possibility was thought to be best realized through an aesthetic intuition. Thus, as was shown above, his impressions and characterization of form in language and culture were infused with a strong aesthetic flavour, and account for the imagistic quality of many of his descriptive and explanatory statements. Moreover, I suggest that this sensitivity was to some degree responsible for the historical element in such ideas as the "genuine culture" or the notion of progress in culture as the "cyclical development of patterns". In light of this, it would seem that Sapir was susceptible to confusing the shape or image of historical processes in terms of their organic development or periodic regularity, for the determinants of history as grounded in the concrete reality and uniqueness of individuals in interaction.

The questions raised in this section, relevant to the problem of holism and individualism in his thought, will be touched upon in Chapter III, and again in Chapter IV, sec.2 where they will be critically assessed. Also in the final chapter (sec.1), I will draw certain conclusions regarding the co-existence of naturalist and conventionalist explanations of human activity in his work.

2.4. Human Nature and Individuals

The foregoing sections I have dealt with the individual only indirectly as epistemological category in Sapir's thought. Rather I have approached the issue of what he saw to be the psychological determinants of culture dynamics. Since the individual person occupies an extremely visible position in his though, this section will be devoted to exploring Sapir's view of the nature of the person, and of human nature in general, as it addresses another important aspect of his epistemology. The kinds of questions which must be asked in this regard then, include the following. To what extent, and in what ways at a global level, did Sapir see human nature as essentially malleable; were individuals determined by the cultural traditions, patterns and so on which they inherited? Or, conversely, did he characterize human nature as having essential characteristics which transcend cultural determination? The actions of individuals in this view would be seen to be determined to some degree by this essential nature, which may or may not be in accord with cultural demands. If there is found a dualistic element in Sapir's formulation of this problem, one must go on to ask what specifically constituted the important characteristics of this essential nature which were thought to affect the individual's relation to culture. Was the individual, in other words, led (for examples) by unconscious emotional requirements in terms of need for control of impulses, or for social cohesion, to conform to social forms;

or was it a rational non-conflictive concern--logical or aesthetic--which determined such conformity? As for the development of the individual personality, did Sapir imply that unique individuality was an illusory concept, that every person was really constructed out of the cultural materials and patterns with which he was surrounded? Or, since he conceived of the notion of essential personality, to what extent was this an active agency in the determination of the individual's development, and adjustment? Would such a characterization assume a basic harmony or conflict between the efforts of the individual after self-expression and cultural dictates?

In the following, it will be shown that, expectably, Sapir gave no single, unequivocal answer to any of these questions. After exploring Sapir's statements relating to these issues, we will briefly examine the basis on which he made his claims to knowledge of the nature of individuals and human nature. With the completion of this fourth theme we will be sufficiently equipped to examine more critically the range of ontological and epistemological implications in this thought in the following chapters.

2.4.1. The limits of relativism

The pervading assumption of relativistic theories of culture, such as Sapir inherited from his association with Boas, was that there was no such thing as human nature. In Boas' view, the significant constant in man's behaviour was its malleability (Hatch 1973:48, 340). What determined man's actions were not universal rational, ethical or utilitarian principles which one could trace through cultural comparisons, but rather the arbitrary and particular givens of the cultural milieu which limited and shaped the kinds of reactions the individual might have. Asch has indicated the behaviourist foundation of this perspective which "presupposes a dynamically empty organism" (Asch 1952:373). The impression which one receives from this view of human nature as culturally determined is that the individual is presumed to be a "plastic man" (Asch 1952:372, Hollis 1977:23), bound to carry out the dictates of his cultural inheritance on the basis of arbitrary, non-rational habitude. The emotional significance with which particular social institutions became imbued was, according to Boas, necessary for their promulgation. Thus it was ethnocentric to think, as the evolutionists and utilitarians had, that human intelligence or will could be viewed as effective agents in the cultural process, or therefore in any adequate concept of human nature.

In his view of human nature as being largely determined by irrational reactions to historical contingency, Boas also

maintained that such reactions tended to develop an internal consistency particular to each culture, autonomous from the actual exigencies of life and held as 'subjective ideas' predominant in the minds of the members of that culture (Boas 1940:436). Nonetheless, Boas refused to entertain the idea that this subjective, ideational aspect of culture appropriated or implied any notion of natural or universal human mental processes, which could have provided the basis for a more positively conceived notion of human nature (Hatch 1973:71).

It is evident that Sapir was strongly influenced by this relativistic view of human nature. First of all, to the extent that Sapir shared with Boas the belief that culture was an emergent system resulting from sui generis historical principles, and not due to the working of some natural properties of the human mind, he was also inclined to the view that human nature was essentially plastic and determined by culture. Certainly Sapir shared the belief that biological and natural environmental exigencies were not the critical determinants of human nature (cf. Sapir 1949[1927c]:558).[26] In an unusually direct instance from an article in 1928 Sapir wrote that "human nature is infinitely complex and every type of reconciliation of opposites seems possible..." (Sapir 1949[1928b]:348). Certainly Sapir's own facility for reconciling contrasting perspectives is evident here. However, in the same paragraph he went on to argue that despite this fact, no

reconciliation could be made between "religious feeling" and "aesthetic emotion" which, he claimed, were antinomous in human nature (Sapir 1949 1928b :348). The passage is unfortunately brief and unclear regarding the parameters of this opposition in actual life. Still, I will show below that it is one of a number of similar statements which directs one to look for underlying assumptions regarding certain positive psychological characteristics of human nature Sapir seems to have held. It will be found that in the notion of an "essential personality" he sought the means to conceptualizing about natural inclinations in the individual, and in humanity at large which were theoretically distinct from cultural determination.

Secondly, Sapir appropriated the concomitant relativist notion of an internally consistent "genius" in culture, which focused on the incommensurability of modes of thought and mental processes in different cultures, as Boas had held. In "Culture, genuine and spurious" for example, he offered an explicit account of this perspective, and emphasized the historically arbitrary nature of the development of culturally "typical" reactions over their source in inherent biological or psychological "hereditary traits":

> Frequently enough what is assumed to be an innate racial characteristic turns out, on closer study to be the result of purely historical causes. A mode of thinking, a distinctive type of reaction, gets itself established, in the course of a complex historical development, as

> normal; it serves then as the model for the working over of new elements of civilization. From numerous examples of such distinctive modes of thinking or types of reaction a basic genius is abstracted. There need be no special quarrel with this conception of a national genius so long as it is not worshipped as an irreducible psychological fetish...(Sapir 1949[1924a]:311).

This relativist perspective of culture "genius", while deriving from a minute examination or reconstruction of actual historical contexts, developed an ahistorical, imagistic quality in the hands of writers such as Benedict. Sapir clearly had an inclination towards this kind of formulation which is exemplified in his notion of an "as if" psychology of culture; that is, culture conceived as a personality organization writ large.[27] Nonetheless it is also clear that he held a concurrent view of the individual as a distinct locus in culture which, in the uniqueness of his (the individual's) personality structure, defied theoretical subsumption within the former approach. In so doing, Sapir was not favouring a cultural relativism so much as an individual relativism.

Thirdly and lastly, Sapir seems explicitly to have accepted the assumption that institutions emerge in cultural development fortuiously by the force of emotionally invested habit, rather than by any conscious will or rationality which one could attribute to a universal characteristics of man. Like Boas, Sapir often interpreted conscious verbalizations of intent as secondary rationalizations, and looked to the unconscious for what he considered to be the source and

and perpetuation of tradition.

> If we can show that normal human beings... are reacting in accordance with deep-seated cultural patterns, and if, further we can show that these patterns are not so much known as felt, no so much capable of conscious description as of naive practice, then we have the right to speak of the "unconscious patterning of behavior in society." The unconscious nature of this patterning consists not in some mysterious function of a racial or social mind reflected in the minds of the individual members of society, but merely in a typical unawareness on the part of the individual of outlines and demarcations and significances of conduct which he is all the time implicitly following...[and adhering to] with tyrannical consistency in the actual conduct of life (Sapir 1949[1927c]:548).

Again however, it will become evident that Sapir found the consequences of this passive view of the individual and human nature to be insufficient, and sought specifically at the level of personality organization to develop concepts which would comprehend more adequately the potentially creative, conscious and rational inclinations of human nature.

2.4.2. Contrasting Perspectives

It is significant that to date, this chapter has only sketchily approached Sapir's vibrant interest in personality and psychiatry which became increasingly predominant in his later writings. That Sapir would be directed toward seeing culture in terms of its "psychological causes" is understandable, given the Boasian orientation to history he held (see above section 2; also Swartz 1968). Still the regularity of "mental processes", which was for Boas the assumed but unelaborated peg on which he hung the notion of internal cultural dynamics in his theory of history, took on, for Sapir, a central and critical place in his conception of "how the 'soul' of man sets to work" (Sapir 1949 1921c :529). While wishing to avoid the practice of setting up straw men, I suggest that Sapir's particular preoccupation with the organization of personality and universals of psychic functioning was, in part, a sustained effort to compound the cultural relativist position with an individual relativist one, and thus resist the deterministic conclusions regarding human nature at which the cultural relativistic position arrived. At the same time however, Sapir did not want to undermine radically the insights which it had disclosed.

A positive source of inspiration for Sapir came from his association with the psychiatrist/social psychologist Harry Stack Sullivan which will also have to be explored. The clarity with which Sullivan stated his central social

behaviourist assumptions regarding human nature and with which Sapir was in enthusiastic agreement will serve as an appropriate sounding board for the juxtaposition of Sapir's other, somewhat more ambiguous conceptions on the topic. This examination will not pretend to be conclusive, but merely point out the kinds of alternatives Sapir considered, and their epistemological inconsistencies. This condition is imposed largely because of the tentative and exploratory nature of Sapir's work right to the end of his life. Thus, we return to the questions raised in the first paragraph of this section. With regard to the first, what characteristics did Sapir attribute to human nature, and to what degree were they compatible with those of ultimate plasticity and cultural determination assumed by the relativist approach?

Sapir maintained that the distinction between "individual" and "social" behaviour was a fallacy, that the difference was merely a function of the interest of the investigator and did not lie in the nature of the behaviour itself (Sapir 1949[1927c]:544-45). Until the end of the 1920's he tended to concentrate his own interest at the cultural end of the spectrum, and emphasized the need to conceive of such behaviour as being formally or configurationally patterned. So, for example, in speaking of the "'psychological geography' of culture in the large" he wrote:

> In ordinary life the basic symbolisms of behavior are densely overlaid by cross-functional patterns of a bewildering variety. It is because <u>every isolated act</u>

> in human behavior is the meeting point of many distinct configurations that it is so difficult for most of us to arrive at the notion of contextual and non-contextual form in behavior (Sapir 1949[1929b]:165 emphasis added).

It seems that by the beginning of the 1930's, and spurred by his close friendship and intellectual exchange with Sullivan (which lasted until the end of his life), however, Sapir increasingly saw cultural analysis from this perspective to be a fictive abstraction (Sapir 1949[1932]:509, [1934c]:595). In its place he explored the individual as the locus of an organization of personal needs and an invariant structure, not independent of the influences of culture, but "genetically" distinct from it (Sapir 1949[1934b]:561). Contrast the following with the above quotation:

> It does not follow...that strictly social determinants, tending as they do, to give visible form and meaning, in a cultural sense, to each of the thousands of modalities of experience which sum up the personality, can define the fundamental structure of such a personality (Sapir 1937:866).

and further "Cultural considerations alone can never explain what happens from day to day [in terms of individual acts and events]" (Sapir as cited in Smith ?1936-37:28). In his call for the development of a "personalized psychology" then, he was seeking to establish principles of personality organization and structure which would provide the means toward a penetrating understanding of the experiential reality of the individual, and of

> the broad human base on which all culture has developed. The profound commonplace that all culture starts from the needs of a common humanity is believed in by all anthropologists, but it is not demonstrated by their writings (Sapir 1949[1934c]:595).

There is much in common between Sapir's "psychiatric science" as he came to call it, and Sullivan's theory of interpersonal relations. Perry has documented their direct exchange and concludes that

> as they both compared experiences, both of them arrived at much the same position: It is the uniqueness of the opportunity rather than the uniqueness of a given personality or physical organism which is the assumed basis of individual development and mental health (Perry 1982: 248).[28]

The implications of this for the characterization of human nature are clear enough. As Sullivan himself said: "Personality is primarily the result of cultural influences superposed on the remarkably plastic human animal" (Sullivan 1964[1940]:113).

I suggest however, that Sapir's personalistic programme was more than just the other side of the coin in his "duality of interest"; that in fact, in his notion of the "essential personality" (a concept which Sullivan discarded (Sullivan (1950)), one can find evidence of an approach to characterizing human nature which conflicts directly with that of the cultural relativist. This is suggested in the interpretation he gave of the source of difference between the two directions of interest in terms of individual temperament:

> What is the genesis of our duality of interest in the facts of behavior? Why is it necessary to discover the contrast, real or fictitious, between culture and personality, or, to speak more accurately, between a segment or behavior seen as culture pattern, and a segment of behavior interpreted as having a personality-defining value? Why cannot our interest in behavior maintain the undifferentiated character which it possessed in early childhood? The answer, presumably, is that each type of interest is necessary for the psychic preservation of the individual in an environment which experience makes increasingly complex and unassimilable on its own simple terms...The observer may dramatize such behavior as he takes note of in terms of a set of values, a conscience which is beyond self and to which he must conform, actually or imaginatively, if he is to preserve his place in the world of authority or impersonal social necessity. Or, on the other hand, he may feel the behavior as self-expressive, as defining the reality of individual consciousness against the mass of environing social determinants. Observations coming within the framework of the former of these two kinds of participation constitute our knowledge of culture. Those which come within the framework of the latter constitute our knowledge of personality. One is as subjective or as objective as the other, for both are essentially modes of projection of personal experience into the analysis of social phenomena (Sapir 1949[1934c]:592).

Sapir later spoke of the "cultural relativism" of the anthropologist in terms of a fearfulness to recognize "certain fundamental normalities regardless of cultural differences" which inadequacy he diagnosed as "a sophisticated form of what the psychiatrist somewhat brutally refers to as a flight from reality" (Sapir 1980[1938b]:10). The impression one receives of Sapir's personal opinion as to what constitutes the more compelling "reality" is clear.

With regard to the "essential personality", this conflict is not immediately apparent, but is definitely

problematic. On the one hand Sapir saw personality in terms of its structure, and sought to find principles of regularity at that level which would form the basis of his psychiatric science. On the other hand, Sapir expressed in his writings a strong "philosophical" belief in the "reality of individual consciousness" (Sapir 1949[1934b]:560).[29]

The former view has essentially no quarrel with the cultural relativist position which accepts a certain minimal commonality of psychological processes, 'though the overt emphasis on this commonality came to override the focus on cultural differences at times, in Sapir's case. Sapir's interest here was scientific: he sought generalizable regularities or "normalities" in the psychiatric notion of personality. To that end he sought to specify certain "effective consistencies" and "universals of behavior which would be located in the emotional makeup of man. To begin with, Sapir spoke of "profound motivations" in the individual personality as having pan-human reference. I noted previously the antinomous contrast he made between the "aesthetic emotion" which worked to express and enrich itself through the creation of "tangible forms", and the "religious feeling" which characteristically sought intensity through consciousness, and an absolute, intangible value system (Sapir 1949 [1928b]:348). Another dichotomy consisted in the distinctive motivations implied in his notion of a "duality of interest" just cited above. A third "substantial" contrast Sapir made

was that between the two "general psychological attitudes" of the introvert and extravert, derived initially from Jung's classification of personality types, but reworked over the years to accord similarly with the orientation of the former two levels of contrast (Sapir 1949[1923a]:529-32; [1934b]: 562-3; as cited by Smith ?1936-37:24-8). For Sapir these motivations were "latent patterns", both innate, and pre- and postnatally conditioned by the second or third year of life, in the structure of the personality of the individual (Sapir 1949[1934b]:561). From the presumed existence of these patterns, Sapir argued for certain "concepts of behavior equivalences" which could be "isolated from the behavior totalities" of the individual. The "universals of behavior" he enumerated were "sublimation, affective transfer, rationalization, libido and ego relations" (Sapir 1949[1934b]:561). These universals were thought to work themselves out in definite formal patterns throughout behaviour. It is not surprising that these universals were so conservatively expressed in this context. I suggest that had Sapir made them more specific, the less capable of generalizing from individual behaviours they would have become.

In the latter view, as described above (p.71) regarding the "individual reality of consciousness" however, the individual was attributed a distinctiveness both from other individuals and from determination by culture to some degree. "Personality" as he used it in this context, referred to the

individualizing principle in human nature. A fine example of this individualist concern for the experienced reality of the person is the now classic instance of Dorsey's informant Two Crows, about which Sapir went into an extended discussion:

> Apparently, Two Crows, a perfectly good and authoriative Indian, could presume to rule out of court the very existence of a custom or attitude or belief vouched for by some other Indian equally good and authoritative... [What] we need to be clear about is whether a completely impersonal anthropological description and analysis of custom in terms which tacitly assume the unimportance of individual needs and preferences is, in the long run, truly possible for a social discipline...
>
> The truth of the matter is that if we think long enough about Two Crows and his persistent denials, we shall have to admit that in some sense Two Crows is never wrong. It may not be a very useful sense for social science but in a strict methodology of science in general it dare not be completely ignored. The fact that this rebel, Two Crows can, in turn, bend others to his own view of fact or theory or to his own preference in action shows that his divergence from custom had, from the very beginning, the essential possibility of culturalized behavior (Sapir 1949[1938a]:570-72).

It is clear then, that Sapir straddled an individual relativistic as well as a cultural relativistic understanding of human nature. The culturally "given" nature of patterns continued to exist for Sapir, but the degree to which an individual's psychology would tend to absorb and manifest these "givens" of culturally normal behaviour was seen as itself variable, and dependent on that individual's constitution or "needs":

> Culture is, then, not something given but something to be gradually and gropingly discovered. We then see at once that elements of culture that come well within the horizon of awareness of one individual are entirely absent in another individual's landscape. This is an important fact, systematically ignored by the cultural anthropologist...[F]or the theoretical anthropologist who wishes to place culture in a general view of human behavior, such an oversight is inexcusable (Sapir 1949[1934c]:596).

This combination of individual and cultural relativism has another problematic ramification in that the former implied that one apply a methodologically individualistic approach to man's behaviour at one level, while the latter, particularly in its emphasis on individuals in culture "as a whole" (i.e., as configuration, as "personality organization" etc.), promoted a holistic methodological approach to the same subject. Sapir unfortunately did not make explicit how, in on the ground ethnographic research, one could amalgamate the belief, such as he is claimed to have had, "in a world of discrete individuals but a oneness and continuity of culture" (Sapir as cited by Smith ?1936-37:22). This ontological issue will be addressed further in Ch. IV, Section 2.

Sapir's vision of "progress" at a macroscopic level in culture, in terms, similar to those of the pragmatists, of the development of conscious rational intelligence is an example of a strain in Sapir's thought which poses another interesting problem. In defending his claim that primitive groups were just as "conventional" as ours, but more "bound" by culture, for example, he argued that "much of the history of the world

is a process of loosening up the feeling of cultural necessity" (Sapir as cited in Smith ?1936-37:9). The criterion he used in making this judgment was intelligence, by which he meant that kind of mentality which insists on "thinking things through for oneself", as distinct from "intelligence which consists in adjusting to social patterns" (Sapir as cited in Smith ?1936-37:10). On the one hand, to see this tendency in human nature requires a perspective which transcends individuals, and cultural particulars. On the other, his espoused view of the locus of consciousness was situated squarely at the level of the individual, where it should also be studied:

> Now fantasied universes of self-contained meaning are the very finest and noblest substitutes we can ever devise for that precise and loving insight into the nooks and crannies of the real that must be forever denied us. But we must not reverse the arrow of experience and claim for experience's imaginative condensations the primacy in an appeal to our loyalty, which properly belongs to our perceptions of men and women as the ultimate units of value in our day-to-day view of the world. If we do not thus value the nuclei of consciousness from which all science, all art, all history, all culture, have flowed as symbolic by-products in the humble but intensely urgent business of establishing meaningful relationships between actual human beings, we commit personal suicide. ...No formulations about man and his place in society which do not prove strictly and literally accurate when tested by the experience of the individual can have more than a transitory or technical authority. Hence we need never fear to modify...our sciences of man as social being, for these sciences cannot point to an order of

> nature that has meaning apart from the directly experienced perceptions and values of the individual (Sapir 1949[1939]:581).

The discrepancy between these two views concerns the criterion of intelligibility in the explanation of human actions, which is appropriated emphatically in the second, but absent in the first view. The issues involved in this conflict, between dualistic and monistic types of explanation however, will have to be left until chapter IV (sec.1) where they will be explored more fully.

The subsequent issue concerns the nature of the reconciliation Sapir sought between the personal and cultural dimensions of man's nature. Given Sapir's bifocal conception of human nature, it is not surprising that the characteristics which he attributed to man's nature were at once monistic and dualistic in relation to culture. This problem pivots on the notion of adjustment. To the extent that he saw the unconscious patterning of behaviour in society as the predominant determinant of individual and collective activity, Sapir was accepting certain monistic implications common to behaviourist theories. The central implication which concerns us here is that there is nothing imputed to the individual organism, conceived as it is in its logical extension as a "dynamically empty" receptacle, which could conflict with its absorption of cultural dictates. Clearly Sapir's personal individualism could not have been more opposed to such a conclusion. Nonetheless, until he began to develop seriously

his conceptual interest in personality in the 1930's, his notion of individual adjustment was, despite his objections, susceptible to this implication.[30] "Adjustment" in his earlier descriptions, consisted in the individual's "tyrannical adherence to the outlines of conduct prescribed for him by culture" (Sapir 1949[1927c]:548). His account of the individual's experience of conformity to this tyranny was in terms of an assumed harmony of interest:

> [M]en and women do what they do and cannot help but do...because they have found it easiest and aesthetically most satisfactory to pattern their conduct in accordance with more or less clearly organized forms of behavior (Sapir 1949[1927c]:558).

By 1932 however, "adjustment" had been explicitly enlarged to become a two-way process:

> "Adjustment," as the term is ordinarily understood, is a superficial concept because it regards only the end product of individual behavior as judged from the standpoint of the requirements, real or supposed, of a particular society. In reality "adjustment" consists of two distinct and even conflicting types of process. It includes, obviously, those accomodations to the behavior requirements of the group without which the individual would find himself isolated and ineffective, but it includes, just as significantly, the effort to retain and make felt in the opinions and attitudes of others that particular cosmos of ideas and values which has grown up more or less unconsciously in the experience of the individual. Ideally these two adjustment tendencies need to be comprised into behavior patterns which do justice to both requirements (Sapir 1949[1932]:519).

The individual in these terms is seen as having a more dynamic input into his own development, taking on the image of mediator

between his own needs and society's demands. The interests and natural inclinations of the individual were now distinct, but optimistically not in conflict with the impersonal demands made on him for cultural conformity. For the most part Sapir adopted a "synthetistic" theoretical stance towards the possibility of their compromise. An understanding of the "true nature of social process" for him involved the "conceptual reconciliation of the life of society with the life of the individual..." (Sapir 1937:870). Moreover he conceived of an ideally harmonious convergence of the two, which would result in a kind of amplification of both the individual's richness of personality and the vitality of cultural integration (Sapir 1928a:7; as cited by Smith ?1936-37:33).

In his earlier work, Sapir conceived of the individual's motivations in terms of the tendency to create a presiding configuration or "definite form" in his behaviour, rather than specifically as interests of a functional, utilitarian nature per se. In his later psychiatric orientation, the emphasis Sapir laid on the individual's perduring requirements shifted somewhat to the need to construct a meaningful symbolic universe. In neither emphasis however, was the notion that the strength of the individual's needs could transform conditions of cultural dissonance or inadequacy entertained.[31] Rather he claimed that acculturation resulted in an impoverished cultural tradition which would necessarily conflict with the process of developing a satisfying personal "configuration"

and/or accruing a network of symbolic referents rich with significance for the individual. What would result, Sapir predicted, was the enrichment of culture by significant individuals only over innumerable generations. The more immediate result would be the increased susceptibility of the personality organization to disintegration. Sapir went so far as to draw an analogy between the death rate involved in the adjustment of personality to a cultural climate with that involved in the adjustment of physique to ecological exigencies (Sapir as cited by Smith ?1936-37:33).

In all, the logical inconsistency between maintaining the monistic position that culture sets the relative limits of possible integration of personal needs with impersonal form on the one hand, while holding on the other the dualistic view that the individual's natural inclinations are distinct from and in potential conflict with his adherence to the demands of cultural norms, and indeed, that the progress of cultural integration itself derives from the efforts of individuals to transcend their "given" cultural limits, is difficult to reconcile. Sapir sought to avoid this inconsistency by broadly formulating his views in terms of an ideal of aesthetic consistency. In the individual's intent to harmonize his needs with the cultural forms with which he was presented, then, Sapir was convinced that some degree of symbiosis was theoretically and historically attainable. As Nadel has shown however, the difficulty with this criterion

of aesthetic consistency is that it requires an evaluative judgment which is logically inconsistent with the cultural relativism it assumes, and empirically very difficult to apply (Nadel 1951).

The last question asks to what extent Sapir saw the individual as self-constructive, an active carrier of culture rather than its passive recipient. Since the relevant implications for this have been exposed in the foregoing paragraphs, they need only brief restatement here. To the end, Sapir held that both cultural and personality determinants were the defining elements of human nature. I have noted the logical inconsistency in maintaining mutually exclusive monistic and dualistic positions regarding human nature. In the former view, the individual's malleability by culture assumes the image of man as one kind of unconscious hypnotic. The dualistic principle has two implications depending on whether Sapir's "psychiatric" or "philosophical" view of the individual's immutable characteristics is stressed. In so far as the individual became endowed with an invariant personality structure, which was determined by unconscious motivational typologies, the image of man received is still essentially one of the somnambulent, though by different causes. The other implication in assuming that there is something in the individual which is actively, dualistically distinct from his slavery to cultural determination derives from Sapir's philosophical belief in the validity of personal consciousness.

Sapir's sympathy with the reality of the individual's experiential world took him, at the last, to the point of claiming that "culture", anthropologically conceived, did not exist as a "given"; that in fact the most realistic conceptualization of the nature of human activitiy one could conceive was in terms of the centre of consciousness in every individual directing his activity. With this focus on the individual as "causal nexus" of experience, the metaphysical locus of "culture" dissolved into a discrete number of personal "sub-cultures". Sapir seems not to have noticed that this view of individuals as self-defining conflicted, within the dualistic framework, with the notion of their determination by personality structural universals of behaviour, as well as with the monistic assumptions he inherited from Boas.

Moreover, he continued to hold that the "fictive", but (equally) "abstract" conception of culture patterns was a necessary prerequisite for the personalistic understanding of individuals' actions. The plurality of perspectives, and their respective conclusions with regard to the notion of autonomous agency in the individual,
step towards recognizing multiple causality in the interrelations between individual and culture. Unfortunately, it does not solve the logical problem of reconciling their inconsistent premises regarding human nature.

As Sapir would have it, human nature is at once determined by the workings of unconscious emotional processes which create one's symbolic attachments and sensitivities to culture, yet also by a conscious will and purposiveness, and finally by a global tendency to rational development. I have noted the integrationist tendency in his view of cultural determinants in human nature, as well as the monistic and dualistic aspects in his thoughts on the relation between the individual's needs and cultural dictates.

The question remains as to how Sapir claimed to know the nature of individuals and human nature at large which he had presupposed. His propensity for finding configurational pattern at the level of culture "wholes" has been described in terms of the intuition of form, above. As his attention turned to personalities in cultures, this method of observation and organizing knowledge was conserved. Moreover the psychoanalytic tradition encouraged him to see in introspection a means to knowledge of fundamental human mental processes which was also accessible to empirical validation. Given an adequate psychological theory, (which did not yet exist, he admitted), the notion that the individual possessed a "nuclear personality", and that there existed "universals of behavior" which could be isolated from culturally variable behaviours, became, for Sapir, open to phenomenal verification. He argued against the use of statistical techniques as not useless, but not integrally helpful means to knowledge in

his psychiatric methodology (Sapir 1930b:122-26). Rather, he depended largely on the capacity to perceive these realities "with that quiet sharpness of gaze", which required more than "simple observation" (Sapir 1937:867). "The true student of personality" was, in Sapir's terms, an "intuitive scientist" (Sapir 1928c:78). The epistemological implications of this approach to the knowledge of individuals will be examined in the final chapter. More immediately however, the ontological ground for these statements must be laid. This last will form the substance of the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

ONTOLOGICAL ISSUES

3.0. Introduction

This chapter aims to make explicit the general ontological framework which supported Sapir's assumptions about culture, language and personality. It will begin with a brief precis of the realist, conceptualist and nominalist alternatives as they have arisen and developed within philosophical history. Since its purpose is orientational, this introduction will not treat the issues with any attempt at exhaustiveness. Nonetheless, I believe it will be useful in clarifying the philosophical "universe of discourse" which will underlie the analysis of Sapir's epistemology. Using this as a point of reference, I will then go on to characterize the ontology supplying Sapir's epistemological assumptions, drawing on statements and positions laid out in the preceding chapter. To this ontological source many of the inconsistencies which have been found in his assumptions can be traced. It will be the aim of the fourth chapter to examine some of the important discrepancies in his epistemology; therefore this chapter is important for the grounding of that examination.

3.1. Universals and Particulars

Realist philosophies have in common the basic premise that universals have a real objective existence. For Plato these universals existed as "forms" or "ideas" in a separate realm from sensible experience and knowable only through the faculty of reason. Perceptual experience could only offer knowledge of particulars which were instances of any universal. Knowledge of a "form" on the other hand, involved a transcendence of sensory experience through the power of reason. Such knowledge of transcendent realities was attained by means of a direct grasp or intuition (Rees 1967:334). Aristotle's philosophical realism maintained the central conviction regarding the objective existence of universals, but objected to their "transcendent" nature, as Plato had conceived them. Rather, Aristotle argued that universals were inherent in the world of sensuous particularity. Universals were not immutable "forms", but based on the reality of similarities among particulars, which made them amenable to classification. Thus also universality was not independent of the function of the mind, as it was in Plato's view. Aristotle maintained that knowledge required both sensory impression and the active judgment of the rational mind to comprehend the essential quality of any and every universal.

The correctness of the method of "reason" in apprehending universals was undoubted by the Greek realists, the medieval philosophers Aquinas and St. Augustine. The issue

was taken up again by certain modern realist philosophies, though with widely divergent conceptions of this method, and of the reality universals were said to have. Relevant for the present account is the fact that in its modern forms, realism has maintained the assumption that universals are objective, but as a sustained reaction both to nineteenth century idealism which emphasized the importance of consciousness in the apprehension of objects, and to certain doctrines of "technical philosophy", it has tended to focus on the relation between knowing and the objects of knowledge rather than on the status of universals per se (Cohen 1962:381,385). Thus for example, New Realism[1] was a form of "direct realism" which held that this relation between the logical objects of thought and the objects of sense was direct and immediate--unmediated by "images", "representations" or the like. The theory was unsuccessful in resolving the problem which is endemic to such formulations, that is, of accounting for error in perceptual knowledge.

The notion that one could have some direct insight, by way of a rational method, into the reality of universals came under scrutiny by other philosophers who were sceptical of its infallibility. The conceptualist and nominalist alternatives developed often in reaction to realist accounts of universals, and resulted in approaches which were more directly concerned with their epistemological foundations than with their metaphysical status (though the latter was

necessarily implicated).

To the conceptualist, the notion that universals had a real existence independent of mind could not go unquestioned. How was one to be sure that one could know them? Instead, universality was conceived to be a function of the mind in experience which, it was assumed, operated by means of concepts. The mind functioned to abstract generalities from particular phenomena, and thus one could only safely ascribe universality to the concepts which described such abstractions. Conceptualism has come to be associated with the British empiricists Locke, Berleley and Hume, all of whom, despite their differences, agreed on the importance of experience in the formulation of concepts, and were opposed to the notion that universals could be known directly through an a priori reasoning faculty. Experience was composed of discrete sensory impressions which one ordered through one's habitual attention to certain selected features of them into abstracted concepts by means of "representations" or "images". Knowledge, then, was by means of selective abstraction. The general problem in conceptualist epistemologies continues to involve accounting for the basis in reality of generalization universal to experience (Woozley 1967:199).

Nominalist expistemologies treated the place of experience in the problem of universals even more radically. According to this view, knowledge could only be of particulars. Nothing universal could be said to exist in those particulars

which were singular and individual (Hobbes 1962[1651]ch.4), or in the conceptual abstractions made from them. Rather, only the "words" or "terms" which were affixed to groups of particulars with similar significance were considered universal. Words were signs of and represented individual phenomena only approximately; they could not be said to exist themselves (Wm. of Ockham). Stress was laid then on the meanings or uses to which words or signs were put as the basis for classifying particulars, which did not necessitate that there be any correspondence in reality between such general signs and their signified particulars. In fact, no claim to real knowledge of the world through signs could be made on this premise. This problem has led nominalists to emphasize the notion of a "resemblance relation" between general words and the classes of particulars with which each was associated. The stress on this relation remains problematic, as does, in a very different way, the realist propensity for identifying universals with discrete formal qualities. In a recent formulation, Wittgenstein has argued that in actual language, resemblances among things grouped by the same general name were not really identical in each case, but were better referred to as 'family resemblances' which varied and overlapped from particular member to member, but none of which were common to all (Cf. Wittgenstein 1953). The result was that universals from this viewpoint became even less capable of accounting for the basis in reality of any assertion of

resemblance among particulars, or of truth in perceptual knowledge.

Modern schools of philosophy have attempted to resolve the inherent incompatibilities among these three alternative conceptions of universals. As it was formulated prior to the seventeenth century, the argument concerning the problem of universals had a common flavour despite the conflicting positions: universals were conceived as largely transcendent objects with little if any interconnection with spatio-temporal reality. At the Platonic extreme, the realm of the "forms" was conceptually analogous to a set of blueprints through which the incomplete world could be seen to manifest and derive its order. At the other, nominalist extreme, the image of unrelated particulars composing the world was complemented with that of a deity imposing connections among them, and thereby holding the otherwise atomistic universe together.

With the development of science in the seventeenth century and the importance for it of the notion of natural laws governing the universe, the philosophical understanding of universals underwent significant transformations. The emergence of the separate sciences argued for a conception of the universe as ordered by its own, immanent forces. For the problem of universals, the argument as to their mental versus real existence persisted. Now, however, there developed a reformulation of the problem based on the recognition by the

sciences of observed regularities in nature. The foci of the separate sciences led to the notion of levels of organization in natural phenomena. This conception of nature as composed of systems of internal organization, emerging at different levels of scientific analysis, was reflected in idealist philosophy.

Kant played a formative role in this issue. Rorty suggests that his significance lay in isolating the "theory of knowledge" as the foundation of every ontology (Rorty 1979:134). For Kant the realist-nominalist alternatives entertained in his day did not adequately recognize the active, constructive component in the mind both in formulating any representation of universals, and in using them to talk about experience. Kant wanted to show that all knowledge of the world was constructed subjectively and bound to the limits imposed by the mind's ordering of perceptual data. This argued for a conceptualist view of universals. At the same time he maintained that it was possible to come to know an objective world with definite laws. Thus in Kant's terms, as well as formulating concepts or "categories" by which thought was made possible, the mind was capable of certain a priori "sensible intuitions" (namely of space and time). These intuitions were said to give form to one's experience of the world, such that in them the objects of knowledge could become imbedded (Kant 1953[1783] Gilson 1937:230). While Kant's philosophical premise could not allow him to assume that knowledge of a real

independent reality of "things-in-themselves" was possible, his interest in scientifically valid knowledge led him to believe that a real relationship between concepts and objective particulars was possible (Walsh 1967:310). The existence of things-in-themselves as distinct from phenomena, however, has remained a problematic point in Kant's epistemology, and of disagreement among succeeding philosophers as to whether Kant could be said to have transcended the conceptualist dilemma which can be found in his philosophy.

It was with the concern to situate universals in the concrete rather than in a transcendental vacuum that Hegel extended one aspect of Kant's programme, in his claim to have made the ontological issue obsolete by introducing what has come to be known as the notion of the "concrete universal" (Ajzenstat, personal communication). From the idealist position, all universals must be seen in terms of their relations to cognition. Thus, in one important sense, idealists opposed the realist contention that universals could exist independently of a mind thinking them. Unlike the nominalists however, Hegel was unwilling to concede that individual particulars were thus unrelated in any real sense to each other and to their capacity for generalization into universal classes. Hegel in fact sought to reveal a certain logical structure in reality (Ewing 1961[1934]:61). Thus he and others such as Bradley and Bosanquet after him, claimed that the "individual" was the universal; that universality as

well as having abstract generality in terms of the recurrence of a quality in many particular instances, achieved a concreteness in the individual by virtue of the fact that the individual manifested perduring qualties in a continuous and more or less systematically connected way throughout the history of his/its actions (Acton 1936, 1937). The coherence of the concrete universal derived from the assumption that its actions were directed by a central purpose. For Hegel, as for Bradley (1883), the individual could be either a person or a larger form of mental organization such as the community (both of which were thought to be contained in the ultimate individual of "Absolute Mind") (Hegel 1931[1807]). Certain personalistically inclined idealists such as Pringle-Pattison (1887), Sterm (1938), objected to the indistinction between these levels, and argued for the primacy of the individual's personal consciousness as both unifying and individualizing principle.[2]

The supposed organic interrelation between concrete particular and universal which characterized the idealist ontological orientation was not without its epistemological inconsistencies. Thus if knowledge of particulars presupposed knowledge of the whole, and knowledge of the whole is presently impossible due to its incompleteness in fact, how could one presume to know anything at all? Despite the claims of the elaborate metaphysical system to the contrary, idealism suffered from the nominalistic epistemological dilemma that

knowledge of the real particulars of the world could not be validated on its own premises.

The pragmatists derived much of their epistemological orientation from the idealists, but explicitly rejected its metaphysical foundation in large part. Rather, in a more directly nominalist fashion, they concentrated on the reduction of the meaning of abstract terms to concrete particulars.[3] Lovejoy has stated it well:

> The typical nominalistic motive--the simplifying, clarifying denkökonomisch motive; the typical nominalistic method--the definintion of universals as collective names for particular items in experience; the typical nominalistic result--the rejection as negligible, if not demonstrably unreal, of all entities incapable of being brought within the compass of concrete experience--these are all conspicuously present in the most authoritative exposition of the pragmatic doctrine (Lovejoy 1963:34).

Still, what were admitted to the pragmatists' category of "concrete experience" were not merely atomic particulars, but systems of causal relations. Universals were conceived as "organizing relations", which were not private and personal but rather social and objective, reflecting the character of the common environment created by a community of minds. Thus the wider the perspective of social experience, the more objective the individual's perspective was held to be. This extended to a belief in a certain notion of progressive evolution on the part of pragmatists such as Dewey, Mead and Whitehead. Cohen (1962:379) had commented on the naturalized idealism implicit in this view. Specifically,

> Mead's writings reveal how strong the heriditary strain of absolute idealism still is in some of

> its pragmatic descendants. By substituting human purposes for the cosmic plan of the Absolute Ego and retaining the organic developmental view, Hegel's philosophy becomes significantly naturalized to be almost indistinguishable from some varieties of modern pragmatism.

3.2. Sapir's Ontology

For the present purpose, the foregoing precis has been necessarily surgical. With these orientational ideas in mind however, we can begin to assess critically Sapir's assumptions concerning first, the nature of universals and particulars and their points of relation. Secondly I will examine his theory of knowledge, or his understanding of the relation of objects known to the percipient/knower as based on this ontology.

My thesis is the following; that on the one hand, Sapir's ontology, as witnessed in his methods, straddled a consent to conceptualist and nominalistic implications. On the other hand I will argue that he wanted to be a realist. I will show that this realist tendency was evident in some of his early poetry and literary critical theory, that it pervaded certain aspects of his theoretical linguistics and of his late work in culture and personality studies. Concerning the first issue of the nature of particulars and universals, it is argued that Sapir's generally nominalistic and conceptualistic position took on a disguised form of idealism when his conceptions of culture and the individual are seen in terms of the notion of "concrete universals". I suggest that beyond an early and aesthetically oriented

Platonism, and a relatively undeveloped Aristotelianism as regards "true science", the "realism" he propounded was of a pragmatic variety which straddled an objective idealism. Thus with regard to the second issue, as to whether the nature of knowledge was subjective or objective, I will show that the pragmatic "objectivity" he argued for could be called "perspective realism" or "objective relativism", and has inherent in it a set of problems in establishing the validity of its criteria of objectivity.

3.2.1. Nominalism vs. Realism

In 1917 Sapir wrote to Lowie:

> ...philosophically, there are only unique phenomena in the world (Sapir 1965:26).

As a statement concerning the nature of particulars, this is nominalistic to the extent that by it he was denying the possibility that such phenomena could be said to have any real interrelation or similarity through their participation in universals. Sapir was not dismissing the fact that one could find similarities among phenomena--" the concept of 'uniqueness' does not necessarily mean an unduplicated uniqueness"--but argued that such similarities, abstracted as they were from ultimately unique phenomena, could have no intrinsic status as realities themselves (Sapir 1965:26). In that context Sapir went on to argue the conceptualist point that such abstraction proceeded from the selective interest of the observer. About this last I will have more to say below.

For the moment let us focus on this notion of particulars as being the only real existents, "single and individual" as he assumed. What, then, constituted these unique phenomena, these particulars for Sapir? To be consistent the question could not be put, since the process of identifying words with such phenomena would become itself selective. Not surprisingly then, particulars usually remain unstated. Nonetheless one might be inclined to view his intuition of the absolute "contents of experience" as a descriptive generalization of his meaning (cf. Ch. II, sec. 3). Recall his claim in Language that this "intuitive science of experience" supplied the "latent content of all languages", but was itself non-linguistic (Sapir 1921a:218). From this perspective, Sapir argued that the effect of language was to bind the contents of this intuition into intelligible forms and interrelations. The relevant implication is that linguistic entities as nominalistic "universals" then, could have no direct correspondence with the theoretically denuded contents of experience. In this respect, Sapir was clearly asserting the division between real particulars and their variable groupings under general linguistic signs.

In reviewing Sapir's linguistic orientation (Ch. II, sec. 1), we saw that he at times held a strongly idealist view of the relation between word and thing. The notion that sign and particular became identified through linguistic habits (which became the first principle of linguistic

relativism) led ostensibly to a different epistemological conclusion regarding the nature of particulars and their relation to universals (Miller 1968). As Fearing has pointed out, however, this second view in fact required the primordial dividedness of thing from word, which is a nominalist assumption, to make its claim regarding the effect of language on perception (Fearing 1967[1954]:52).

Sapir recognized and accepted this nominalist premise explicitly in his review of Ogden and Richards' The Meaning of Meaning in 1923, the originality of which, he claimed

> lies chiefly in this, that it refuses to see a special relation between symbol and referent or thing (event) symbolized; further that it looks upon thinking as the interpreting of "signs", which interpreting is merely the psychological reaction to the sign in the light of past and present experience...The relation between a symbol (say the word "door") and a referent (say a door or this door) is merely imputed, even fictitious. The thought of Messrs. Ogden and Richards is as simple as it is difficult to grasp. It looks away not only from the universals of the realist, but from the more innocent "concepts" (abstracted short-hand references) of the conceptualist and orthodox linguist as well (Sapir 1923c:572-3).

If Sapir had held a consistently nominalistic view of the nature of particulars, he would have been led to the acceptance of a Pyrronian scepticism of ever having real knowledge of the world, as were the authors he was discussing (cf. Ogden and Richards 1930[1923]:39). This, I suggest, was simply not the case with Sapir, nor was such consistency (and its resulting scepticism) his desired goal in the main. In

order to begin to substantiate this claim let us return to his notion of the intuition of the contents of experience.

This notion can be interpreted very differently, I think, and in a way which would point to an ambiguity of implication. These "contents of experience" which were supposed to be revealed through a direct intuition could be seen not so much in terms of the nominalist's idea of discrete sensory particulars or events, as in terms of universal contents, perhaps even resembling the realm of Platonic ideas (after its own architectonic fashion), theoretically distinct from the sensible particularity of the phenomenal world, but participating in it and suffused through the forms of all language.[4] If viewed as universals, Sapir's concept of the contents of experience suggests that they could be known more clearly in their "true", objective and impersonal nature by the profound artist, or, one might add, by the (then) unorthodox linguist. The intuition of such non-linguistic bound entities would not merely be sensory (empirical), then, but also logical (rational). The implication of all this for the present discussion of the nature of particulars is that to some extent Sapir held a realist conviction that the contents of experience in their multiplicity embodied, and could be known through universals. To that extent he was accepting the theoretical possibility of real knowledge of particulars in experience by means of existent universals, not just through fictive abstractions from particulars on the basis of signs

or concepts. I suggest that in those early years, he toyed with widely divergent ontological positions. Compare, for example, the statement which opened this discussion--that "philosophically there are only unique phenomena in the world" --with the Platonic (or more specifically Pythagorean) implications which he entertained in a poem entitled "The Music of the Spheres" written in the same year (Sapir 1917d:28).[5] Admittedly, it is insufficient to argue the point on the basis of one poem, but I do maintain that it indicates the presence of a certain ideal Sapir held, if rarely expressed in his more prosaic work. His repeated defensiveness to the charge of "mysticism" in certain linguistic and anthropological claims may be relevant in this regard (cf. Sapir 1949[1925]: 42,[1927c]:548-9).

It is clear, however, that in the course of Sapir's development of thought the majority of ontological claims he made or implied fell somewhere between the two extremes of nominalism and realism. Within the realm of the human or historical sciences, it is reasonable to locate Sapir's general understanding of particulars at the level of individual behaviours. Whether he was speaking of language, culture or personality it was in terms of actual behavioural events that Sapir wanted to ground his remarks. The manner in which he conceived of the relation of particulars to the universals thought to describe them was largely conceptualist. He recognized this conceptualism explicitly in his linguistic

orientation (Sapir 1921a:89-95). Within the realm of theoretical anthropology, the clearest evidence of this is found in his explicit argument that the distinction between "individual" and "cultural" or "social" behaviours was a necessary one for study, but which rested philosophically on the assumption that investigators approached the assumed totality of behavioural data with interests and value systems which presupposed the selective abstraction of relevant particulars from that totality. Thus within the realm of his own interests, Sapir distinguished forcefully between the cultural anthropological and the psychiatric conceptual frameworks by which to understand behaviour (Sapir 1949[1934c]:591; [1938a]:572-3). Sapir was aware of this conceptualism:

> [w]e do maintain that such difference of analysis are merely imposed by the nature of the interest of the observer and are not inherent in the phenomena themselves (Sapir 1949[1927c]:546).[6]

Singer has associated Sapir's conceptualistic orientation with the

> constructionist tendencies in the thought of James, Russell, Whitehead and other modern philosophers...Russell, for example, argues that mind and matter do not differ as raw material, which is made up of 'neutral' sense-data or events, but only as different logical constructions from this material (Singer 1961:62).

Singer's perceptive analysis however, does not take into consideration the possibility that Sapir held concurrent assumptions in this matter, which potentially conflicted with this position.[7]

Recall that conceptualism locates the "universal" in the concept, which is imposed in order to group particulars together, without necessarily assuming that any real entity is actually inherent in and shared by the particulars so grouped. In the following paragraphs, I will give evidence to suggest that Sapir simultaneously held two divergent views of universals as existent in fact. First I will explore how the idealist notion of the "concrete universal" applies to Sapir's conception of cultural entities. Subsequently I will contrast this with the ways in which he expressed a realist naturalism concerning the possibility of isolating universals of an abstract general nature to identify general developmental elements and patterns in lingustic structure and in personality structure.

The identifying features of the "concrete universal" were two. First, as noted above, they were distinguished from those of abstract universals (conceived as timeless, transcendent entities), on the basis of the connectedness and continuity through time they were assumed to exhibit. Secondly, it was argued that the character of a concrete universal was such that being bound in time, and thus change, it revealed itself through an identity in difference (Acton 1936:427). Whereas realists had focused on the isolation of "abstract" universals and presupposed that all particular members of observed classes of phenomena would be seen to share this common quality, the idealists claimed that

the relevance of the idea of concrete universals rested in the belief that there existed certain other types of group distinct from "classes", the individual members of which were related internally. Each particular member was thought to have its own unique place within that system of relations.

One of the primary concerns in developing this concept had to do with the dissatisfaction the idealists felt with the usual quality attributed to abstract universals, that is, as identifying a single property common to various particulars, and which, in focusing on this minimum unit of abstract commonality, neglected the intrinsically unique ways in which such qualities came to be connected in the individual phenomenon as a whole:

> [C]oncentration upon the common qualities of of objects [individuals] leads to a neglect of the way in which the different properties of individuals are combined among themselves (Acton 1937:5; see also Bosanquet 1912:35ff).

In other words, abstract universals simply could not account for variation which was the essential ingredient in the particular organization of qualities which made up the perduring individual. According to those theorists, "identity", conceived in terms of the concrete universal, could not be be known apart from its particular "differences", through which it entered into the constitution of the individual (Acton 1937:3).

Turning to Sapir, it is clear that he was convinced of the reality of certain types of entities as "systems",

perduring, continuous loci of organization and direction. Sapir's earlier writings emphasize pattern and drift in languages and cultures as the purposive, cohesive principles which rendered such phenomena capable of being conceived as dynamic entities.

An early influence for this way of conceptualizing linguistic matters would no doubt be Herder and Humboldt, whose idealist notions of "inner form" and "organism" in language he knew well. Linguistics in this respect was Sapir's favoured field because of the tightest self-containment (or "aesthetic consistency") languages maintain. The particularly distinct concept of "drift" is relevant here, since for Sapir it accounted for variation in a language through time, in terms of an independent, impersonal "life" directing the evolution of that language.

Shades of Hegel, Spengler and Cooley emerge in Sapir's early notion of "genuine" cultures as "healthy spiritual organisms", and there is the acknowledgement Sapir makes to Croce regarding the relation of language to art. The receptivity with which Sapir approached "configurational" psychology for what he felt to be the empirical foundation it gave to the asserted reality of patterning in language and culture in dictating the norms of internal variation, is another example of this persuasion.

This orientation persisted long after Sapir became sceptical of overtly organic metaphors, as we have already

witnessed in this statement taken from a class note:

> Sapir believes in a world of discrete individuals but a oneness and continuity of culture...(as cited by Smith ?1936-37:22).

or this, that

> personality organizations...at last analysis are psychologically comparable with the greatest cultures or idea systems (Sapir 1949 [1932]:521).

It was Sapir's increasing interest in psychiatry which led him to focus particularly on and develop the notion of individual personality in terms suggestive of the notion of a concrete universal. In this respect his philosophical debts go, at least indirectly, to the personalists such as Pringle-Pattison, Bowne (1908) and others more phenomenologically inclined. Hence the utter seriousness with which Sapir took the notion of the individual's experience as forming a "causal nexus" (Sapir as cited by Smith ?1936-37:28):

> Not for one single moment can we allow ourselves to forget the experienced unity of the individual (Sapir 1949[1939]:581).

Unlike the conceptual universe of the vocabularies in the separate sciences, the "world of meanings" which the individual abstracted for himself from his culture claimed a reality which was, for Sapir, the only meaningful "order in nature". The identity in difference within a personality system productive of individual behaviours was understood in terms of the norms and continuity which that personal locus of experience determined for itself:

> It is only through an analysis of variation that the reality and meaning of a norm can be established at all, and it is only through a minute and sympathetic study of individual behaviour in the state in which normal human beings find themselves, namely in a state of society, that it will ultimately be possible to say things about society itself and culture that are more than fairly convenient abstractions (Sapir 1949 [1938a]:576).

The parallels drawn here among the levels of organized relations which composed the concrete universals of languages, cultures and personalities could go on indefinitely. It is important to note that Sapir conceived of no necessary cumulative inclusion of one in the others. Rather, he maintained the prerogative of exchanging the focus according to his immediate purpose. Their commonality as concrete universals resided in the wholeness and completeness he attributed to them, as well as temporal continuity, direction and identity in diversity (variation).

There is a sense in which Sapir also conceived of abstract universals in a more Aristotelian fashion. Regarding the theory of change in linguistic structure he developed, Sapir expectably emphasized the unique history of the individual language. However, as was noted above (Ch. II, sec. 3), he argued that there was another level of analysis at which all languages could be seen to pass through sequential or cyclic stages of development. I suggest this latter notion entails a more absolutistic, teleological and qualitative view of the nature of universals in language

history. Minus the teleological aspect, Sapir's later work in semantics evinces a similar conception of universals of meaning.[8]

Culture was described in generally more relativistic terms, but there is one reference Sapir made which, perhaps by virtue of its unpopularity among relativists, is significant in pointing to a similar implication:

> No doubt there are culture patterns which tend to be universal, not only in form but in psychological significance, but it is very easy to be mistaken in those matters and to impute equivalences of meaning which do not truly exist (Sapir 1949 1932 :517).

Finally, Sapir's notion, that the aim of his projected "psychiatric science" would be to develop a methodology adequate to describe personality structure, claimed this feature as well. The explicit "universals of behavior" which he isolated, amounted, as we saw above (Ch. II, sec. 4), to rather abstract and general psychoanalytic categories, in high contrast with the concrete universality of the "world of meaning" and coherence of the individual's day-to-day perceptions.

Summarizing the observations made so far, it would appear that despite Sapir's explicitly nominalistic position on the nature of particulars, and the generally conceptualist implications for his view of universals in cultural analysis, there remains a sense in which Sapir conceived of cultural entities and individual persons, after the idealist fashion,

as objective "concrete universals". Finally there is evidence to suggest that he enjoyed a certain Platonic realism in his aesthetic and literary explorations, and that one could argue that an Aristotelian realism funded his notion of pan-cultural abstract universals.

3.2.2. Theory of Knowledge

The second part of this section concerns the problem of the relation of objects known to the knower; or, the question of the subjectivity vs. objectivity of knowledge. Clearly, Sapir conceived of the knowledge derived from his methods to be objective. The problem remains to assess the means by which Sapir proposed to validate this claim. I will argue below that within the pragmatist orientation which Sapir generally advocated, one can see both the influence of "direct realism" and strong idealist currents. Since, philosophically, the arguments these views provide to substantiate their claims to objective knowledge are problematic, it is important to examine them for their relevance to Sapir's epistemology.

Given Sapir's propensity for contrasting "perspectives", it is appropriate to begin by outlining the philosophical approach which deals with the aspectual character attributed to knowledge of phenomena. Lovejoy has discussed this issue in terms of objective idealism and its variant in objective relativism. Lovejoy outlined the objective idealist assumption that "the relations of things should always be conceived

as entering into their essential natures" (Lovejoy 1930:79). As for its resulting position on how one's relation to objects of knowledge could be said to be "objective", he observes:

> Knowledge is more "objective" in proportion as a fragment of reality is viewed from many standpoints. Any such fragment has aspects as numerous as the other fragments with which it is diversely related; and "truth" is approximated in so far as these diversities of aspect are taken account of in all their multiplicity, yet synthesized into a coherent unity. Consequently an aspect peculiar to a single point of view presents the minimum of objective validity. The full truth about any part would be possessed only by an intelligence capable of simultaneously grasping in an exhaustive synthesis the concrete whole of organically interrelated elements--an achievement beyond the reach of any temporal and finite mind (Lovejoy 1930:80, emphasis added).

Singer cogently remarks that for this ideal Sapir was particularly well-suited:

> [Sapir's] solution...is to suggest a systematic employment of the cultural and individual perspectives successively, or almost simultaneously upon the same body of data...Sapir insists on a theoretical reversibility of perspectives...
> The approach necessarily requires either a close collaboration between an anthropologist and a psychologist, or, as in Sapir's case, the capacity for bifocal vision (Singer 1961: 63-5).

The objective relativists considered themselves realists and not idealists (Murphy 1927), and as Lovejoy has shown, they inverted the Hegelian dialectic to argue that the relevance of the percipient or cognitive event in determining the nature of what is apprehended lay in its concrete, unique participation in that nature at every moment:

> If [the] perceiver should disregard the special aspect which reality wears from that standpoint and seek to place himself in some extraneous or generalized or "external" point of view, he would not thereby come nearer to the concrete truth of things; he would on the contrary, simply ignore or falsify that particular manifestation of the whole nexus of relations which distinguishes his own situation therein (Lovejoy 1930:80-1).

I suggest that Sapir straddled both positions.[9] For example, witness his suggestions for developing a "realistic technique" in prose fiction, of which th test would be, he claimed, "the relative ease with which the reader or hearer or spectator [could] be made to live through the experiences, thoughts, feelings of the characters" (Sapir 1917c:503-4). He went on to contrast the "romance of reality" of the omniscent narrator (writer) in attempting an objective account of multiple individuals in their interrelations, with the "rigorous realism" of the writer who frankly admitted his subjectivity and viewed all events by a "single light" technique, i.e., through the eyes of one character, for a "more subtle and aesthetically satisfying" effect. This contrast alone is pregnant with implications, but he went on to describe a third technique:

> [I]t is at least possible to combine the peculiar advantages of these two contrasting techniques...What if we tell [our story about three human beings seated around a dinner table] all three times--as seen, heard and felt by the host, by the hostess and by the guest? Should we not succeed in being subjective in three different ways, in other words in being objective? For may not objectivity be defined as the composite picture gained by laying a number of subjectivities on top of one another...to produce the effect of

> cumulative energy, of a steadily growing comprehension of the meaning of the whole[?] (Sapir 1917c:505, emphasis added).

The emphasis is added these two quotations to highlight the implicit idealist assumption that there exists a coherent totality of perspectives into which the percipient enters, and of which he/she may become more conscious, if so inclined to exercise the prerogative. On the other hand, Sapir adopts a relativist position with regard to the integrity of the "internal" point of view (following Lovejoy's terminology).

One proponent of the objective relativist view, George Herbert Mead, argued in a language strikingly similar to that of Sapir's "psychiatric Science" that objectivity in perspectives was a question of the extent to which the individual could enter into the perspectives of others (Mead 1927:83). It was the organization of perspectives, not the stuff of them which was real, and which was made concrete through the interactions of individuals. Sullivan (1964), Cooley (1918), Dewey 1925 (1925) and Whitehead (1929) shared similar convictions. I suggest that Sapir was underestimating his own philosophical debt[10] when, concerning the place of the percipient or cognitive event in the nature of apprehended realities, he wrote:

> For centuries the only escape from [scientific] fragmentism was into the too ambitious dream-worlds of philosophy, worlds defined by the assumption that the human intelligence could behold the universe instead of twinkling within. Now that philosophy is being progressively redefined as a highly technical critique of

> the validity or conditionality of judgments, it is interesting to see [cultural anthropology and psychiatry]...taking on the character of inclusive perception of human events and personal relations in as powerfully conceptualized form as possible (Sapir 1949[1939]:584).

Thus it is not surprising that Sapir was susceptible to some of the problems inherent in the objective relativist argument.

For example, the objective relativists claimed that their view of man's capacity for knowledge of the objective world was a form of realism, though they argued that the nature of this knowledge was in terms of relations rather than of independent qualities, Platonic or Aristotelian. As Hirst has pointed out, the realist conclusions they wanted to embrace were difficult to reconcile with the "selective theory" of perception which they adopted (Hirst 1967:79). That theory assumed that the relation between the perceiver and the object perceived was direct; their account of the "causal processes in perception" maintained that the percipient came in direct confrontation with a selected number of properties intrinsic to the external object, (as opposed to indirect realist theories, which assumed that the object could only be known through mental representations generated by such phenomena).[11] The direct experience or intuition of objects posited as such, with the consequences that all perspectives were considered equal, has made it impossible to account adequately for error (Hirst 1967:79), and one might add, ignores the significance of scientific validational procedures. Lovejoy remarks that the objective relativists arrived

paradoxically at a similar position, regarding the relation of object to knower, to that of certain scientific positivists (e.g. Mach), who, however, characterized this relation as subjective and dualist (1930:81).

In Sapir's case it is clear on the one hand that he recognized the subjectivity of the individual/cultural perspectives taken singly, yet on the other, that Sapir's faith in his own intuitions led him to believe that the possibility of objective knowledge was real, and to underestimate the problem of error. Translated into his own terms, there is a vacillation from a conservatism regarding "that precise and loving insight into the nooks and crannies of the real that must forever be denied us" (Sapir 1949[1939]:581), to an optimism concerning his projected "psychiatric science" in approaching that ideal: "Under favorable circumstances [the] broadly conceived...universe of discourse [of] either [perspective could] take on the character of [this] true science of man" (Sapir 1949[1934c]:592).

Witness the scepticism, for example, which was most marked where his attitude had shifted (or was still in the process of shifting) away from enthusiastically accepting certain concepts. The clearest instance involves his conceptualizations of the methods appropriate for studying culture in the large. On the one hand he came to view his early approach to culture, i.e., in terms of impersonal, abstracted patterns, as an "objectified"

> assembly or mass of loosely overlapping idea and action systems which through verbal habit, can be made to assume the appearance of a closed system of behavior (Sapir 1949 [1934c]:594).

On the other, in the same publication, he was proposing an alternative--the notion of culture as a personality organization writ large--which, subsequently, suffered a similar fate. Within three years he began to refer to that method as productive of "presumptive", "as if" psychologies of culture (Sapir 1937:866). The nominalistic quality of this formulation is apparent [12], yet the phrasing suggests a discontent with this conclusion. Nonetheless, Sapir did not go on to discard the notion of the "presumptive psychology of culture" as useless, but rather, retained it as a helpful, if heuristic and non-final approach to gaining knowledge of the "true nature of social process" (cf. Smith ?1936-37:31-33).

Still, the optimism persisted. As was noted above in this section, he went so far as to speak of "universals of behavior", the critical dimension of which, one might claim, was their embodiment in "interpersonal relations". Sapir repeatedly commented on the inability of the separate sciences, within their individual universes of discourse, to study interpersonal relations "in their full realism" (Sapir 1949 [1939]:578).[13]

Preston has argued that Sapir did not actively (Preston 1966:1124), nor successfully (Preston 1980:374) develop a methodology to do this service, but tended rather,

to rely on his own "precision of perception" for his insights. I suggest that this is consistent with the direct realism which was presupposed in his theory of knowledge, and with the kinds of validational problems it presented, as just described.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

4.0. Introduction

In the four sections which compose chapter two, I outlined themes in Sapir's thought which are remarkable in that they implicitly incoroprate positions on the relevant issue which are epistemologically conflicting, or at least difficult to reconcile, one with another. In the third chapter I went on to indicate some of the ontological confusions which underlie the more specialized discrepancies imbedded in Sapir's vocabulary. Out of all this a profusion of epistemological and methodological issues is raised with relevance for each of the themes discussed above. For example, a chapter in itself could be devoted to the theories of history supplying the distinction that holds in Sapir's work between his critical accounts of the "determinants" of history and his speculations on the "shape" of history. Similarly, there is the issue of the relation of language to experience which, for Sapir, was reconciled by claiming that the ostensible conflict was nullified if one took a "contrastive" or "bifocal" perspective on the matter. Again though, the question as to whether in fact such a reconciliation is possible on those grounds could easily constitute another chapter. And so on.

Each of these issues deserves extended individual treatment which it is, in the present context, impossible to give. Instead, I propose to focus on a single problem which is, I think, a significant aspect of all of the issues raised. In particular, I will examine the issues underlying Sapir's position on whether and how one can explain individual behaviour. The present and the following section will approach this problem from different, though not unrelated perspectives. As for this section, I will discuss the problem in terms of the debate current in the philosophy of action, which in bald terms asks whether the "reason" given for an action can be said to be its "cause". Since this debate has arisen out of a much older and larger one between idealism and naturalism, I will employ it as the means by which to contrast the dualistic with monistic approaches to explanation associated with certain members of these two schools. After the introduction to this issue, I will compare the views of two philosophers known to have influenced Sapir--Heinrich Rickert and George Herbert Mead--in order to highlight the contrast between the two types of approach. I will argue that theoretically, Rickert's understanding of the nature of the individual precluded him from accepting the possibility of giving causal explanations of his actions, whereas Mead's position was in principle tolerant of that possibility. Subsequently, I will go on to show how each of these men's positions finds a place in Sapir's statements on

the issue. To point to their mutual exclusivity is not to invalidate Sapir's attempt at reconciliation, since the issue is still an unresolved philosophical debate. Rather, it is the means by which he implicitly sought to reconcile them which will be found to be inadequate.

In the second section I will examine the issue concerning the explanation of individual behaviour in terms of the holist vs. individualist debate. In both sections, I will draw from the topics raised in chapter two for examples, but, for the reasons given above, the exemplifications will be selective, not systematic.

Finally, the chapter will end with a restatement of the major issues addressed in this thesis, and of the conclusions regarding Sapir's epistemology which I have drawn from the analysis of those issues.

4.1. EXPLANATION OR UNDERSTANDING: THE DEBATE

The point of departure here is the question, formulated in its strict form by the philosophers of action, whether it can be said that by knowing the "reasons" (or, in some accounts, the realted notions, "motives" or "intentions") given by an individual for his action, one can claim to know the causes of those actions. In more general terms the issue turns on whether individual actions or behaviours are open to causal

explanation or not. Those who argue that this combination is at least in principle possible to admit that very different perspectives are involved between common-sensical beliefs and scientific statements about an action, but claim that "temporally" and "epistemologically" no impassible gulf may be said to exist between them (Beck 1975:58). Those who argue that it is not, claim that if it can be said at all that explanations can be given of actions, they are of a different type from causal, scientific ones, and among themselves, "logically miscellaneous" (Dray 1966:85). The former position is naturalistic; in this respect it carries a monistic assumption with regard to the possibility of rendering compatible the appreciation of the "intelligibility" of an individual's account of his actions, with the explanation of his actions in causal terms. The latter by contrast argues from a certain dualistic position that knowledge of causal relations between the account given by the individual of his actions and those actions themselves is impossible to establish. One argument given for this position is that the account constitutes part of the action itself, and that in causal relations, the cause must be logically distinct from

its effect and involve a reference to bodily phenomena (Melden 1968:76). Another more general defence such dualists offer is that every perspective imposes a principle of value selection and that if one is interested in the perspective of another individual, the only "objectivity" to which one can aspire is that of understanding that individual from the "inside", in terms of his own principle of selection. Thus, according to the dualist, one should not assume to be able to do more than give interpretations of individuals' actions in ways which aim to understand them in terms of the meaningfulness or intelligibility they have in their original contexts. The monist's reply to this negativism would be to argue that the idealist's tendency to posit essences ("spirit" or "genius" would be equivalents), whose existence is their own justification, is unwarranted. Thus those who are tolerant of the possibility of reconciling actions with causal explanations have often offered arguments to the effect that a more dynamic relation holds between an individual's "reasons" for acting and the kind of causal explanation required to accomodate them (Davidson 1968).

4.1.1. RICKERT

Broadly speaking, in contrast with the naturalist's monistic view, the dualist's position with which we are concerned is distinctly idealist in tenor. It is a perspective on the problem of explanation that is well-known to various schools within that tradition. One school in particular had

an influence on Sapir. Heinrich Rickert[1] was a member of the Baden or Southwest school of German idealism, and formulated his view of the difference between explanations appropriate for what he called the "historical" or "cultural" sciences, and those for the "natural" sciences. The basis of this distinction, he argued, was that the method of the Kulturwissenschaften was "individualizing": it dealt with the understanding of history and personalities in their particular uniqueness and richness of colour and value, whereas the methodological characteristic of the Naturwissenschaften was its commitment to generalization from natural events into universal principles or laws. These laws, he claimed, were conceptual or "ideal" abstractions, in contrast with the actual and real subject matter of the historical sciences. Ideally, these principles would explain and predict all phenomenal events for which they were expected to account, but, as generalizations, they could never be said to "explain" any actual event or action in terms of its own uniqueness. For example, Rickert considered psychology to be a conceptual science, 'though less developed than the other natural sciences, rather than a cultural science in this respect. The importance of psychology as a "science of principles", he wrote,

> diminishes in the same measure as the cultural importance of what is purely individual increases, and investigations involving general concepts tend, on the whole, to disappear accordingly. This is in fact the case precisely with the most important cultural events. The nonrecurring individual can never be "unessential" in a

> history of religion, the state, science or art. Here, as everyone knows who does not want deliberately to close his mind to the historical facts for the sake of some theory, impulses to create new cultural goods almost always come from particular personalities. Personalities must therefore also become historically significant, and in that case it is impossible to represent them by means of concepts that are only relatively historical (Rickert 1962:110-11 emphasis his).

That a psychology could even in principal be developed which accomodated an appreciation of historical individualities, he denied:

> If...we investigate the mental life of historical personalities important from the point of view of culture and civilization and designate this as spiritual, then we do, in fact, find a "spiritual" unity of a particular kind, which eludes every attempt to grasp it in terms of concepts formed by a process of generalization. This may well give rise to the opinion that there is a method specific to the sciences whose subject matter falls within the domain constituted by the activity of the human "spirit", or that a psychology must be developed different essentially from the empirical and explanatory discipline which, applying the method of the natural sciences, goes under that name today. However, once we understand that the nature of this "spiritual" unity is constituted by reference to values, we can see that this opinion is delusional (Rickert 1962:102-3, emphasis his).

Rickert's attack was levelled against what he called the positivistic or naturalistic approach to historical subjects, and led to a general scepticism of the possibility of explaining any individual's actions in terms of general concepts or universal laws. He also objected to Hegel's philosophy of history, with its method of arriving at over-

arching generalizations about history as a whole, as an application of the methods of the natural sciences methodologically inappropriate for approaching historical contexts in their specificity (Hayek in his preface to Rickert 1962:vi). Where he spoke of "causality" in the individualizing sciences, it was in relation to the potential of the historian to understand the mental life, the meaning of the actions of personalities as unique causal nexūs; he explicitly denied that such causal relations could be said to coincide with universal laws of nature (Rickert 1962:94)[2].

Thus, in terms of the question formulated above, an individual's "reason" for his actions could not be called their "cause". No causal explanation of actions, understood in terms of scientific principles, would coincide with the individual's own account. Therefore, that account, the individual's knowledge of his own reasons, should be classed as being of a different type from that of any causal explanation (Melden 1961:16-17). One should rather, in Rickert's terms, attempt to understand it in terms of the value it had for that individual.

4.1.2. MEAD

George Herbert Mead, whose pragmatic philosophy was, as Lovejoy noted, a "naturalized" idealism, endeavoured to create a discipline of "social psychology" which could account adequately for the place of values and meaning in knowledge

and actions.[3] Mead's notion of psychology was, in principle then, substantially different from that of Rickert. Whereas the latter, as we saw, held dualistic assumptions about the kinds of knowledge one could have about "natural" and "cultural" phenomena, the influence of Darwinian evolutionism showed itself in Mead's conception of man, which included consciousness as well as physical behaviour, as functioning in accordance with natural laws (Desmonde 1967:231). From this monistic perspective, "individualities" were not posited essences open only to understanding and not explanation. Individual "selves" were conceived as emerging developmentally out of their social environment and interaction with others (Mead, 1964). This social process of mutual determination between organism and environment was, he claimed, open to the methods of investigation used in other experimental sciences. 'Though Mead's psychology has been called social behaviourist, he objected to the omission of the fact of consciousness from classic behaviourist theories as self-stultifying (Beck 1975). Rather, he argued, mind was an integral aspect of behaviour which developed actively out of social experience. For Mead, "experience [was] both the starting point and the goal of research science and the field of all our values and meanings" (Mead 1938:517). Similarly, he refused to conceive of personality as a mysterious "spiritual unity" resistant to explanation, as had Rickert.

Recurring to the particular issue described above, Mead's view of the possibility of reconciling scientific explanations of behaviour with the individual's own account of his actions was decidedly tolerant. In fact Mead's statements themselves have been used to augment the position held by the more pragmatically oriented philosophers of action (cf. Beck 1975:132-33).

4.1.3. SAPIR

The existence of "reasons" (sometimes "intuitions", "rationalizations") given by individuals to account for their actions was a powerful reality for Sapir. As the basis of his epistemological, ethical and aesthetic principles, the force of that reality could not be ignored in any formulation, be it literary and historical, or social scientific and guided by some explanatory framework: "Not for one single moment can we allow ourselves to forget the experienced unity of the individual." Underlying the various perspectives he took then, was this perduring recognition of the fact of psychological reality. Because of the persistence of this point of view throughout his work, I will argue that Sapir wanted to be a monist in the sense described above, but that, as with his "willed" ontological position, there are important exceptions --residues of idealist dualisms--which compound the issue.

I think the best example of the monistic ideal he sought in the explanation of individual behaviour can be found in the linguistic case of the phonemic principle.

The critical value and thrust of that principle was that it coincided harmoniously with the untutored "reasons" the individual gave for his phonetic behaviour. Sapir frequently commented on the spontaneous agreement expressed by the informant at having the phonetic differences he "heard" congealed into a fitting principle.[4] In such an instance the reasons, or "intuitions" as he was apt to call them, were admittedly naive, but real, and in this kind of principle, which took them seriously into account, a minimum or absence of discontinuity was assumed between the individual's "consciousness" of his language, and the linguistic structure which the explanation offered. Moreover, I suggest that Sapir would generally have responded affirmatively to the idea that the method could produce a constructive enhancement of the individual's consciousness. In any event, Sapir was sometimes sceptical of the validity of methods of analysis which tended wittingly or otherwise, to undermine the individual's intuitions, and which could only with difficulty and substantial cognitive dissonance be made intelligible to him.

While there is no space to include an extended account of his discussion, Beck's (1975) erudite discussion of the reflexive growth of consciousness which can characterize this pragmatic approach to explanation is relevant in this context. In particular, he contrasts it with what he calls the "self-sultifying" quality of the dualistic position assumed by

certain idealists and behaviourists. Authors who hold this latter position, he argues, in exempting themselves as spectators from the state of unconsciousness (or mindlessness as in the case of behaviourism) common to the naive individuals whose actions they want to explain, must consequently (among other things) dismiss and ignore all protestation to their explanations expressed by such actors (see also Lovejoy 1922; and Jonas 1968 on "schizophrenic" explanations).

In short, Sapir assumed the naturalist position that the "reasons" given for actions by any individual were, in principle, to be considered a species of cause, and that theoretically comprehensive causal explanations of those actions would have to accomodate them.

Clearly this same philosophy supplied Sapir's optimism concerning the possibility of establishing what he called a "psychiatric science":

> Causation implies continuity, as does personality itself. The social scientist's world of reality is generally expressed in discontinuous terms. An effective philosophy of causation in the realm of social phenomena seems impossible so long as these phenomena are judged to have a valid existence and sequence in their own right. It is only when they are translated into the underlying facts of behavior from which they have never been divorced in reality that one can hope to advance to an understanding of causes. The test can be made easily enough. We have no difficulty in understanding how a given human being's experiences tend to produce certain results in the further conduct of his life. Our knowledge is far too fragmentary to allow

> us to understand fully, but there is never a serious difficulty in principle in imputing to the stream of his experiences that causative quality which we take for granted in the physical universe. To the extent that we can similarly speak of causative sequences in social phenomena, what we are really doing is to pyramid, as skilfully and as rapidly as possible, the sorts of cause and effect relations that we are familiar with in individual experience, imputing these to a social reality which has been constructed out of our need for a miximally economical expression of typically human events. It will be the future task of the psychiatrist to read cause and effect in human history ...(Sapir 1949[1938a]:576, emphasis added).

This claim, expressed late in his life, offers an insight into one of the reasons for the insatiable interest in psychological theories Sapir had, as was noted in Ch. II, sec. 2. It explains to a large degree why, despite his original agreement with Rickert (and Boas) in their despair of psychology ever being more than an abstract science of principles, Sapir offered constructive criticisms (rather than flat refutations) of Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, and why he was enthusiastic about Ogden and Richard's incipient "science of symbolism", the potential of experimental methods in disclosing the reality of an unconscious intuitive logic and that of Gestalt psychology in supplying the conceptual framework for a "more general psychology of form-trends". Most directly, the optimism expressed in this quotation reflects his close intellectual association with Harry Stack Sullivan, a prominent psychiatrist who was deeply influenced by Mead's social psychology.

Nonetheless it is wise not to allow the early scepticism regarding the possibility of explaining human actions adequately, which Sapir shared with Rickert, to be eclipsed from the present account. Sapir's preoccupation with the intuition of form did tend, at times, to lead him to emphasize the importance of style in behaviour, to claim that every culture had its own "genius", to suggest that society was an "unconscious artist" and, most significantly for the present concern, to posit that every individual had an "essential personality". Whether this was for what might amount to ultimately romantic aesthetic reasons or not, I am not in the position to decide. It is important to raise this however, because these examples point to a very different conclusion with regard to the question of the appropriateness of causal explanations in any account of an individual's actions. Moreover, they do not date merely from the early part of Sapir's career.

Recall that Rickert, along with other idealists such as Herder, posited a "spiritual unity" or "essence" as characterizing every object of human history--a personality, a language, an historical period or a culture. Each was said to have its own integrity and wholeness, and could not be adequately understood in its individuality by attempting to explain it in terms of generalizing principles foreign to its nature. In Sapir's case then, it is not surprising that in his early years he conceived such notions as that of the

"genuine" culture (distinct from his ethnological conception of culture), as a "spiritually healthy organism", and so on. Likewise, it becomes understandable that in order to describe or understand such things, he suggested that one combine the "conscious knowledge of the ethnologist" with the "intuitions of the artist" and learn to express this synthesis "in forms that are at once more gracious and less discussible". I will argue that a residuum of this idealism persisted until the end of his life in the notion of an "essential personality", and I suggest that the fact that he saw no insurmountable difficulty in integrating it into his general personalistic programme is not in itself sufficient to allay the difficulties which it poses.[5]

For example, in 1927, before Sapir had explicitly conceptualized his notion of "personality", he wrote an article discussing speech as a personality trait. In it he argued that every person had a "natural, theoretically unmodififed voice" distinct from those aspects which could be ascribed to social background. So strong was his intuitive conviction about this, he described it as having a "predestined form" which, despite depriving "accidents", "will be there for our discovery" (Sapir 1949[1927d]:536-37). Later, as we saw in Ch. II sec. 4, Sapir distinguished five definitions or understandings of the term personality, each of which, he maintained, should be studied, but only one of which could give knowledge of an "essential" or "nuclear" personality.

This last, the "psychiatric" understanding, viewed personality as an "essentially invariant reactive system", distinct for example from his sociological definition of it as a "gradually cumulative entity" (Sapir 1949[1934b]:560). For instance, he stated:

> I think that if the psychiatrist will admit that he is not so much interested, so far as his nuclear concept of personality is concerned, in what people do as in what they are, in their early-formed latencies of behavior rather than in their socially interpreted conduct, and if furthermore, the psychiatrist will admit to speaking to the sociologist that what the sociologist is interested in is a different concept of personality there ought to be no special difficulty of understanding (Sapir 1928c: 80, emphasis added).

Again, how the "psychiatrist" might come to know what a person "is" apart from what he "does" required that he see that individual as a system of ideas taking a "definite 'form'" (Sapir 1928c:78-9). Contrast this with Sullivan's "psychiatric" understanding of personality:

> No great progress in this field of study can be made until it is realized that the field of observation is what people do with each other, what they can communicate to each other about what they do with each other. When that is done, no such thing as the durable, unique, individual personality is ever clearly justified. For all I know every human being has as many personalties as he has interpersonal relations... (Sullivan 1950:329).

Even if one were to rename this definition in Sapir's terminology as being essentially "sociological", there remains a central incompatibility between the two which is not resolved

simply by saying that it ought to be.

In both cases, Sapir was concerned that scientific methods be developed to support his intuitions of such phenomena, but he was also vaguely conscious (though not distrubed) that this might violate the usual methods of verification and explanation:

> ...While the psychiatrist probably commits more sins against common sense and fact than any other known scientist, he has the most valuable hunch of any of them, and... many a sociologist and anthropologist while he has at his disposal the most valuable facts of all facts, frequently commits the most unpardonable sin of all sins, which is not to see those facts as constitutive of a real 'personality' or 'personalities' (Sapir 1928c:78).

In terms of the argument I have outlined above, I suggest that his notion of an essential personality in fact retained the qualities common to the idealist conceptualization of personalities as spiritual unities or concrete universals. This would lead one to expect that Sapir would be sceptical of the possibility of ever deriving a causal explanation of such a thing which would encompass the "reasons" an individual gave for his actions. Despite this expectation, Sapir was in fact optimistic about the possibility of achieving a naturalist synthesis of the two goals in his projected psychiatric science. On the basis of the foregoing assessment, I hold that this constitutes a major contradiction in his assumptions about the compatibility of idealist and naturalist approaches to the question of explaining vs. understanding human action.

Melden (1961) has argued this point in a way very relevant to this discussion of Sapir. He maintains that describing a person's actions in terms of his reasons, motives, intentions, etc. is logically distinct from describing them in scientific terms, say of neural or physiological events, in that the former approach can only have meaning in the context of human action, and that further, unlike the latter forms of description, it assumes the prior knowledge or understanding of that person as a "character":

> [T]he concern is not with logically self-contained events which stand in some empirically discovered causal relation to one another, but with human events. It is hardly necessary at this point to inquire into the logical features of our descriptions of the character of persons. Their logical connection with action, the interests, desires, motives, habits etc., of agents is surely evident. It follows that there is a radical disparity between these two modes of explanation: causal explanations of events and our familiar explanations of human actions.
>
> It is this radical disparity that accounts for the characteristic ambivalences and contradictions in current psychological discussions (Melden 1961:200).

The ambivalences and contradictions which persist in Sapir's case have been indicated; referring to our example of his notion of personality, he could argue, on the one hand, for the explanation of behaviour in terms of abstract "universals", while believing contemporaneously that the kind of method which he was advocating would lead to a personalized understanding of an indvidual's essential personality as

played out in the context of that individual's life experiences.

Sapir was grappling with an as yet unresolved dilemma. I suggest however, that his method of disarming the oppositions by straddling both the monistic (naturalistic) and dualistic (idealistic) positions of the issue of explanation and understanding, and by arguing for a plurality of levels of analysis, was inconsistent with his synthetistic dissatisfaction with "scientific fragmentism", and did not begin to approach the discontinuities and contradictions which were inherent in those levels.

4.2. INDIVIDUALISM AND HOLISM: INTRODUCTION

The preceding discussion developed the argument that Sapir wanted to take a naturalistic or tolerant position on the question of whether or not one could speak in principle of explaining human action in causal terms. Compounding the issue, I suggested, was the persistence of a rather different set of assumptions which led to a contradictory conclusion. In particular, the interest he characteristically voiced in matters of "form" was raised because of its importance to Sapir in taking cognizance of the unique character of things --whether they be linguistic "drifts" or "genii", "psychological characterizations of culture", or "real personalities" --as distinct from matters of function and explanation. In intuiting forms, Sapir felt that one could understand the

nature of such phenomena, but this was not to say that one had thereby necessarily explained them. In Chapter II, I referred to this kind of intuition as an integral part of his methodology; in terms of this preceding section it was shown to imply an idealistic dualism or negativism with regard to the question of explanation.

It was also in Chapter II, however, that I suggested that Sapir's understanding of form was as an explanatory principle as well. The fact must not be ignored that he did suppose that the positing of a pan-human "innate sense of form" went far to explain the existence and apprehension of social phenomena and individuals in terms of their tendency to exhibit pattern or formal organization. This leads one to want to examine critically his perception of such formal organizations, and the type of explanation he appropriated by which to account for them.

The examination to follow will begin with an introduction to the two major competing schools of thought on the issue of explaining social phenomena, that is, the debate between individualism and holism. While the positions taken in the debate in its current form have become substantially more refined (such that Dray (1967) could suggest that in separating out the ontological from the logical issues, the oppositions could be said to be approaching resolution), it must be remembered that during Sapir's time, they were still generating considerable metaphysical heat. For this reason,

when the discussion subsequently turns to Sapir, it will become apparent that, on the one hand, his apprehension of multiple or contrasting perspectives furnished him with a keen sense of the strengths and limits of both methodological holist and individualist approaches to the explanation of cultural and individual "forms", but that on the other, there is a sense in which an incompatible metaphysical holism persisted in his thought. I will argue that a) his vacillation between methodological and ontological holism is unrecognized and at times contradictory, and b) the means by which he sought to relate individual and cultural forms of organization is critically underdeveloped in Sapir's mode or engine of explanation. This last criticism is particularly important given the aim toward the development and integration of the social sciences which Sapir expressed in this regard.

4.2.1. The Debate

The debate which concerns the problem of explaining social phenomena holistically or individualistically is related to, and has had as extended an history in philosophy as that in the theory of action, discussed immediately above. Historically it has been ontological in character, though the argument has an epistemological aspect connected with it. In the present context, it will be necessary to speak to both aspects in order to derive a clearer understanding of Sapir's position in the issue.

First of all then, the ontological question turns on the debate as to whether one can speak of social "wholes" as having a distinct reality of their own, or whether, if one may speak of them at all, one can only refer to them as heuristic constructs--conceptualist or nominalist representations of collectivity. The former point of view claims that to point to the individual elements which compose the whole is insufficient for an apprehension of the nature of that whole, and that to refuse to acknowledge the existence of macroscopic wholes is to be blind to the greater unity which is perceived to emerge out of the interrelation of the atomic parts. Moreover, what constitute the "individual" parts are not necessarily individual persons, but rather institutions within the culture whose interaction composes the social fabric (Mandelbaum 1965[1955]:481). Extreme ontological holists have argued further that macroscopic wholes, (among which they include those which have emerged from economics and linguistics but also society and culture generally), could be said to have "purposes" and "interests" distinct from and irreducible to the psychological dispositions and beliefs of individuals. The individualist replies that the "nature" or "unity" of such wholes is not an empirical given; that rather, since individuals are the only available stuff of society, "the ontological basis of methodological individualism is the assumption that...the ultimate constituents of the social world are individual people" (Watkins 1965[1957]:505). Further,

they claim that any reference to "purposes" or "interests" can only be directed to the thoughts and intentions of individual people else the ascription lead to varieties of reified abstraction.

More contemporary methodological holists have claimed that to allow macro explanations of behaviour does not commit one to accepting an historicist or organicist view of social processes, and in this respect, have undermined the notion that a conscious "purpose" or "intelligibility" can be attributed to the whole (Gellner 1968[1956]:256-57). "There is no necessary connection between [the sui generis societal laws posited by] methodological holism and the dismal conclusion that men are caught up in some inexorable process that possesses something of a life of its own" (Dray 1967:54). What holists will not concede is the logical prerogative to explain social entities in terms reducible to the psychological dispositions of individuals.

Individualists refuse to accept this condition. While they acknowledge that societal or holistic terms occur both in common language and in historical and social scientific explanations, they maintain that in the case of the latter, the investigator's aim must be to eliminate them "by translation" into ontologically individualist terms, i.e., the attitudes and actions of the people they represent (Goldstein 1958).

The individualists have sometimes supported their ontological argument with an epistemological one. This concerns the criterion of explanation, the question as to whether explanations must encompass the reasons individuals have for their actions (a variant of the issue discussed in the previous section). Individualists such as Watkins (1973[1952]:164-65) have claimed that the explanation of any social event must be able to be understood in terms of the "reasons" or "intelligible dispositions" discernible in individuals' actions, and that one cannot speak of "causes" in any "intellectually satisfying" way, until one has made this reduction (Dray 1967:54). Methodological holists cannot accept this criterion of intelligibility without requiring ontological holism. Nonetheless, the denial that "society is itself a mind" has occasionally been undermined by the concurrent notion of certain holists, that it has a "'mental organization' or 'inner side' that is not identical with the mentality of any of its component individuals" (Dray 1967:56 quoting Ginsberg 1956).

Both individualists and holists claim to represent scientific methodology: both agree that in theory, individual behaviour and social organization are available to explanation. Their differences lie in the conclusions they draw as to the conceptual frameworks appropriate for the accomplishment of this aim in practice.

4.2.2. Sapir

It is in this question of holism versus individualism that Sapir's urge to combine the best of both worlds in his theoretical design becomes most clearly exemplified. It is important to repeat that he was amply critical of the extremes of both. Radical methodological individualism, which was for Sapir exemplified by associationist and behaviourist psychologies, represented forms of unintelligible atomism. Similarly, he opposed those social theories whose stipulation of a "social unconscious", "superorganic" or a single scientific principle to explain human behaviour was overt or thinly disguised, inasmuch as they led logically to the suffocation of personal volition and individuality. Into this last category, most of cultural anthropology, with its assumption of the "'givenness' of culture", came to fall in Sapir's eventual statements.

On the positive side, he was himself an ontological individualist to the extent he argued that the real substance of language and culture could only be the individuals who spoke and composed it, and urged accordingly that the social sciences "translate" their terms into a language which clearly situated that locus in "the individual or a specifically enumerated list of individuals, not an economically or politically or socially defined group of individuals" (Sapir 1949 [1932]:518, emphasis his). This he saw expressly as a "moving forward to a realistic instead of a metaphorical

definition of what is meant by culture and society" (Sapir 1939:870).

The limit of his individualism however, is made explicit in his review of a work by Otto Jespersen in which he states that

> [a] certain class of phenomena cannot be shown to be illusory, as Jespersen appears to think, merely because it is unthinkable in terms of actual experience except as a mode of abstraction of another, more empirically ascertained, class. If carried to their logical conclusion, Jespersen's strictures would demolish the study of all culture patterns, and condemn the social scientist to the interminable listing of individual events (Sapir 1926:499).

By itself, this reference to patterns as real classes of individuals (where "individual" refers to behavioural event, not person) merely indicates Sapir's dissatisfaction with a nominalistic individualism; it is indifferent to the question of holism. Methodologically, however, Sapir's use of such terms as "pattern", "form", "configuration" and so on, included the assumption that these tended to bind into wholes. Recall that language tended to be the archetype for his statements about culture:

> Linguistics would seem to have a very peculiar value for configurative studies because the patterning of language is to a very appreciable extent self-contained and not significantly at the mercy of intercrossing patterns of a non-linguistic type (Sapir 1949 [1929b]:165).

To his concepts of "drift" and "genius" in language and culture he ascribed the tendency toward formal completeness, symmetry, balance, and harmony, which is clearly holistic. Again:

> Wherever the human mind has worked collectively and unconsciously, it has striven for and often attained unique form. The important point is that the evolution of form has a drift in one direction, that it seeks poise, and that it rests, relatively speaking, when it has found this poise (Sapir 1949[1921e]:382).

At the same time, Sapir's interest in the individual was holistic. His focus on personality, while it took various perspectives, persistently emphasized its systemic or organizational nature, as a distinct entity from that of culture. Thus:

> Whether we talk about an individual as a physiological organism or about society, at the other end of the behavior gamut, what we are really talking about is systems of ideas (Sapir 1928c: 77, emphasis his).

I suggest that two features of Sapir's holism must be distinguished. On the one hand, his bifocal view of culture and personality involved the assumption that there existed two kinds of wholes, or types of organization. Again, this is well-exemplified in Smith's note that "Sapir believes in the discreteness of individuals, but a oneness and continuity of culture"(Sapir as cited by Smith ?1936-37:22). On the other, it appears that in each case, their ontological status is not as fixed as might initially be thought. In other words, the status which he attributed to impersonal cultural wholes was largely, but not always, of a nominalistic nature, i.e. a convenient, heuristic construct; and conversely, the real ontological status which he ascribed to individuals was not without its lapses, and this, despite his repeated warning that one never forget this fact. Together, these two features

contribute to what I suggest is an unacknowledged vacillation between methodological holism and ontological holism.

From this perspective, the significant aspect of this confusion concerns the central position which the notion of "form-feeling"--that assumed "innate sense of form"--held in Sapir's conceptions of culture and the individual. As was suggested in Ch. II sec. 2, Gestalt psychology appealed to Sapir predominantly because it lent an at least rudimentary scientific footing to his belief that a psychic mechanism of this sort must be responsible for both the patterned behaviour of individuals, and for the existence of larger configurations of culture, in which he conceived the individual's behaviour patterns to participate. It becomes easier to see how, concurrent with his recognition of the importance of the individual in the study of langauge and culture, Sapir could conceive of such entities as linguistic and cultural "drift", each having a "life of its own" to the extent that individuals must unconsciously conform and adapt to its "configurational pressure". It is a short step from this type of assertion to that which claims that such drifts have "purposes" or "intentions" of their own. In this context, the intimate relation Sapir was prone to note between the tendency to formal completeness in language and the place of art in life (especially in well-integrated, "genuine" cultures) is not accidental. Recall that, for example, in the outline for his projected book entitled The Psychology of Culture, his concluding

section explored the "necessary" notion of "culture as purpose and as art" (Sapir 1928a:8). It is my contention that Sapir's application of the notion of formal wholes, in language and culture conceived as self-completing aesthetic tendencies, but open to scientific verification and explanation, is sufficiently frequent and sober to warrant serious attention, and the judgment that at least at times, he was willing to suggest that such wholes had an ontological existence with distinct "purposes" of their own.[6] Thus I must disagree with Harris in his blanket statement that

> [t] he siren of literary effect, which is not always identical with meticulous statement, sometimes led Sapir into such sentences as this [1949 (1931d):106]: "It is largely the function of the artist to make articulate these more subtle intentions of society." Some writers really mean it when they refer to the 'subtle intentions of society"; Sapir obviously did not (Harris 1951:321 fn.).

The case is similar if one examines his notions of the individual as a personal whole. The perspectives he juggled were multiple and occasionally contradictory with regard to the purposes for which they assumed personality should be studied.[7] Nonetheless, they were almost always consistent in their pluralism, that is, in attributing a distinct wholeness to the "experienced unity" of every individual. There is one exception, however, which concerns the rather more metaphorical assertion of a "generalized psychology conceived as typical of a given society" (Sapir 1928c:79). Comparable to Benedict's "culture ethos" or "configuration", the characterization of

culture as a personality organization was held by Sapir at times to be "inevitable and necessary" (Sapir 1949[1934b]:563). From the present point of view, however, this characterization constitutes a confusion of the two types of "whole" Sapir generally posited, for it is not clear how the particular personalities of a group were related to this cultural personality "type" (or for that matter, how the latter was related to the notion of culture as a network of impersonal patterns).[8] That Sapir himself was uneasy about the status of psychological characterizations of culture is evidenced in his concurrent designation of it as a "presumptive psychology" (cf. Ch. III). In all, it would seem that Sapir wanted to be an ontological individualist whose methodology was holistic, but that he was nonetheless occasionally prone to making statements which belied an ontological holistic tenor.

It was argued in Ch. III that Sapir's understanding of individuals was, in its defining characteristics, similar to the notion of a concrete universal. Likewise, the systemic nature he attributed to culture "as a whole" conserved this quality. Where he was emphasizing the power of cultural patterning, he described the individual as an unconscious "participant" in such forms. As his focus shifted onto the individual as an independent centre of consciousness, the entitivity of impersonal forms of culture rapidly dissolved into the impression of multiple personal cultures. Sapir

documented this "duality of interest", and sought to justify the alternative perspectives as the "projections" of the investigator's psychological characteristics as prompting the preference for one or th other focus. While the admission to temperament as the motive for these formulations is, at one level, intellectually honest, the resulting impression of the nature of such entities one receives is conceptualistic. Where Sapir spoke of other "levels of organization"--those in which he himself was less interested, such as the physiological or "organismic", or again the social institutional--this nominal quality was even more pronounced.

Nisbet, in reference in Herder, suggested that this way of thinking in terms of levels of organization was prompted by the latter's wish to "synthesize all areas of his experience and to comprehend them as a single whole" (Nisbet 1970:103). Similarly, Needham (speaking about Whitehead), has indicated the relations between this type of thinking and the dialectical method:

> The syntheses at all successive levels of being, resolving the successive contradictions, form a series of envelopes, for they each include the elements of the contradictions on the levels below them as a series of parts. Like so many things in nature, the successive syntheses form a dendritic continuum or hierarchy of wholes (Needham 1948:192).

While Sapir consistently downplayed any allusions to hierarchy or chains of being, there remains this tendency for him to see the knowledge contributed by the spectrum of sciences to the understanding of the individual as productive of a "steadily

growing comprehension of the meaning of the whole". Moreover, the typical attempt on Sapir's part to render "apparent" the contradictory nature of his assertions by relocating their locus at another level is clearly related to this way of thinking.

As Nisbet notes, "the whole problem of what constitutes a separate level of organization is as important today as it was in Herder's time..." (Nisbet 1970:103). One of the fundamental issues in this regard concerns the confusion between concepts meant to distinguish among levels, and those meant to unite them. Related to it is the problem of explaining how transitions from one level to another take place. In Sapir's theoretical anthropology, these are critical issues. As we saw, the relations which Sapir held to exist between the "continuity and oneness of culture" and the "world of meanings" which the individual abstracts for himself, were difficult to isolate and keep distinct. Consequently, it is not surprising that Sapir's methodology remained such a largely personal, intuitive one.

In the foregoing examination, Sapir's nominalism was identified and discussed, but it was also argued that he wanted to be a realist; in this respect, the ideals (if not the underlying assumptions) of the pragmatist orientation were most directly visible. Recall that the "psychiatric science" which he foresaw developing was based on a fundamental agreement with Sullivan's "science of interpersonal relations" which stressed

the processual rather than the "essential" nature of individuals in interaction. Instead of viewing the individual as possessing a personality "essence", he was seen as an element in a network of social relations. These "organizing relations" were thought of as the real focus of social study. Sapir himself referred to "interpersonal relations [as] real things". Considered abstractly as classes, these relations are equivalent to the "universals of behavior" which figured prominently in the argument for Sapir's "realism". It was in their application to particular interactions between people that Sapir believed one could, (given a contextual sensitivity,) class behaviours into real types which were independent of their culturally relative context. Harris suggests that the logical and empirical rigour, and the psychological sensitivity which were so critical to his creative productivity in linguistics found an analogue in this science of interpersonal relations.[9] In this context, the lack of an "adequate psychology" was perhaps most prohibitive of Sapir's development in this direction. As it was, the contents of Sapir's "universals of behavior" remained uncharacteristically primitive and bland. I am not in a position to decide whether this was a question of circumstance, or an inherent limitation imposed by the "naturalized" idealism epistemology of the pragmatic approach. The point is that the combination of approaches to the problem of the relation between individual and culture in Sapir's work does not help to clarify what that relation is.

4.3. CONCLUSIONS

The pages following the introduction to this thesis have approached Sapir's theoretical anthropology in a thematic attempt to determine whether it contains certain epistemological inconsistencies. Chapter II documented a number of possible contradictions in his thought on what might be called, broadly speaking, the relations between the history and science of man. The following chapter sought to frame the observed discrepancies in ontological terms. The present chapter has focused on the explanation of individual behaviour as the point of reference for exploring in a critical fashion, the tendencies isolated in the various themes of Sapir's work. This focus has served to highlight the contrasts within his assumptions concerning both the possibility of explaining human action, and of the nature of such explanations. Now it is important to assess these theoretical contrasts in terms of the actual strengths and shortcomings of his accomplishments.[10] First, however, I must examine the issues involved in saying that Sapir "wanted" to be a realist. The conclusions drawn from this examination bear on one's assessment of the contrasts identified in the preceding sections.

The question as to whether objective relativism (such as Sapir shared with Mead) constitutes a truly realist philosophy, or whether it is really a variant of its idealist counterpart, continues to find no simple resolution among philosophers. Lovejoy, as we saw in Ch. III, was sceptical

of both objective idealism and objective relativism (along with other varieties of pragmatism) ever being other than nominalistic theories. On the other hand, Acton (1967:111) has argued that even objective idealism could be a form of "epistemological realism", compatible with an idealistic ontology. As we noted at the end of Ch. III, a "direct realism" characterized these approaches. Sapir's belief that it was through a multiplicity of perspectives that one could come to know the reality of the whole, and that these perspectives, must be based on the real perceptions of actual individuals reflects this direct realism approach to knowledge. However, there are a number of objections to direct realism as an adequate epistemology, both in terms of its inherent weaknesses, and in terms of ignoring other assumptions which underlay Sapir's methods. Both types of objection contribute to the conclusion that Sapir was not a consistent realist. The difficulty in accounting for error was identified as an internal problem in direct realist theories. From the latter source of objection, Sapir's receptiveness to Gestalt psychology is but one example. On the one hand, it substantiated Sapir's intuitions concerning the reality of an "innate sense of form", and in that sense contributed to the objectivity of his <u>own</u> "direct experience". His employing it to explain the tendency for individuals to pattern their perceptions and behaviour after an ideal "significant form" which was incommensurable with objective reality, and which he,

at times, attributed to the working of an unconscious design or "artist" in society, however, if taken to its logical conclusion, argues against the possibility of a realist epistemology. In the following, then, I will argue that Sapir cannot seriously be considered a realist in this sense, much as one might be inclined to believe that the keeness and honesty to his perceptions led him to admit the possibility.

Rather, if one looks closely at the persistent shortcomings in his methodology, they betray a strong idealism, despite his objections to that philosophy. On the one hand, one can see this in his attempts at synthesis. I have indicated the characteristic weakness in Sapir's method of resolving contradictions by juxtaposing them at other levels of analysis, and described it as a reflection of the idealist propensity for the dialectical method. I suggest that it is the source of his vagueness and vacillation regarding the status of, and the relations between "personal" and "impersonal" levels of organization in social life. Clearly this contributed to the intuitive quality and as well as the relative lack of development of the method by which he approached such phenomena. As a source of his scientific optimism, it was an obvious motive in what he himself once referred to as the "naive" scientific search for the unifying principle (or "universe of discourse") which would comprehend the totality of perspectives he envisioned in his psychiatric science. At the same time, his idealism was also an integral part of his intuitive sensitivity

to unique form and "genuine" character in the lives of individuals and cultures. At its pessimistic extreme, where his perceptiveness of individuality seemed irreconciliable with his scientific optimism, it would appear that Sapir's nominalism and personalistic pluralism are most clearly evidenced.

Idealism is directly opposed to naturalism (Acton 1967: 110). The basis of this opposition lies in the idealists' rejection of the notion that mind (consciousness, language and values etc.) has emerged from material things or processes.

In the discussion which began this chapter, I showed that Sapir simultaneously held naturalist and idealist assumptions regarding the possibility of explaining individuals' actions. In that context I argued that the thrust of Sapir's ideas was largely naturalistic, 'though the notion of an "essential personality" was viewed as a residue of the idealist predilection for conceiving of persons as "concrete universals". If one reviews Sapir's positions within the topics discussed in Ch. II, one finds a similar pattern. That there is a movement in the course of the three decades in which he wrote, towards embracing a more naturalist approach to explanations of cultural phenomena is, on the whole, true. Witness for example, the shift from the historical relativist view of culture to one which stressed increasingly the psychological universals in human behaviour. In this light, Aberle's criticism of this shift as evincing an inherent contradiction is logically correct, but given the tenacity with which Sapir

held on to the significance of history and individuality throughout his forays into psychology, I suggest that Sapir tended to admit a naturalistic approach only where he felt that it could encompass an idealist perspective within it. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that this approachment was far more successful in his linguistic theories of the origin of language and symbolism, and the phonemic principle than in his culture theory, relatively speaking.

It may be argued that the movement from an emphasis on culture, to one on the individual, as a "whole" is a function of a similar attempt at a pragmatic synthesis in Sapir's anthropology. Sapir's initial interest in the individual as unconscious source of variation and development in the drift of culture gave way to a focus on personality. The naturalist aspect of this shift is given in his claim that explanations at this level would be more powerful than impersonal cultural analyses. Their power was said to derive from the tightness and consistency of organization exhibited in the personality as an empirical fact. As we saw, however, Sapir implied that knowledge at this level could give rise to knowledge of culture as a whole in these terms. Thus, despite the appeal to ontological and epistemological individualism, this approach harboured an implicit ontological holism.

Sapir's ontological and epistemological assumptions have been outlined and critically examined in this paper. The purpose of the exercise has been twofold: a) specifically,

to draw out the major inconsistencies in Sapir's thought and limitations in his methodology which could shed light on the source of the weaknesses in his theoretical anthropology; and b) more generally, to act as a philosophical reminder that anthropologists take greater cognizance of the nature and consequences of the philosophical assumptions they apply in their own fields.

Concerning the first of these two levels, I suggest the following as a brief encapsulation of the findings emerging from this analysis of Sapir's thought. Characteristically, Sapir felt the reality of his intuitions concerning, for example, the relation of the individual to culture, very strongly and immediately. Such was his "world...of the artist, pure and simple", in which reality was directly perceived. For Sapir, then, no datum was too subjective to be directly experienced. This characteristic was associated with a direct realist epistemology (with all its shortcomings). When these intuitions acquired sufficient distance to be identified conceptually (and since Sapir considered himself a scientist, this was frequently), he was willing to defer to a more sceptical, nominalistic position regarding the relation between theory and fact. The flexibility with which Sapir moved between those two epistemological directions may account for one characterization of him as a "methodological solipsist" (Osgood, 1967). One might further suggest that the limitations which these extremes imposed on his methodology may have had

some relation to the frustration Sapir is said to have felt later in his life, regarding the realization of his "psychiatric science" (Sapir 1967). The position taken here, then, is that these epistemological inconsistencies were responsible, at least in part, for the fact that for Sapir, "the problem did not yield" (Preston 1980:374).

This is not the place to offer constructive suggestions toward a resolution of such epistemological discrepancies in anthropology, nor is it possible to explore their persistence and change in the work of anthropologists influenced by Sapir. Nonetheless, the prospective fertility of such avenues of investigation amplifies the importance of the more general purpose with which this thesis was undertaken. The clarification of epistemological and ontological assumptions might contribute to more rigourous constructive developments in this and other areas of anthropological theory, as well as definitely enhancing our awareness of the traditions and history of ideas funding those assumptions.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

[1]Nisbet's characterization of Herder as an intellectual personality compares strikingly:

> He wished to preserve both conflicting attitudes within his own mind, defending each one separately for the benefit of two individuals (a religious mystic and a scientist) for each of whom only one attitude could be valid, as he well knew. Where he could not conceal a contradiction from his own eyes, he was prepared to ignore it. He would simply live with latent or even manifest contradictions rather than eliminate them at the cost of sacrificing any one of the contradictory elements (Nisbet 1970:3).

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1]Especially in contrast to the mystical turn Herder later took.

[2]That is, a position which conceived, or at least did not deny, a possible genetic relationship between animal and early human vocal expression.

[3]Certainly Sapir recognized the fruitfulness of this more specific project, when in a footnote in the 1916 paper, he stated that he planned to write another article specifically on "Time Perspective in Language" as a general subject (Sapir 1949[1916a]:fn. 432). While that paper was never published if ever written, the intent is further indication of his interest in developing reconstructive methods.

[4]Sapir later referred to this type as "condensation symbolism" (Sapir 1949[1934a]:565).

[5]This strain of thought may have had an influence on Sapir's papers in semantics and on his attempt to isolate the requirements for the construction of an international language logically and creatively superior to any extant natural language (cf. Sapir 1930a; 1949[1931a]:110-21,[1944]:122-49).

[6]Cain's effort to trace Sapir's developing interest in gestalt psychology is valuable. He claims however, that Sapir's only reference to work in that field dates from 1929 after his move to Chicago (Cain 1980:150, fn. 3). It is a point in Cain's favour (as against that of Murray (1981)) that this claim is inaccurate. In 1925 in a letter to Ruth Benedict Sapir advises her of the value of Koffka's work in that field (Mead 1959:177). See above section 2.2.3., p. 30.

[7]Interestingly, in arguing against this tendency, Sapir resorted to classifying and comparing the mentality of nineteenth century evolutionists with that of "Oriental mysticism, ideal rationalism, scholasticism, formal intellectualism at other times and in other places" (Sapir 1920:378). Apparently this type of psychological generalization did not require, or at least did not receive the rigourous historical scrutiny he was advocating in that passage!

[8]This is a refutation of the implication in Murray's argument that Sapir could not have been aware of behaviourism until the 1920's (cf. Murray 1981:8-9).

[9](Sapir 1949[1917a]:522), in other words, the associationism of Wundtian experimental psychology, the 'established order' of time (Peters and Mace 1967:20), and its replacement by behaviourism.

[10](Sapir 1917b:445; 1949[1932]:513), in which he included Freudian psychoanalysis and Jung's psychology of personality types (Sapir 1949[1923a]:532).

[11]i.e. the explicit one, that the elements in history are considered to be unique, individual; and the implicit one, that there are others accepted as non-historical or universal.

[12]Interesting examples of what Sapir saw as such "mechanisms" are the "emotionally integrated complex", the "transfer of emotion" (Sapir 1949[1921c]:529) and elsewhere, the "transfer of a pattern of feeling" (Sapir 1949[1927b]:342-3).

[13]Murray denies outright that Sapir could have been influenced by Gestalt theory (thus contradicting, among others, Hymes and Fought (1975:979) whome Murray cites specifically in his own defence), arguing, among other disparate points, that the man "was interested in personality, not perception" (Murray 1981:9). Without further comment on this statement, I think it is fairly evident from the materials examined so far, that in fact Sapir had many and varied interests. Murray's claim suggests more omissions than it does clarify the issue. Also, it is not clear that among those concerns, personality included, Sapir was not interested in "perception" in some respect.

Murray later correctly points out the fallacy, in Cain's (1980) argument of imputing historical influence on the basis of a presumed Zeitgeist or climate of the times, without establishing evidence of direct contact. Nonetheless, the fact that both Cain and Murray overlook Sapir's 1925 reference to Koffka (from Ottawa no less) seems to dilute if not undermine Murray's main point.

[14]Aberle argues similarly, but further claims that this line of thinking contributed to the development of personality and culture studies, 'though he is at times inaccurate in his attributions to Sapir. A relevant example in the present context is the fact that Aberle points to psychoanalysis to account for Sapir's interest in "configurations" and "formal

elegance" in culture, omitting all reference to Gestalt psychology as influential in that line of thought (Aberle 1957: 18). This would appear to be a case of overinclusion on Aberle's part, inasmuch as an emphasis on aesthetico-formal features in mental functioning has not figured prominently in the psychoanalytic literature.

[15]"It is not claimed that the tendency to rhythmic expression [of an innate, intuited sense of form] is the only determinant [of certain social phenomena of primitive societies] but it is certainly a powerful underlying factor in the development of all social parallelisms and symmetries" (Sapir 1949 [1927b]:344).

[16]One may infer that this was more for reasons of personal disinclination at the time of writing than for any of a theoretical nature when he wrote somewhat slightingly that "a cool reserve is an excellent mood for the making of historical science; its usefulness to the building of culture in the present is doubtful"(Sapir 1949[1924a]:325).

[17]As with the problem of the influence of Gestalt psychology on Sapir's thought, there has developed an academic debate as to how much of a Crocean Sapir was (cf. Modjeska 1968,Hymes, 1969). Again Sapir's frugal use of references to document the sources of his ideas becomes problematic. Nonetheless, it seems unwise to take either extreme position, i.e., either that he must have been heavily influenced by such an author as Croce if he did cite him, or that he was so original a thinker that no one could have had as formative an effect on his development, as some might want to believe, without more compelling evidence. Rather the evidence suggests to me that Sapir took from and discarded such theories as appealed to him at various points in his exploratory career, largely spontaneously (if not unsystematically, in terms of assessing critically their potential for self-contradiction of earlier positions).

[18]Note that the first use of the term "significant form" as an aesthetic principle was by Clive Bell in 1914. I have found no reference to Bell's work in Sapir's writings, but the parallels of thought here suggest themselves as another avenue of inquiry into possible influences. Though her work is chronologically later, Langer's Feeling and Form (1953) is prompted by the same interests.

[19]Certainly Sapir's auditory aesthetic sensitivity is evident here as well. The recurring theme in many of Sapir's essays in literary and musical criticism emphasized the point that nuances of mood and meaning were contained in the aesthetic

features of tone and rhythmic periods common to both art media. Two of the many examples are offered here: Commenting on the poetry of G.M. Hopkins, Sapir spoke of the former's "wild joy in the sheer sound of words", which must be "read with the ear, never with the eye" (Sapir 1949[1921f]:501). Regarding the limited popular appreciation of free verse poets of the time, Sapir claimed that much of the misunderstanding "may well be due to the sheer inability to think, or rather image, in purely auditory terms" (Sapir 1921d:228).

[20]Aberle has aptly noted that despite Sapir's explicit criticism of the idea elsewhere (cf. Sapir 1917b), this level could be called the "superorganic".

[21]"In a sense it is well known to him" (Sapir 1949 [1927c]:548).

[22]It also persisted in his work in semantics (cf. Sapir 1930a; 1949[1944]:122-49).

[23]Contrast the character of this conception of non-linguistic reality not only with Whorf's "kaleidoscopic flux of impressions" (1952), but also Fearing's developmental concept of "physiognomic perception" (1967).

[24]Twaddell's position is that

> [w]hatever our attitude toward mind, spirit, soul etc. as realities, we must agree that the scientist proceeds as though there were no such things, as though all his information were acquired through processes of his physiological nervous system. In so far as he occupies himself with psychical, non-material forces, the scientist is not a scientist. The scientific method is quite simply the nominalistic attitude toward the problem of the universals, in matters of procedure (Twaddell 1957:57).

[25]Corroborating this line of thinking is Hamlyn's analysis of the philosophical assumptions underlying Gestalt psychology, which as I have suggested above, are, in important ways, consistent with Sapir's orientation toward the reality and accessibility to knowledge of forms. Hamlyn maintains that the gestaltists failed "to sort out the epistemological and psychological questions which are at issue", and that the assertion that wholes, rather than atomic sensations are "given" to perception, "is nothing if not metaphysics, as must be any account of the 'given'" (Hamlyn 1961:41-42).

[26]While Sapir was adamant about the autonomy of race from language and culture, he did maintain a certain phrenological outlook at times. Witness his reference to Kretschmer's "physical types" from his classes, and his "intuitive feeling [that] there is a correlation between physical type and mental set" (Sapir as cited by Smith ?1936-37:11).

[27]"If we are justified in speaking of the growth of culture at all, it must be in the spirit, not of a composite history made up of the private histories of particular patterns, but in the spirit of the development of a personality" (Sapir 1949[1934c]:594). Contrast this with, for example, his earlier statements in response to Dewey's ideas on cultural "development" (cf. Sapir 1916b:2).

[28]It will be argued that, irrespective of whether this is a valid characterization of Sullivan, it is only representative of part Sapir's way of thinking. (As well as the present context, see above, Ch. IV sec. 1.).

[29]Sapir contrasted five definitions of "personality" (Sapir 1949 1934b :560). His explicit concern was with the "psychiatric", which he defined as "an essentially invariant reactive system". The "philosophical" concept by contrast viewed personality as an "invariant point of experience" and "the subjective awareness of the self as distinct from other objects of observation" (Sapir 1949[1934b]:560).

[30]Sapir recognized the problem as early as in "Culture, genuine and spurious" (Sapir 1949[1924a]:326-27). It is argued here that Sapir addressed the problem of adjustment conflict only much latter in his theory of personality.

[31]"Creation is the bending of form to one's will, not a manufacture of form ex nihilo" (Sapir 1949[1924a]:321).

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1]By this I mean to refer to the school developed by Holt et al. (1912), but also include the proponents of objective relativism and perspective realism (eg. Murphy 1927; Mead 1927) because of their shared assumption regarding the belief that knowledge of objects was direct (Cohen 1962:383). They are to be distinguished from the "critical realists" who argued that knowledge of objective "reals" could only be indirect through sense data generated by the object in the mind (cf. Drake et al. 1920).

[2]Lavely indicates that the pluralism implicit in this latter view was influenced by Leibniz' doctrine that reality was composed of monads which were individual centres of activity (Lavely 1967:108).

[3]See for example the theory of signs propounded by Peirce, one of the founders of pragmatic philosophy. Pierce is particularly interesting inasmuch as he considered himself a realist (Peirce 1931-58 vol. 1:5).

[4]Note his reference to

> "universal" tokens in that vaster world in which words are not even a nuisance, for they are not there at all. In this world, which is naturally that of the artist pure and simple, belong pictures of an honest-to-goodness cat, however, abbreviated as to line, or of a woman holding a child, or for that matter, a checker board design. Such pictures...do not require the explicit comment of formulated, word-bound thought (Sapir 1928d:3).

[5]

> The Music of the Spheres
>
> Hear you the music of the spheres
> Afluting and astrumming softly from the stars to earth?
> Can you not hear it?
> It is faint, but hark!
> It comes asinging soft and broad as mist
> From spaces far remote,
> From filmy stars that faintly blur the farthest night.
> Carried by the winds that blow immovably
> From end to end of space,

> The winds that gently brush the stars and set them
> twinkling,
> Set them twinkling like a host of tiny silvery bells.
> Presences invisible and vast do breathe into the
> falling strains
> And give them faintly booming droning fundaments
> That pulse through sapce.
> O listen to the fluting strumming singing strains,
> Shot through with tinkling ringing sounds,
> Upheld on booming drones!
> They are very faint, but hark!
> Can you hear them now?

[6]This single statement provides evidence for Sapir's exclusion in large part from the generalization which Lindesmith and Strauss (1950:590) make, in which they argue that a certain Aristotelian realism, with its concomitant distinction between "essence" and "accident" is implicit in the writings of culture and personality theorists.

[7]Note Sapir's cool reserve toward Russell (Sapir 1929c).

[8]As Harris points out, Sapir attempted to isolate elements of meaning on an empirical basis and not through some a priori "deductive system of presumed meanings" (Harris 1951:301). Still, in discussing another aspect of Sapir's research in this field, i.e. that of the semantic relations among the meanings themselves, Harris states that

> such analysis could be aided by the abstract study of relations in mathematics and logic..., and perhaps also by investigations along the lines of experimental psychology into basic (not culturally determined) perception and behavior (Harris 1951:300).

In the latter instance, one is reminded of the psychological experimentation Sapir did conduct to substantiate his notion of an unsocialized intuitive logic, which as was noted above (Ch.II sec. 3), seemed to have been assumed a priori regardless of empirical verification. As for the former, the highly abstract semantic analyses which Sapir completed as contributions to the development of an international auxiliary language have a similar thrust (cf. Sapir 1930a; 1949 [1944]:122-49):

> What is needed above all is a language that is as simple as regular, as logical, as rich, and as creative as possible; a language which starts with a minimum of demands on the learning capacity of the normal individual and can do the maximum amount of work; which is to serve as a sort of

> logical touchstone to all national languages and as the standard medium of translation. It must, ideally be as superior to any accepted language as the mathematical method of expressing quantities and relations between quantities is to the more lumbering methods of expressing these quantities and relations in verbal form (Sapir 1949[1931a]:113).

[9]The flexibility with which Sapir was capable of taking both points of view may paradoxically contribute to the variability which Nyce (n.d.) has observed in the extent to which Sapir was able to capture an intimate understanding of the personalities he described in his life histories (cf. Sapir 1918; 1921g; 1922b).

[10]Particularly inasmuch as he was acquainted with Mead at Chicago University (cf. Leaf 1979:189-90).

[11]The basic premises regarding perception which the Gestalt theorists presupposed correspond significantly with these of direct realism. In particular, recall Köhler's belief in a "science of direct experience".

[12]This he was aware of already in 1928 when he outlined his prospective chapter on "Cultural Types". The psychological "types" he propounded were "not to be interpreted literally" as they would have been in any realist account of such typologies, but rather, metaphorically, "as if" (Sapir 1928a:7).

[13]See also Sapir (1937:870): "Interpersonal relations... are real things". The following excerpt from a letter to Kroeber will serve as a final example of how this objective relativism maintained an idealist flavour:

> Of course I'm interested in culture patterns, linguistic included. All I claim is that their consistencies and spatial and temporal persistencies can be, and ultimately should be, explained in terms of humble psychological formulations, with particular emphasis on interpersonal relations. I have no consciousness whatever of being revolutionary or of losing an interest in what is generally phrased in an impersonal way. Quite the contrary. I feel rather like the physicist who believes the immensities of the atom are not unrelated to the immensities of interstellar space (Sapir 1938c).

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1]The influence was apparently longlasting. Sapir's first reference to Rickert dates from 1917 (cf. Sapir 1917b). He must have continued to cite him in his classes, for as late as ?1936-37 Smith made a note concerning his importance in this issue.

[2]Nonetheless, the inclination to find meaning in history at a global level led Rickert to posit the possibility of developing "objective" criteria for a "universal history", despite his opinion of Hegel on this issue. Unwittingly, then, he was confirming the positivism he had sought to invalidate, in that all historical particulars (alike with those of science) could be subsumed under the transcendent logic of this universal history (Anchor 1967:194). (One wonders what, in 1917, Sapir's reaction to this aspect of Rickert's methodology was!)

[3]I do not know to what extent Sapir actually conversed with Mead about their mutual projects in that direction in the 1930's, but as was noted in the previous chapter, they did have some contact while at Chicago (cf. Leaf 1979:189-90), and there is sufficient parallel between the two in their later writings that examining Mead's views on explanation will be significant for the subsequent assessment of Sapir.

[4]The first example of this that I am aware of dates from 1921 (cf. Sapir 1921a: fn. 56). Again twelve years later, in an explicit formulation of the phonemic principle, he wrote:

> The native realizes when what he is taught "clicks" with what his phonological intuitions have already taught him, but he is made uncomfortable when purely phonetic distinctions are pointed out to him which seem real enough when he focuses his attention on them, but which are always fading out of his consciousness because their objective reality is not confirmed by these intuitions (Sapir 1949[1933b]:48).

[5]The raising of this problem is not new. Hymes in particular has referred to it as a "shift", but this does not take into account the concurrence of both perspectives. Moreover, to my knowledge, he has not offered any suggestions,

philosophical or otherwise, to account for this discrepancy. (See Hymes' reference note to Sapir [1931c] in Hymes (ed.) 1964:128). Also in a personal communication (Hymes 1971) he wrote:

> ...There still remains the fundamental question, why locate the locus in persons, rather, say, than in general culture patterns a la Benedict, or in persons conceived as social roles, or in social interactions a la Goffman later, rather than in what in Sapir seems pretty clearly a focus on the person as individual life history in time?

[6]Sapir's naturalized pragmatic approach to what in the nineteenth century was still very spiritual and idealistic --i.e., this notion of culture as art--was not singular in its day. See for examples Dewey's Art as Experience (1934), G.H. Mead (1925-26), Suzanne Langer's Feeling and Form (1953), Pepper (1938) and Whitehead (1929,1933).

[7]Cf. sec. 1 of this chapter, regarding the confusion between his essentialist and social-interactionist accounts of personality. Another instance concerns Sapir's interest in the life history as a personality document, which took two forms. On the one hand, he was fascinated by life histories as an intrinsically valuable means of rendering the lives of exotic peoples intelligible and "familiar":

> ...[A] great deal might be done to capture the spirit of the primitive by adhering so far as possible, to its letter--in other words by transcribing...personal experiences and other texts that have been written down or dictated by natives...
>
> It would almost seem that the bare recital of the details of any mode of life that human beings have actually lived has a hidden power that transcends the skill or the awkwardness of the teller (Sapir 1949[1922a]:504).

On the other, the life history came to represent a scientific document for Sapir as he turned to the study of personality types:

> [W]hether we admit it or not, we are interested in what, for want of a better term, we call types...The life history must be the document par excellence which interests us, not because it is an interesting document, but because we

> hope by its means to get together in order that we may clarify the concept of personality (Sapir 1930b:123 emphasis added).

Watson has noted that these two approaches have very different ends in mind. Still, even he admits that the nature of the entity examined in both cases remains the "real" individual (Watson 1978:7).

[8]Hayek ascribes the source of this super-personality concept to "that curious alliance between nineteenth-century positivism and Hegelianism" (1973:48).

[9]"In linguistics, the analog to 'the ways in which different sorts of personalities enter into significant relations with each other' is the distributional interrelation of elements" (Harris 1951:317 fn.).

[10]Note that I do not mean to belittle the strengths of his approach by not emphasing them equally; simply, that my present purpose is critical.

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