RELATIVISM AND THE DEMISE OF

EPISTEMIC FOUNDATIONS

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By

MARK OWEN WILLIAMS, B.A. (Hons.)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to show that the anti-foundationalism of philosophers like Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty does not, as is commonly thought, entail relativism. Consequently, anti-foundationalists of this stripe are not vulnerable to the myriad arguments brought against the doctrine of relativism.

Both foundationalism and relativism, it is argued, suppose that there is something (direct awareness of concrete states of affairs, intuitive self-evidence, etc, on the one hand; power, consensus, coherence, etc. on the other) which 'makes truths true'. The anti-foundationalist, on the contrary, maintains that nothing does so. Central to establishing the plausibility of this view are the arguments employed by Donald Davidson against the dualism of conceptual scheme(s) and empirical content--a distinction upon which both the foundationalism of the empiricist tradition, and conceptual relativism, rely.

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AUTHOR: Mark Owen Williams, B.A. Honours (Acadia)

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CHAPTER 1

RELATIVISM AND THE SELF-REFUTATION ARGUMENT

i. Introduction

The philosophical literature of the past few decades betrays a profound mistrust of epistemological foundations. A brief survey of this literature will also reveal that those who eschew foundationalism are repeatedly accused of relativism. The anti-foundationalist, who argues that there is nothing epistemological to be said about the nature of truth "apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society . . . uses in one or another area of inquiry," is invariably seen by the foundationalist as asserting the positive doctrine that truth is relative to the justificatory procedures of different cultures or epochs.[1] There is, however, no reason to think that a commitment to anti-foundationalism is, necessarily, also a commitment to relativism.

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[1] Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" in Post-Analytic Philosophy, ed. J. Rajcham and C. West (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 6.

In the present work, I argue that, while relativism is one form of anti-foundationalism, anti-foundationalism need not be relativistic. The foundationalist has, therefore, no grounds for accusing the anti-foundationalist of relativism simply in virtue of her commitment to anti-foundationalism.

Professed relativists may ask why I have chosen to separate the two theses in this manner. Having rejected foundationalism, why not also embrace some form of relativism? The reason, of course, is that relativism is equally unacceptable. Given the way in which the epistemological problematic has been set up, however, no such anti-foundational and non-relativistic, third position exists. At least, it is difficult to fathom without giving up certain dearly held philosophical assumptions about the acquisition and status of knowledge. For relativists and foundationalists alike, it is nearly impossible to envision what giving up these assumptions would be like. One of the tasks of this thesis, therefore, is to show the plausibility of this third position.

For many philosophers, to show that some position is tainted by relativism is to dismiss it on the grounds that one or another of the well-rehearsed, classical arguments against the doctrine is sufficient to refute it. Though these arguments are not without their merits, some forms of relativism fall through the cracks. Typically, then, the foundationalist plays fast and loose with anti-foundational theories. First, they are unjustifiably

thought to entail some form of relativism, and are then too quickly dismissed on the assumption that they must, therefore, be self-refuting. I attempt to show here that both these assumptions are ill-founded. Though I end up agreeing with the foundationalist as to the fate of relativism, it is not for the same reasons. The first chapter, then, attempts to show the limitations of the classical arguments against relativism and the conclusions we may legitimately draw from their application.

The first two chapters explore the various arguments against the two dominant forms of epistemological relativism: Protagorean and conceptual. The third chapter is dedicated to the idiosyncratic relativism of Joseph Margolis. Margolis's relativism is unique insofar as it is able to escape the arguments brought against Protagorean and conceptual relativism, which I hope to have shown are decisive in these cases. Margolis, however, is able to evade the damaging effects of these arguments because his relativism is, I shall argue, no relativism at all. The fourth and final chapter introduces a position which is both anti-foundational and non-relativistic. The argument hangs on the fact that foundationalism and relativism are akin in invoking a particular doctrine in the philosophy of truth: that what makes sentences true is something that is not itself a linguistic sign. Though the arguments against 'truth-makers' have most often been aimed at correspondence theories of truth, they are equally

potent against non-trivial coherence theories. The upshot is that a semantic characterization of truth is all that we can or should ever hope for.

ii. The Self-Refutation Argument

So what is wrong with relativism? One argument that is as old as Plato maintains that relativism is self-refuting. Relativism may begin from anti-foundationalist premises claiming that there is no position outside history, culture or language which human beings may assume in order to secure privileged access to the indubitable foundations of knowledge. But the relativist does not stop there. Instead, the relativist holds that although we cannot get outside of our skins, truths are still objectively determinable within a framework in virtue of their cohering with other beliefs, or corresponding with reality as it is conceived within a framework. Relativism thus maintains that there is no neutral, objective way of adjudicating between competing knowledge claims. Instead, there is a plurality of possible ways in which knowledge claims might be assessed. According to relativism, then, there may be a plurality of competing and irreconcilable claims, across cultures or historical periods, all of which are true.

The self-refutation argument, subsequently, goes as follows: if relativism is true, then it may be that according to some other means by

which knowledge claims are assessed, relativism is false. Thus, relativism, in even sanctioning the possibility that its contradictory is true, must be false, or at least in principle undecidable, insofar as relativism--in principle-- allows for the possibility that its contradictory is true.

Another closely related objection to relativism which is often confused with the self-refutation argument, claims not that relativism is self-refuting, but that it is inconsistent. This criticism turns not on the possibility that according to some other means of assessing knowledge claims relativism may be false, but on the fact that relativism, to be consistent, and "a complete theory of intellectual activity," must not be construed as absolutely true.[2] The only alternative for the relativist is to argue that relativism is only relatively true, which is supposed to be equally unsatisfactory according to relativism's opponents.[3]

Whether relativism is taken to be absolutely true, that is, as universally valid for all rational beings, or as only relatively true for some individual or community, has a bearing on the self-refutation argument. Only if relativism is taken to be absolutely true in the above sense, does the self-refutation argument go through, for only then will the judgements of others (i.e., that relativism is false) be of concern to the relativist.

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[2] Jack W. Meiland, "On the Paradox of Cognitive Relativism," Metaphilosophy 11, no. 2 (April 1980): 120.

[3] Ibid., 116.

Otherwise, we reach the sceptical conclusion that relativism is true only for the relativist or, in a slightly more interesting case, for members who share her conceptual framework as well.

iii. Elements of Any Relativism

Before turning to specific instances of the self-refutation argument, it may be helpful to bring out the salient features of any relativism arising out of the general formulation of the self-refutation argument above. In what follows, I will be concerned to show that the characteristic features of relativism presented here are either presupposed by the self-refutation argument (i.e., serve as its premises), or follow from these other presupposed elements. The result of defining relativism in terms of the self-refutation argument will be that relativism, as initially set forth, will by definition be self-refuting. I hope that in discussing the more specific forms of relativism that it will become evident that these general features are constitutive of any doctrine worthy of the name.

A. Relativism denies that there is any neutral, objective way of adjudicating between competing knowledge claims. This is the rejection of the foundationalist hope. If this were not presupposed by the self-refutation argument, then it would not be possible for the opponent of relativism to

assert that, on the relativist's view, the truth value of a knowledge claim may differ in accordance with some other means of assessing knowledge claims.

B. Relativism holds, instead, that there are a plurality of ways in which knowledge claims might be assessed, and in the case of some competing knowledge claims, that any choice between them must be arbitrary, or based on something other than rational grounds. It is this element of relativism which leads some to regard it as either a form of incommensurabilism or irrationalism. 'Incommensurabilism' is the view that the advocates on both sides of a dispute may be counted right because they "live in different worlds." If this were the case, the question might arise whether those claims in competition are really in competition at all because they may not be about the same things. 'Irrationalism', on the other hand, holds that the choice between competing knowledge claims is based on something other than good reasons (e.g., on mystical insight, intuition, faith, etc.).

C. Relativism is itself a knowledge claim. It is thus susceptible to being true or false; and, we would assume, is construed by the relativist to be a defensible, rationally justifiable position.

D. Relativism is a meta-theory. By this I mean it is a second-order theory, a theory about theories. Because it is itself a theory (that is, a knowledge claim), it should, as a matter of consistency, be applicable to itself.

E. Relativism is a theory of truth. As such, it purports to give the conditions under which the truth value of a given statement is determined. This also means that relativism is totalizing with regard to truth in that it aims at accounting for the truth conditions of any statement whatsoever.

F. Relativism, being a theory of truth, implies a relativistic ontology. That theories of truth generally imply an ontology of some sort or other is true insofar as what truths are <u>about</u> is a 'world' or 'reality', whether truth conditions are determined by a relation of correspondence with the world or something else. With relativism, the world which truths are true to is not unitary, but instead there are, or may be, a plurality of such worlds. What the world <u>is</u>, according to the advocates of relativism, is determined at least in part by the contributions human beings make to their knowledge of the world, for example, in the form of concepts. Depending on how narrowly or broadly relativism is conceived, the world may be relativized to individuals (as in the case of Protagorean relativism); to

conceptual frameworks based on, say, linguistic difference (as in the case of conceptual relativism); or even more broadly, to a framework including all human beings differentiated, for example, on the basis of biological difference (if we imagine the possibility of alternative conceptual frameworks to range to space aliens or dolphins). I shall follow Michael Krausz in referring to this as the 'range' of relativism.[4]

G. Any statement of relative truth requires the locution 'true for'.[5] If, as relativism asserts, there is a possible plurality of criteria or standards by means of which knowledge claims may be assessed, no longer may we refer to them as being simply true or false. Instead, knowledge claims will only be true or false <u>for</u> an individual or group (i.e., members of a community who share a conceptual framework, and thus employ criteria or standards for adjudicating between competing knowledge claims specific to that community).

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[4] Michael Krausz, "Relativism and Foundationalism: Some Strategies and Distinctions," <u>Metaphilosophy</u> 11, no. 2 (April 1980): 397. See also Michael Krausz, ed. <u>Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation</u> (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 1.

[5] See Chris Swoyer, "True For," in <u>Relativism: Cognitive and Moral</u>, ed. Jack W. Meiland and Michael Krausz (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 94ff.

Having generalized both relativism and the self-refutation argument, I now turn to two specific forms of the doctrine and examine them in light of the self-refutation argument.

iv. *Protagorean Relativism*

> Man is the measure of all things, of those that are, that they are, and of those that are not, that they are not.
> -Protagoras

There is more than one interpretation of what Protagoras means when he says that "Man is the measure of all things. . . ." Yet each of these interpretations has been objected to on the grounds that The Measure doctrine is self-refuting.

Sextus, who supposes himself to be reiterating Socrates' objection in the Theaetetus, interprets the Measure doctrine as the subjectivist thesis, every appearance whatsoever is true. Since one such appearance, however, is that not every appearance is true (and assuming there is someone somewhere for whom this appears to be the case), if the subjectivist thesis is true, then it is false. In other words, if every appearance is true and it appears to someone that not every appearance is true, then 'not every appearance is true' is true. The subjectivist thesis, every appearance whatsoever is true, is thus self-refuting.

Sextus' interpretation leads straightforwardly to a <u>reductio</u> of Protagoras' Measure doctrine, but he fails to take into account an essential element of the Protagorean thesis, namely, the relativizing qualifier 'true for'. Plato's interpretation, on the other hand, does take this important feature into account. Even with this modification, however, the self-refutation argument will work if we suppose Protagoras to have intended his thesis to be a universally valid theory of truth, true for everyone.

In place of the subjectivist thesis is the relativist claim that every judgement (appearance) is true <u>for</u> the person whose judgement it is. Yet, at a crucial moment in the dialogue, Socrates drops the relativizing qualifier. This leaves the subjectivist thesis as stated above. Plato's objection does nevertheless differ subtly from that offered by Sextus. Instead, Protagoras' position requires that he accept as true the opinions of those who judge the opposite of himself. Thus, he is forced by his own lights to concede that the Measure doctrine is both true and false, and thereby is led into contradiction. On Plato's interpretation the Measure doctrine is, therefore, self-refuting in the same way as it was for Sextus. In addition, however, when confronted with contradictory beliefs (e.g. it appears to Socrates that all swans are white while it appears to Theodorus that some swans are not white), Protagoras commits himself to the truth of both claims given his belief that the subjectivist interpretation of the Measure doctrine is true. Protagoras is thus, on Plato's account, led into

contradiction not only in the case of the Measure doctrine, but in the case of any proposition whatsoever (given that there is someone for whom the proposition and its contradiction appear to be the case).

Either way, the Measure doctrine fails if it is interpreted as the subjectivist thesis, every appearance whatsoever is true. The relativist thesis, every judgement is true for the person whose judgement it is, cannot, however, be self-refuting in the same way. For it implies simply that the Measure doctrine, or any other, is true for those who judge it to be true and false for those who judge it to be false. Under such circumstances a Protagorean relativist may hold the doctrine without contradiction.

Commentators have roundly criticized Plato for omitting the relativizing qualifier in the last of a series of three arguments, accusing him of inadvertence, conscious overstatement and perverse dishonesty.[6] M.F. Burnyeat reminds us, however, that the first two arguments do not depend on the omission of the relativizing qualifier, and he thinks it misguided to suppose that Plato was not well aware of its importance. To the contrary, Socrates begins the debate with a direct quotation from Protagoras, "what seems to each person is so for the person to whom it so seems" (Theaetetus 170a, emphasis added). Burnyeat proposes that this claim be formalized as follows: (for all persons x and all propositions p)

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[6] M.F. Burnyeat, "Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's Theaetetus," The Philosophical Review 85, no. 2 (April 1976): 175.

P1. If it seems to x that p, then it is true for x that p.[7]

This, however, is not the whole story. Plato also interprets Protagoras to hold the converse relation:

> P[2]. If it does not seem to x that p, then it is not true for x that p.[8]

According to Plato, Protagoras is claiming that the relation between 'seeming' (judging/believing) and 'being true' is one of equivalence, and not one of mere implication. This is evident in an example Plato offers of the doctrine. Socrates notes at 152b that sometimes the same wind feels cold to one person and not to another. For the first person it seems to x that p and, therefore, is true for x that p. Conversely, for the second person it does not seem that the wind is cold and, therefore, it is not true for x' that p.[9] This example supports the formalization of the Measure doctrine:

> [M]. 'It seems to x that p' both implies and is implied by 'It is true for x that p.'[10]

This interpretation also seems plausible given the latter portion of the Measure doctrine as put forward by Protagoras. Not only is Man "the

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[7] Ibid., 178.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Notice that the example does not state that for the second person 'the wind is not cold' which formally would read 'it seems to x that not-p, and therefore, 'it is true for x that not-p. This is merely a substitution instance of P1 thus eliminating the need for P2. See Ibid.   Note, also, the ambiguity of the phrase 'the same wind'. Whether Protagoras would claim that the two persons felt the 'same' wind is at this point not clear.

[10] Ibid., 179.

measure of all things, of those that are, that they are," but also, "of those that are not, that they are not." It is not clear in translation that the formal relation as stated above is what Protagoras intended, but Plato quite clearly takes this to be the case.

One objection to the notion of relative truth as captured by the Measure doctrine is that it leaves us unable to distinguish between belief and truth. If believing something to be the case is a sufficient and necessary condition for its being true, then ". . . to talk of relative truth is only to talk about belief in an indirect way."[11] As the editors of Relativism: Cognitive and Moral argue:

> If all that the relativists mean by saying that
> statement S is true for Jones is that Jones believes S,
> they have chosen a very misleading and circuitous way
> of saying that Jones believes S.[12]

This objection depends on the assumption that the predicates 'is true for x' and 'seems to x' have the same meaning. It is because the relation takes the form of a biconditional, that the terms are thereby supposed to be synonymous. But this does not follow. If it did, we might be tempted to conclude that the notion of relative truth is either trivial or counter-intuitive insofar as we do in fact distinguish between belief and truth. We must,

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[11] Meiland and Krausz, 82.

[12] Ibid.

therefore, be able to say something about how the meanings of the two predicates differ.

Burnyeat notes that a theory of truth must somehow link our judgements to the 'world': the 'world' for the Protagorean relativist being relativized to each individual.[13] To clarify this link between the relativist theory of truth and ontology, Burnyeat points out that:

> To speak of how things appear to someone is to describe his state of mind, but to say that things are for him as they appear is to point beyond his state of mind to the way things actually are, not indeed in the world <u>tout court</u> (for Protagoras there is no such thing), but in the world as it is for him, in his world.[14]

Stating that some statement p is 'true for x' is, therefore, not simply another way of saying 'it seems to x that p'. Thus, the relation between the two statements is not one of synonymy which would reduce the relativist thesis, M, to a "bare tautology."[15] Instead, to say that 'it is true for x that p' is to tell how things <u>are</u> in x's world.[16] The relativist thesis, M, as well as being a theory of truth, implies a relativist ontology, namely, that each individual lives in his or her own world (i.e. a relativistic world).[17]

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[13] Burnyeat, 181.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 182.

[17] The interpretation of Protagoras' theory offered here is somewhat amiss if we take into account Socrates' characterization of Protagoras' position at 166d. There, Protagoras is made to say:

> As for wisdom and the wise man, I am very far from
> saying that they do not exist. By a wise man I mean
> precisely a man who can change any one of us, when
> what is bad appears and is to him, and make what is
> good appear and be to him (166d).

We may either interpret this to mean that Protagoras has some conception of absolute truth which the wise man (by training is philosophy, or as a gift from the gods, etc.) gets closer to. It is tempting, on this interpretation, to suggest that what Protagoras intends to say is that the wise man knows more true things about the world, but that even he is not really in a position to say which of the things he says are true (absolutely). Thus, a certain scepticism is introduced into the Protagorean position.

More consistently, by the 'wise man' Protagoras may mean, simply, 'sophists like himself'. On this account, Protagoras would not be committing himself to any notion of absolute truth, but would instead be merely commending his own position, and the positions of persuasive rhetoricians like himself. This would be, then, to acknowledge that being able to persuade and influence others requires practical insight into psychology and social affairs--the kinds of things which are discussed in Aristotle's Rhetoric and Machiavelli's The Prince. There is nothing to 'wisdom', on this interpretation, which would commit Protagoras to a conception of absolute truth.

More important, it is said that Protagoras believes that the wise and honest public speakers:

> substitute in the community sound for unsound views
> of what is right. For I hold that whatever practices
> seem right and laudable to any particular state are so,
> for that state, so long as it holds by them (167c).

If Protagoras was committed to such a view, this would count against characterizing Protagoras as a subjectivist because it extends the 'range' of his relativism. I acknowledge, then, that the above interpretation of Protagoras is not exactly right insofar as he does hold to this corollary position regarding truth in states. This further position is in many ways akin to conceptual relativism as discussed in the following sections, so need not be treated separately. I thus also acknowledge that my account of Protagoras is in part heuristic insofar as I have interpreted his position as representative of subjective relativism in order to set in bold relief the contrast between subjective and conceptual relativisms, and the different arguments which may be employed against them.

The first in the series of three arguments found in the <u>Theaetetus</u> supposes that Protagoras may not himself have believed the Measure doctrine as formulated above. The second argument claims that since no one else believes it, it is not true for anyone at all(170e-171a). That is, if Protagoras "did believe it, but the mass of mankind does not agree with him, then . . . it is more false than true by just so much as the unbelievers outnumber the believers"(171a). This sort of apportioning of truth, we would think, would have been "anathema to Protagoras."[18] Yet this line of reasoning is the natural result if truth is to be defined in terms of the judgements of individuals. The first argument does not serve as an objection to the Measure doctrine unless Protagoras himself did not believe it, possible, but unlikely. Coupled with the second argument, however, the Protagorean relativist is reduced to counting heads. Neither is this an objection to the Measure doctrine, though it does reveal where reasoning as a Protagorean might lead.

The third and final argument in the series, Burnyeat submits, mirrors the first two. First, it is necessary to get (the absent) Protagoras to admit that others do in fact judge the Measure doctrine to be false. Socrates then goes on to argue that Protagoras, in admitting this, must join with his opponents in judging the doctrine to be false. For this argument to work, however, we must interpret 'true' in 'every judgement is true' as 'true <u>for</u>',

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[18] Ibid., 183n.

when this is expressed by or on behalf of a relativist. Otherwise we are to understand by 'true', as used by Socrates for example, to mean 'true' (period).

> . . . this, the most charitable hypothesis, asks rather less of one's credulity than the rival suggestions of inadvertence, conscious overstatement, and perverse dishonesty, all of which compound the error they attribute to Plato by making his argument commit the philosophical sin of irrelevance as well.[19]

The hypothesis that 'true' be interpreted as 'true for' when uttered by or on behalf of a relativist makes a crucial distinction between the way in which Protagoras uses the notions of true and false and the way in which his opponents use them. In the first stage of the final argument, Protagoras is forced to admit that his opponents have judged truly in judging the Measure doctrine to be false. In other words, it is true <u>for</u> them that the doctrine is false, not false <u>for</u> them, but false <u>simpliciter</u>. But to admit that the Measure doctrine is false <u>simpliciter</u> for his opponents requires that he also admit that his opponents do not live in their own relativistic worlds.[20] Again, in conceding that his opponents have judged truly in claiming the Measure doctrine is false, Protagoras is compelled to admit that it is true <u>for</u> his opponents that the Measure doctrine is false <u>simpliciter</u>. But, in admitting this, he must also concede that his opponents are not relativistic

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[19] Ibid., 184.

[20] Ibid., 188.

measures, and hence, that the doctrine is not simply false <u>for</u> them but false <u>simpliciter</u>.

The Measure doctrine interpreted as either a subjectivist or relativist thesis is, therefore, self-refuting. In Plato, as it was for Sextus, Protagorean relativism is self-refuting because it is taken to be a universally valid theory of truth. Protagoras, in admitting that the Measure doctrine is false <u>for</u> his opponents, must on this view also admit that the locution 'true (or false) <u>for</u>' is, for his opponents, an illegitimate way of employing the predicate 'is true' (or is 'false').

It will be remembered that this element of universality also entered into the general formulation of the self-refutation argument above (p. 6). But what if Protagoras denied that the Measure doctrine was to be taken as a universally valid theory of truth, or true according to some absolute and objective standard? Suppose, instead, that he took it to be only relatively true. <u>Prima facie</u>, this would appear to be a more consistent response to the demands of relativism. Moreover, the doctrine would no longer be self-refuting. As pointed out previously, this would entail only that the doctrine was true for Protagoras and his supporters, yet false for his opponents. In this there would be no contradiction. The problem is, instead, that there would be nothing to compel his opponents to take his relativism seriously. He may simply be ignored, and we could then, of

course, 'all go home'. So, while we could not refute Protagoras, neither do

we have to listen to him:

> If Protagoras does not speak to the human condition,
> does not put forward his claim that each of us lives in
> our own relativistic world as something we can all
> discuss and, possibly, come to accept, but simply
> asserts solipsistically that he, for his part, lives in a
> world in which this is so, then indeed there is no
> discussing it with him.[21]

This criticism, while straightforward in the case of Protagorean

relativism, is not so in the case of conceptual relativism. Jack Meiland

disagrees that conceptual relativism ought to be regarded as a universally

valid theory of truth, arguing that relativism should apply to itself. He also

thinks that it is a justifiable thesis within a framework, or at least that

there is nothing standing in the way of its being reasonably established.[22]

v. *Conceptual Relativism (I)*

> Relativism is the basic conviction that when we turn to
> the examination of those concepts that philosophers
> have taken to be most fundamental--whether it is the
> concept of rationality, truth, reality, right, the good, or
> norms--we are forced to recognize that in the final
> analysis all such concepts must be understood as
> relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical
> framework, paradigm, form of life, society, or culture.
>
> -Richard Bernstein
> <u>Beyond Objectivism and Relativism</u>

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[21] Ibid., 191.

[22] Meiland's arguments to this effect are taken up in chapter 2.

There are difficulties in applying the self-refutation argument to conceptual relativism primarily due to problems in establishing the empirical thesis that there is someone for whom--according to their conceptual framework--conceptual relativism is false. As we saw, such an empirical thesis is essential to the self-refutation arguments of both Sextus and Plato.

Another difficulty is that we cannot so easily assume that the conceptual relativist takes her theory to be universally valid for all conceptual frameworks. If conceptual relativism were only relatively true, then it may be true in one framework and false in another without contradiction. The conceptual relativist may thus avoid the charge of self-refutation.

Let us first consider conceptual relativism as a universally valid theory. Conceptual relativism may be shown to be self-refuting for the same reasons as Protagorean relativism if the relativist can be compelled to acknowledge that according to some other framework (other than that of the relativist), 'truth is relative to a conceptual framework' is false and relativism is regarded as a universally valid theory of truth. But what if this could not be shown, that according to some other framework, conceptual relativism is false? In this case it would be necessary to fall back on the bare possibility that conceptual relativism is false according to some other

framework. If all empirical considerations are taken into account, and we find that according to all known conceptual frameworks 'truth is relative to a conceptual framework' is true, the conceptual relativist must still accept that according to some other, as-yet unknown framework 'truth is relative to a conceptual framework' may be false. On the self-refutation argument, then, given this immanent possibility, conceptual relativism must either be judged to be false insofar as we could show that according to some conceptual framework, conceptual relativism is false, or insofar as we could not show this, that the truth-value of conceptual relativism is in principle undecidable. That is, according to its own lights, conceptual relativism must allow at least the possibility that it is false according to some alternative conceptual framework. But without this evidence, it is impossible to conclude on the self-refutation argument that relativism is anything more than possibly false.

Let us then take a slightly different tack and look at relativism from the point of view of what it implies: that some statement S may be true according to one conceptual framework and yet false according to another. The implication of relativism cited here is a different, stronger thesis than simply saying that the two statements don't mean the same thing. There are two ways in which we might understand this latter point. First, the statement S in one framework may exactly correspond to a string of marks or vocalizations in another framework, but mean different things.

Thus, for example, a structural description of the sentence 'the sun is shining' may indicate in another framework (or language) the sentence 'call off your dog'. Second, assuming a holistic interpretation of frameworks, 'the sun is shining' may correspond to a sentence in the other framework, and thus, be in some sense a translation, but differ in meaning as a result of the utterance's conceptual context. Beliefs about the sun, what it is to shine, etc. may differ, as may the patterns of inferential relations between these beliefs. So, as a consequence, the two statements differ in meaning (and therefore, would not have really been a translation in the first place). Being different statements, their truth value may, of course, also differ. The latter sort of incommensurability with regards to meaning is characteristic of the standard interpretations of the relativism of Kuhn and Feyerabend.[23]

What we are concerned with here, however, is the possibility that the same statement may be true in one framework and false in another. Assuming these statements appear in different languages, it is necessary first of all to translate one into the other. Only then is it possible to recognize the phrase in the other language as 'the same statement'. As William Newton-Smith argues:

> If s", is a sentence which we hold to be the translation
> of s, then, ex hypothesi we are committed to saying
> that s has for them whatever truth-value s" has for us.
> If we hold s" to be false and they hold that s is true we

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[23] Cf. Gerald Doppelt, "Kuhn's Epistemological Relativism: An Interpretation and Defense," in Meiland and Krausz.

are committed to saying they are just plain mistaken.
There is no question of coherently saying that s is true
for them and its translation, s", is false for us.[24]

This argument, however, presupposes a particular theory of truth, namely that 'truth' is not equivocal, and that it is not relative to a speaker or community of speakers. Assuming this, the argument turns out to be circular, presupposing what it sets out to prove. But this rebuttal misses the point of Newton-Smith's argument. Instead, his point is that this sort of relativism fails from the start, that the very utterance of relativism is incoherent. This is true, however, only if relativism is construed as a universally valid theory of truth. It is not incoherent to assert that truth is relative to a community of speakers, and claim that this assertion is itself only relatively true.

If, on the other hand, it is claimed that the doctrine of relativism is absolutely true, then with this claim at least "we are committed to saying that [relativism] has for them whatever truth value [a translation of the relativist's doctrine into our language] has for us." It is then just a matter of transposing our conclusion of the self-refutation argument onto Newton-Smith's to show that, while conceptual relativism interpreted as a universally valid theory of truth is not self-refuting, it is incoherent. It is self-refuting if there is someone for whom, according to their conceptual

    [24]   William Newton-Smith, "Relativism and the Possibility of Interpretation," in Rationality and Relativism, ed. Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), 108.

framework, relativism is false, but merely undecidable (and thus, not self-refuting) if this evidence is lacking. Given, however, that relativism requires the possibility that according to some other framework relativism is false, it is nonetheless incoherent. For we cannot make sense of the utterance, 'truth is relative to a conceptual framework', being true in our framework and false in another, if relativism is to be interpreted as a universally valid theory of truth ranging over all frameworks.

After showing that Protagorean relativism construed as a universally valid theory of truth is self-refuting, we considered Protagorean relativism conceived as a thesis that is itself only relatively true. It was discovered that relativism on this formulation is not self-refuting, but neither do we need to take it seriously. The next version considered was conceptual relativism construed as a universally valid theory of truth. Here we found that if it can be established that relativism is false for someone according to their framework, then it is self-refuting, but that if such evidence is lacking, it is nonetheless incoherent.

What is left to be considered is conceptual relativism interpreted as a thesis which applies to itself, that is itself only relatively true.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL RELATIVISM (II)

i. Relativism and Self-Vitiation

Jack Meiland, for one, argues that the conceptual relativist does not do herself any favours by arguing that relativism is absolutely true,[1] for doing so creates more problems than it's worth. Not only is it susceptible to the charges outlined in chapter 1, but, we may ask, if relativism is to be taken as absolutely true, how would the relativist go about substantiating that this and not other theories is absolutely true? If relativism were absolutely true, why could not other metaphilosophical doctrines be absolutely true as well? Might it not be the case that the very contradiction of relativism (i.e., absolutism) is absolutely true? Meiland plainly dislikes the possibility that we might have to divide up our theories and beliefs into those which are absolutely true and those which are only relatively true.[2]

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[1] Meiland, 120. Chris Swoyer for another. Cf. Swoyer, 101.

[2] Ibid., 119.

Moreover, there is good reason for the relativist to claim that all of our theories and beliefs are relatively true including statements of relativism [hereafter, conceptual relativism (II)]. This view is often taken by opponents of relativism to be an admission of failure, but it is not at all clear why this should be the case. For Protagoras to suggest that the Measure doctrine is only relatively true, would lead him into a subjectivism where relativism is true only for himself and a few devout followers. As was pointed out, there is nothing in this view that would compel us to take it seriously. But neither is Protagoras's fall into subjectivism self-refuting. In fact, it is peculiarly immune from criticism since the possibility for dialogue has been severed.

Conceptual relativism (II) is similarly immune from the self-refutation argument. It differs distinctly, however, from Protagorean relativism insofar as it leaves open the possibility of objectivity within a framework. Conceptual relativism (II) thus demands that the traditional conception of objectivity be modified, away from its universalist pretensions, and towards the cultural and historical. This does not mean that objectivity must be given up altogether for consensus, but rather that its boundaries be narrowed to suit divergent, historical and cultural communities. Given the relativistic construal of conceptual relativism, it is still possible that the non-relativist, who shares the relativist's framework, may be persuaded of the truth of the doctrine. Notice what sort of objectivity would then be

attainable. Objectivity could still, as now, be tied to a conception of rational persuasion, but with the proviso that what was rational for one community may not be so for another and, thus, that nothing like the universalistic objectivity of the Enlightenment would be possible. If it happened that all such communities shared some particular belief, and whose styles of reasoning all gave to this belief something like the force of a necessary truth, then this would still, on the relativist's view, be a contingent matter. Neither would it preclude the existence of some as-yet unknown framework according to which this belief was not, given their style of reasoning, true. So the relativist who conceives her relativism as only relatively true, not only cannot be accused of self-refutation, but neither can she simply be ignored.

This brings us to a second series of arguments voiced against the relativist. Meiland classifies them as self-vitiating, by which he means attempts to undercut conceptual relativism (II) by arguing that in some way "the doctrine prevents itself from achieving its purposes."[3] Meiland considers three such arguments put forward by Roger Trigg, Gordon Kaufman and Ernst Nagel, which he encapsulates as follows:

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[3] Ibid., 121. Cf. Edward Beach, "The Paradox of Cognitive Relativism Revisited: A Reply to Jack W. Meiland," Metaphilosophy 15, no. 1 (January 1984): 1-15.

(1) There is no possibility of a non-relativist accepting relativism [Trigg].
(2) The non-relativist can have no reason--can have no rational basis--for accepting relativism [Kaufman].

(3). The relativist can have no motive in uttering the doctrine of relativism, particularly in uttering it to a non-relativist [Nagel].[4]

Meiland's case against the charge that there is no chance of the non-relativist being converted to relativism begins by pointing out that there is nothing either logically or psychologically standing in the way of such a conversion. It is possible, however, to make out a stronger charge. Meiland bolsters Trigg's argument by suggesting that relativism may imply a brand of historical determinism such that the non-relativist would have no freedom to alter her opinion of relativism. To get this argument going, it must be assumed that the relativist views our historical and cultural commitments as determinate and fixed. But, it might be argued, such conversions may be built into the logic of these histories, in which case such conversions would not only be possible, but--under the right conditions--inevitable. So, whether we can assume determinism on the part of the relativist is not necessarily problematic. In any case, it seems that a "more sophisticated understanding of the notion of a historical and cultural situation" is in order.[5] "A situation at a particular time could be quite complex with

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 122.

several different currents running through it, some of which produce relativism and others non-relativism."[6] Versions of relativism that are not deterministic will, of course, have no problem allowing for the non-relativist's conversion.

So the non-relativist might in principle be converted to relativism upon hearing the doctrine. Is not this the problem, that such conversions must be 'religious' rather than based on good reasons? The relativist typically argues for his view, which suggests that the relativist expects that the non-relativist may be rationally persuaded.[7] If this possibility is ruled out, then we may well accuse the relativist's position of being self-vitiating. First, we must ask the non-relativist to loosen his grip on the traditional, universalist notions of rationality and objectivity. As has been indicated ad nauseam, the conceptual relativist can account for objectivity within a framework given an acknowledged base of shared presuppositions. For anyone who shares these presuppositions, assertions following from them will be true. The non-relativist may, therefore, already hold presuppositions from which relativism follows. It is thus just a matter of pointing out to the non-relativist that she holds such presuppositions, whether shared by the relativist or not. As Chris Swoyer asks:

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 123.

> If the relativist can make such a position [conceptual relativism (II)] plausible, he can then add that his claims are no worse off than most of the other things we hold true. And if relativism's claims are as secure as the myriad claims that are on solid ground for us normally, what more could be demanded?[8]

Furthermore, there is nothing in the relativist's position which disallows him from arguing for his position.[9] Specifically, it is not part of the relativist's view that relativism cannot follow as the conclusion of an argument.

So much for the charge that relativism cannot allow for the non-relativist's conversion on the basis of good reasons. What about the claim that the relativist can have no motive for uttering the doctrine of relativism? This charge assumes either that relativism results in radical subjectivism, in which case, as has already been concluded, we would not be compelled to take the relativist seriously. This assumption cannot, however, be maintained for reasons already given. Or it assumes that

> . . . only that which is purely objective or absolute is worth expressing and (what is a different thing) worth communicating. This assumption would, of course, rule out literature, art and music, poetry, and in general the expression of that subjective experience of the world which constitutes the greatest part of our lives and gives our lives their meaning and significance.[10]

Relativism is thus not self-vitiating in any of the ways considered.

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[8] Swoyer, 101.

[9] Meiland, 125.

[10] Ibid., 126.

ii. Davidson on Conceptual Relativism

From the previous section we may conclude that conceptual relativism (II) is a thesis that may justifiably be argued for, and not just among relativists. Consequently, we may ask what reasons this sort of relativist offers in favour of her position. The arguments typically begin with the recognition of the actual diversity of belief existing among different cultures or various periods in our own culture's past.[11] Since the relativist also rejects the view that it is possible to take up a standpoint outside history and culture (the standpoint of Kant's transcendental ego, for example), the relativist concludes that objectivity, if it is to be attainable at all, must be obtained at the level of something less universal, like language, history or culture. Put thus, relativism appears as an explanatory thesis that attempts to account for diversity of belief within the context of a theoretical bias against universalism. The predominant versions end up, in one way or another, making truth relative to the cultural or historical. In effect, this move requires the relativist to posit what we might call a 'cultural ego'--a Zeitgeist which the members of a culture or epoch share. In the specific form of conceptual relativism we are discussing, it is the notion of a conceptual framework that plays this role. One thing that the relativist must make sense of, then, is the notion of a conceptual framework

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[11] Meiland and Krausz, 1.

and, furthermore, of a diversity of such frameworks as this is a basic requirement of conceptual relativism. If the notion of a conceptual framework makes no sense, then neither will it make sense to say that 'truth is relative to a conceptual framework'. Similarly, if it makes no sense to say that there is more than one framework, then there are no grounds for asserting relativism. It is these problems that Donald Davidson considers in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." As he argues, "conceptual relativism is a heady and exotic doctrine or would be if we could make good sense of it."[12]

Davidson's argument begins by asking us to "accept the doctrine that associates having a language with having a conceptual scheme."[13] This seems prima facie probable insofar as conceptual frameworks, as we have understood them thus far, share certain salient features with natural languages: they are plural; they are social, that is, shared and intersubjective, and as such allow for a measure of objectivity; they are bound up with the notion of truth; and concepts may be construed as linguistic entities. Furthermore, we have been thinking about frameworks in which, on the self-refutation argument, it would be possible to formulate

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[12] Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," in Meiland and Krausz, 66. Emphasis added.

[13] Ibid., 67.

an attitude about relativism as well as about antelopes and quarks, and the kind of thing in which we could do this would be something like a language.

On the other hand, it may be possible to associate conceptual schemes with sets of non-linguistic mental categories. Davidson rejects the attempt. "For then we would have to imagine the mind, with its ordinary categories, operating with a language with _its_ organizing structure."[14] This being the case, the "original problem is needlessly doubled."[15] Otherwise, it is only wordlessly that the mind comes to grips with reality[16]--a view that surely cannot be maintained because, with any such theory, ". . . the mind is divorced from the traits that constitute it."[17]

Associating languages with conceptual schemes is thus "a way of focussing on criteria of identity for conceptual schemes" because "speakers of different languages may share a conceptual scheme provided there is a way of translating one language into the other."[18] As for the attempt, required by relativism, to make sense of the notion of a conceptual scheme that is radically different from our own:

> It is tempting to take a very short line indeed:
> nothing, it may be said, could count as evidence that

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 68.

[18] Ibid., 67.

some form of activity could not be interpreted in our
language that was not at the same time evidence that
that form of activity was not speech behavior. If this
were right, we probably ought to hold that a form of
activity that cannot be interpreted as language in our
language is not speech behavior. Putting matters in
this way is unsatisfactory, however, for it comes to
little more than making translatability into a familiar
tongue a criterion of languagehood. As fiat, the thesis
lacks self-evidence; if it is a truth, as I think it is, it
should emerge as the conclusion of an argument.[19]

Davidson's basic argument, then, goes something as follows: If

translatability into a familiar tongue (say, English) is a criterion for

something being a language, then either: something is not translatable into

English, in which case it is not a language (conceptual scheme), or it is

translatable, in which case it is not something so different as to constitute

an alternative conceptual scheme radically different from our own.

We have yet, however, to establish that something is a language

if and only if it is translatable into English. Granted that this can emerge

as the conclusion of an argument, the case will be made against making

sense of the notion of a conceptual scheme radically different from our own.

First, Davidson presents paradigmatic examples of relativism and shows

them to involve the notion of translation as the test of difference between

conceptual schemes. He then considers two promising alternatives to trans-

latability for criteria of languagehood, but finds that both involve or entail

translatability after all.

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[19] Ibid., 68.

Benjamin Lee Whorf urges that because language organizes experience, that is, classifies and arranges it:

> We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, <u>unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar or can in some way be calibrated.</u>[20]

Or as Thomas Kuhn argues:

> In the transition from one theory to the next words change their meanings or conditions of applicability in subtle ways. Though most of the same signs are used before and after the revolution--e.g. force, mass, element, compound cell--the ways in which some of them attach to nature has somehow changed. <u>Successive theories are thus, we [Feyerabend and I] say, incommensurable.</u>[21]

Davidson glosses 'calibration' in the passage from Whorf as 'translation', and 'incommensurable' as 'not intertranslatable'.[22] He concludes this part of his argument quoting Quine:

> The test of difference remains failure or difficulty of translation: ". . . to speak of that remote medium [alternative conceptual scheme] as radically different from ours is to say no more than that the translations do not come smoothly." Yet the roughness may be so

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[20] Benjamin Lee Whorf, <u>Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf</u>, ed. J.B. Carroll (Cambridge, Mass.: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1956), 55. Emphasis added.

[21] Thomas Kuhn, "Reflections on My Critics," in <u>Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge</u>, ed. I. Lakatos & A. Musgrave (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 266, 267. Emphasis added.

[22] Davidson, 73.

great that the alien has <u>an "as yet unimagined pattern</u> <u>beyond individuation.</u>"[23]

These, then, are claims made by those who are taken as the paradigmatic exemplars of conceptual relativism. In their view, not only does translation, or something very close to it, turn out to be the test of difference between conceptual schemes, but this, in turn, supports the view that associates having a conceptual scheme with having a language, since translation is typically something we do with languages.

Davidson then goes on to see whether or not it is possible to develop a criterion of languagehood that does not involve translatability. The alternatives he considers are reminiscent of Hegel's discussion of knowledge as medium and instrument in the opening pages of the <u>Pheno-</u> <u>menology</u>. Davidson claims that according to these alternatives language is supposed to stand in a certain relationship to reality or experience.

The dominant metaphors or images fall into two broad categories. The first claims that languages divide up, systematize or organize the stream of experience, nature, reality, etc. Furthermore, what might require organization falls into two classes: reality and experience. First, reality. As a single object, reality cannot intelligibly be 'organized' unless it has already been individuated to some degree, for it is not single entities but

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[23]   Ibid.   Quotations from W.V.O. Quine, "Speaking of Objects," in <u>Ontological Relativity and Other Essays</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 25 & 24 respectively. Emphasis added.

pluralities that get organized. Moreover, to recognize objects individuated in another language that are not in our own requires a common ontology. If, on the other hand, the two languages have a common ontology, then they must be at least partially intertranslatable, and thus not 'radically' different. The metaphor of language organizing reality is, therefore, not a wholly different criterion from translatability.

If it is experience that is to be organized, then again it may be argued that organization is not something we do with singular entities. The notion of organization only makes sense in connection with pluralities. As well, Davidson inquires how something could count as a language which organized <u>only</u> experiences. Surely objects need organizing as well.[24]

The second class of metaphors claim that languages or conceptual schemes help us to cope with, predict, account for, face, or fit the tribunal of experience. Unlike the image of organizing, which can be made out by pairing words with things or with bits of experience, to say that language predicts or helps us cope with experience or reality involves whole sentences. For it is sentences that help us to cope with or predict things in the world around us.

A sentence may be said to fit our experience if it is borne out by the evidence. But this "notion of fitting the totality of experience, like the notions of fitting the facts, or being true to the facts, adds nothing intel-

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[24] Ibid., 75.

ligible to the simple concept of being true."[25] Thus, we might formulate a criterion of languagehood that differs from translatability as follows: something is a language or conceptual scheme if it is for the most part true (allowing for differences in detail).[26] That is, a language fits or faces up to the tribunal of experience if the sentences of that language are borne out by the evidence and, thus, are true.

Davidson questions, however, whether we can understand the notion of truth independently of that of translation. He argues that we cannot:

> We recognize sentences like "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white" to be trivially true. Yet the totality of such English sentences uniquely determines the extension of the concept of truth for English. Tarski generalized this observation and made it a test for theories of truth: according to Tarski's convention T, a satisfactory theory of truth for a language L must entail, for every sentence s of L, a theorem of the form "s is true if and only if p" where "s" is replaced by a description of s and "p" by s itself if L is English, and by a translation of s into English if L is not English.[27]

Since convention T, our best intuition as to how truth is used, makes essential use of the notion of translation into a familiar idiom:

> . . . there does not seem to be much hope for a test that a conceptual scheme is radically different from ours if

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[25] Ibid., 75-76.

[26] Ibid., 76.

[27] Ibid.

that test depends on the assumption that we can divorce the notion of truth from that of translation.[28]

Since both of the dominant images relating language to the world are not able to supply us with a criterion which does not, at least implicitly, involve translatability, we are left with no feasible candidates as alternatives. Taking translatability as our criterion, then, we would not be in a position to recognize as a language something we could not translate into our own.

It should be noted that Davidson is not arguing that this is an a priori constraint on languagehood.[29] That is, it is not in the nature of the thing itself that a language be translatable into English. This being the case, does it not seem that whether a language is translatable into our own is contingent on the capacities of domestic translators? Imagine, for example, a case where alien speakers ostensibly speak a language, that is, periodically direct complex vocalizations at one another. Try as we may, however, we are not able to even come close to understanding what they are saying. What does this imply: that the aliens are not speaking a language? This conclusion does not seem foregone. Even though we have made the effort and failed, we may still say that it _seems_ like they are speaking a

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Robert Kraut, "The Third Dogma," in Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson, ed. Ernst LePore (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1986), 403.

language or that they <u>might</u> be speaking a language.[30] If a language were in principle untranslatable, it may be the case that we would not want to call it a language at all. But it is not clear what would count as evidence for this. In the case we are considering, the most we may conclude is that we could not recognize something as a language that was radically different from our own, which is exactly the conclusion we at present want to draw. We could not recognize a language as radically different because, in such a case, we would not be in a position to specify anything about the supposed language in question. That is, there would be nothing that we could recognize as individuated in their language that was not in our own, as this would require a common ontology on the basis of which such differentiations could be made.

Supposing, then, that we are justified in associating conceptual schemes with languages or with sets of intertranslatable languages, which I argued is reasonable, we could not on the present argument recognize a language that was radically different from our own. Thus, the conceptual relativist cannot make sense of a diversity of conceptual frameworks.[31]

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[30] See Richard Rorty, "World Well Lost," in <u>Consequences of Pragmatism</u> (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 6ff; Philip E. Devine, "Relativism," <u>The Monist</u> 67, no.3 (July 1984): 412ff. Both Rorty and Devine argue to this effect.

[31] This may look like a verificationist argument as, in fact, Rorty construes it. The argument, however, does not hang on the fact that because we could not 'verify' the existence of a language that was radically different from our own, that such languages are, therefore, an impossibility.

As for the very idea of a conceptual scheme, Davidson argues:

> It would be wrong to summarize by saying we have
> shown how communication is possible between people
> who have different schemes. . . . It would be equally
> wrong to announce the glorious news that all mankind-
> -all speakers of language, at least--share a common
> scheme and ontology. For if we cannot intelligibly say
> that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly
> say that they are one.[32]

As it stands, this is a <u>non</u> <u>sequitur</u> unless the notion of a conceptual scheme

is in some way dependent on the existence of alternative schemes. But this

is not the case. Kant, for example, held that there was only one. There are

of course other reasons for rejecting the Kantian project, but the arguments

presented thus far do not call into question the idea of a monolithic

conceptual scheme shared by all rational beings.

What I have been attempting to show to this point is that

Davidson effectively argues against the possibility of there being a plurality

of conceptual schemes. Paradoxically, nine years earlier, Stephan Korner

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All we could legitimately conclude from such an argument is that we could
not identify as a language something that was radically different from our
own. Of course, this does not imply it is not a language, but simply that we
could not identify it as such. Rather, what Davidson has done is to turn
translatability into a criterion of languagehood, and therefore, to make this
specific form of verifiability essential to languagehood. Such a move
warrants the much stronger conclusion concerning the very existence of a
language radically different from our own, and thus avoids the <u>non</u> <u>sequitur</u>
of the typical verificationist argument.

[32] Davidson, 79.

argued in the opposite direction: not that there must be more than one conceptual scheme, but that the uniqueness of any one scheme cannot be demonstrated. Thus, he claimed to show "The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions"--impossible, because they require that the unique apriority of a schema be demonstrated which, Korner claims, cannot be done.

The point of a transcendental argument is to show the possibility of knowledge that is both synthetic and a priori, that is, that certain concepts (a conceptual scheme) are a necessary condition for the possibility of some region of experience. A transcendental argument, then, attempts to establish the conditions necessary for the possibility of some feature of our experience, and thereby, with John Kekes, "offer a justification for certain descriptions of the external world."[33] Specifically, the paradigmatic example of a transcendental argument, Kant's Transcendental Deduction, is an attempt to show "the necessary applicability of certain categories to the world of experience;"[34] or, in other words, that a certain "categorial schema" is a necessary condition of our experience having certain features.[35] In general, Korner writes:

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[33] John Kekes, "The Scandal of Philosophy," The International Philosophical Quarterly 12 (1972): 513.

[34] Charles Taylor, "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (March 1979): 152.

[35] Stephan Korner, "The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions," The Monist 51 (1967): 318.

> A transcendental deduction . . . [is] a logically sound demonstration of the reasons why a particular categorial schema is not only in fact, but also necessarily employed, in differentiating a region of experience.[36]

What we are looking into, then, is whether particular concepts or categories are not only sufficient but necessary for our experience having certain features that ostensibly it does in fact have.

Before proceeding with a transcendental argument, it must first be shown that with regards to the region of experience under consideration, such an argument is appropriate. In other words, ". . . a method of prior differentiation of the region must first be exhibited and shown to belong to a schema."[37] So, for example:

> [Kant] held that of all the methods of prior differentiation of experience which he investigated, only those of external and practical differentiation--and not, for example, any method of aesthetic differentiation--belong to categorial schemata.[38]

To reiterate, Kant's Transcendental Deduction is intended to show that a particular categorial schema is the necessary condition of some experience having certain features, and this presupposes that, for example, methods of external and practical differentiation belong to categorial schemata.

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 319.

[38] Ibid.

Kant had at least two goals in mind in developing his Transcendental Deduction. The first was to answer the question "How are a priori synthetic judgements possible?" that is, how is it possible to have knowledge about experience prior to experience? The pat answer, and that which suggests the need for a transcendental argument, is that this kind of knowledge is possible because we bring to experience the categories of the understanding. Experience is thus to be understood as in part constituted by the activity of the knowing subject. A judgement is synthetic insofar as it is not based on reason alone (i.e., does not simply involve an examination of the meaning of concepts), and therefore must be based on, and be about, experience. On the other hand, the truths that synthetic a priori judgements yield are not merely contingent but necessary, and hence, a priori. Since necessity cannot be deduced from experience, the categories under which experience is subsumed must be brought to experience by the knowing subject.

A related goal was to reassert that nature operated according to a certain lawfulness and, therefore, of necessity. In the words of Barry Stroud:

> Kant recognized two distinct questions which could be asked about concepts. The first--the "question of fact--amounts to "How do we come to have this concept, and what is involved in our having it?". This is the task of the "physiology of the understanding" as practiced by Locke. But even if we knew what experiences or mental operations had been required in order for us to have the concepts we do, Kant's second

question--the "question of right"--would still not have been answered, since we would not yet have established our right to, or our <u>justification</u> for, the possession and employment of those concepts. Although concepts can be derived from experience by various means, they might still lack "objective validity," and to show that this is not so is the task of the transcendental deduction.[39]

Accordingly, it becomes necessary for Kant to show that the categorial schema of the Transcendental Deduction is necessary for the possibility of any method of external differentiation and, therefore, of our experience having certain features, both insofar as the Transcendental Deduction is supposed to show how synthetic knowledge can be possible a priori, and serve as a justification for certain, 'objectively valid' descriptions of the external world.

As Korner suggests:

Before one can show <u>why</u> any and every possible method belongs to the schema one has to show <u>that</u> any and every possible method belongs to it. One must, as I shall say demonstrate the schema's uniqueness.[40]

To demonstrate a schema's uniqueness must involve showing that one schema and no other can serve as the condition for the possibility of some feature of experience. If a schema's uniqueness is not demonstrable, then, although it might be a sufficient condition, it could not be shown to be

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[39]   Barry Stroud, "Transcendental Arguments," <u>The Journal of Philosophy</u> 65, no. 9 (1968): 241.

[40] Korner, 320.

necessary. Thus, we could neither assert the unique apriority of the schema, nor use it to justify the employment of only those methods belonging to that schema and not others.

There are three ways in which a schema's uniqueness might be demonstrated without recourse to "e.g., some mystical insight or some special logic."[41] Instead of going fully into Korner's arguments, I shall just briefly state these possible methods and why they will not work. First, we might compare the schema with undifferentiated experience, but this presupposes that we can make sense of the notion of 'undifferentiated experience'. It seems impossible that we could formulate such a comparison without making explicit some background method of prior differentiation. Second, we might compare this schema with all of its possible competitors, but this would require that they all could be exhibited and, of course, there is no way we could be certain that they all had been exhibited. Finally, we might examine the schema from within itself. This method, however, could only show that the schema functions in differentiating a region of experience, and is therefore sufficient, but it could not show that it is the only possible schema, and thus, necessary. "It is the impossibility of demonstrating a schema's uniqueness," Korner writes, "that renders transcendental deductions impossible."[42]

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[41] Ibid., 321.

[42] Ibid.

On Davidson's argument it was seen that we cannot make sense

of the notion of a conceptual scheme radically different from our own.

Conversely, Korner's argument purports to show that there is no method

available whereby we could demonstrate that there was only one. Davidson

is not, however, concerned primarily with rejecting the idea that there might

be alternative conceptual schemes radically different from our own, but with

calling into question 'the very idea' of a conceptual scheme per se. In "On

the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," these arguments appear in-

separable. In a later reflection on this work, however, he does distinguish

between the two. Of the latter he says:

> But more important, it is argued that if we reject the
> idea of an uninterpreted source of evidence no room is
> left for a dualism between scheme and content.
> Without such a dualism we cannot make sense of
> conceptual relativism.[43]

iii. The Scheme-Content Distinction

The distinction between scheme and content plays a crucial role

in the articulation of conceptual relativism. As we saw, the exemplars of

conceptual relativism regard failure of translation as an indication of

substantial difference between conceptual schemes. In order to articulate

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[43] Donald Davidson, Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (New York: Clarendon Press, 1984), xviii.

this difference in the absence of an accurate translation manual, however, we might suppose that there is something outside all schemes, supplying a point of view from which it is possible to compare schemes and, thus, to say how schemes differ. It is unproblematic that the conceptual relativist is committed to the notion of a scheme or framework, for this is built into the position itself. It is, however, equally essential that the conceptual relativist have a notion of content (the world, reality, experience, etc.) over which schemes range, and which makes massive differences between schemes intelligible.

It must be understood that Davidson is ever and always positioning himself vis-a-vis Quine. Though there are a number of candidates for this 'something outside all schemes', some of which Davidson discusses in his paper, he settles on that which Quine inherited from his predecessors: empirical content. Though the role that empirical content plays for Quine and his predecessors is very different from the role it plays for relativists like Kuhn and Feyerabend, they are nonetheless talking about the same thing.[44] Davidson's argument is that we cannot make sense of this notion that makes possible talk about massive differences between conceptual schemes. And, if we cannot make out the dualism between scheme and content, neither can we make sense of the very idea of a

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[44] I consider the potential objection here in chapter 4, section 4.

conceptual scheme. I return now to Quine's predecessors to get a better look at the notion of empirical content.

Characteristic of the positivism of the early analytic tradition was the view that the domain of philosophy is the analysis and clarification of meanings. Meaning was supposed to stand in a certain relation to truth, viz., it was thought necessary to know what a statement meant before its truth value could be determined. Hence, philosophy was thought of as logically and epistemologically prior to the methods employed by the scientist which tell us, not what sentences mean, but which are true and false.[45] At the centre of this project was the distinction made between analytic and synthetic truths: those true in virtue of the meanings of the terms used, and those true in virtue of the way the world is. Consequently, the tools of philosophical analysis (logic and set theory), statements of which were supposed to fall into the analytic category, were assigned primacy over the various subject matter of the empirical sciences.[46] In other words, philosophy was regarded as 'foundational' in relation to the empirical disciplines.

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[45] George. D. Romanos, Quine and Analytic Philosophy (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 22.

[46] Ibid., 2.

Logical positivism was also a reaction to idealist metaphysics. This renewed interest in Kant, who had succeeded in marginalizing metaphysics by setting it outside the bounds of possible knowledge. Kant's view that we can never know reality or nature as it is in itself but, instead, that the limits of knowledge extend only to reality as mediated by concepts, was profoundly influential. In order to bridge the gap between Mind and reality, it became necessary to posit a third thing, viz. experiences, intuitions, perceptions or sensations as intermediaries between our beliefs and the world. Since it is not possible to know what reality is like in itself, the world could, it was supposed, be known only through these intermediaries.

The early analytic tradition was, therefore, foundational in another sense, for observation, occasion or protocol sentences were thought simply to report what is perceived. As Davidson points out, some philosophers:

> tried to attain the same results [as Hume] by reducing the gap between perception and judgements to zero . . . by claiming that [certain propositions] have exactly the same epistemic content as a sensation.[47]

Such reports, assuming our senses do not systematically fail us, were thought to afford a degree of certainty for empirical claims which could then serve as the foundations for more complex empirical claims. The basis of

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[47] Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in LePore, 310.

such foundations, however, the source of justification for these basic beliefs, remained the sensations themselves. The image, then, is that sensory experience serves to ground our basic beliefs, that is, tie them directly to the world. These foundational beliefs--whose epistemic content was thought, as it were, to have the same extension as the sensations to which they refer-- were thus supposed to be the meeting place of language and the world. Then, on the basis of such beliefs, it was thought possible to construct-- systematically, in accordance with the principles of logic whose primacy has already been noted--ever more complex beliefs. So, protocol sentences and the like were supposed to serve as the indubitable foundations for all empirical knowledge.[48]

We come closest to understanding the notion of emirical content if we think of it in terms of of Locke's impressions, Kant's intuitions, or Russell's sense-data. That is, empirical content is experience uncontaminated by language or mental categories. We may speak of the empirical content of belief, i.e. that part of belief which refers, or is in some

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[48] As I have described it, this turns out to be a two-fold foundationalism. In the first place, sensory experience is thought to justify and, therefore, ground those beliefs captured by observation sentences and the like. Second, these beliefs are intended to serve as the foundation for all empirical knowledge insofar as this knowledge is inferentially justified on the basis of these basic beliefs. As we will see, the problem is not with beliefs being justified on the basis of other beliefs, almost all epistemological theories are foundational in this, trivial sense. Rather, problems arise when it is argued that perceptual experience justifies--non-inferentially--our most basic beliefs.

other way related to the objects of experience. This only makes sense, however, if we think that perceptions are already endowed with unique sensory content which, prior to language, differentiates one perception from another. Furthermore, we must think of bits of language as being able to capture, without remainder, the unique sensory contents of a sensation.

The analytic-synthetic distinction makes essential use of the notion of empirical content. In fact the distinction can be made out solely in terms of this notion. Either sentences (judgements, statements, propositions) have empirical content and, thus, are synthetic, or they do not and are analytic.[49] In "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," Quine called into question the notion of analyticity: the thought that it is possible to isolate those sentences that are true purely in virtue of the meaning of their terms. Since then, Quine has maintained that this is not possible because language confronts experience holistically, and thus, leaves us no way of determining the empirical content of sentences taken in isolation.[50] The conclusion which Quine draws, however, is not that we are unable to isolate sentences uncontaminated by empirical content, but that there are no such sentences to be discovered. That is, if language is to be construed holistically as a fine-grained web or network of beliefs, desires, etc., when empirical content

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[49] Davidson, "Conceptual Scheme," 71.

[50] Bjorn T. Ramberg, Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language: An Introduction (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1989), 11.

gets into the system, all of our beliefs become more or less directly contaminated. So, although it is possible to maintain both the analytic-synthetic and scheme-content distinctions as the logical positivists did, it is also possible to retain the latter while rejecting the former. The difference is this: making sense of the analytic-synthetic distinction demands that we be able to pick out the empirical content of beliefs sentence by sentence. We may, however, reject this possibility and still claim that it is possible to "ascribe definite empirical content to a body of sentences."[51]

To give up the notion of determinate meaning, according to Davidson, "is to give up the idea that we can clearly distinguish between theory and language."[52] In other words, meaning, instead of being fixed by the structure of language, its rules or conventions, ought to be conceived as changing with changes in theory (belief).[53] Elsewhere Davidson argues that belief and meaning ought to be construed as interdependent notions.[54] Not only can we not know what someone believes without also knowing what her utterances mean, neither can we understand what a person means

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[51] Ibid., 12.

[52] Davidson, "Conceptual Scheme," 70.

[53] Ibid.

[54] See Donald Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," 27; "Radical Interpretation," 134, 137; "Belief and the Basis of Meaning," 142, 144, in Davidson, Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation. Also See Davidson's "Conceptual Scheme," 67, 77; "A Coherence Theory," 314-315.

without knowing a great deal about her beliefs.[55] For example, one way

of showing we understand a word is to use that word in potentially true

sentences. The interdependence of meaning and belief is, of course, a

consequence of Davidson's holism: that words and sentences mean what

they do only in the context of a language.

Although Quine rejected the analytic-synthetic distinction made

by his predecessors, Davidson claims that he still holds to the scheme-

content distinction, which he refers to as the "third dogma" of empiricism.[56]

He concludes that

> It is possible, as we have seen, to give up meanings
> and analyticity while retaining the idea of language as
> embodying a conceptual scheme. Thus in place of the
> dualism of the analytic-synthetic we get the dualism of
> conceptual scheme and empirical content.[57]

The connection between conceptual relativism and the scheme-

content distinction is this: if empirical content is understood as direct

awareness of an as-yet uninterpreted reality, then it may be the case that

radically different languages with their various ontologies divide up this

perceptual 'experience' in different ways. Two different communities may

thus 'live in different worlds', and so not be able to communicate with each

other because their most basic concepts are incommensurable. Still, we

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[55] Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," 27.

[56] Davidson, "Conceptual Scheme," 72.

[57] Ibid.

could not conclude from this that their beliefs about the things individuated by their ontology were not largely true. So relativism opens up the possibility that the referential expressions of their language are "largely true but not translatable."[58]

Pointing out this connection thus affords the opportunity of connecting up the scheme-content distinction with the issue of translatability. To be able to translate the utterances of others into our own language is nothing other than to understand what those utterances mean. The conceptual relativist argues that we might not be able to translate the utterances of a speaker who does not share our conceptual scheme, but whose beliefs may, nonetheless, be by and large true. What is required of conceptual relativism (II) is, therefore, that meaning and truth be separable in this way. As was suggested, this is not Davidson's view. Rather, he inverts the classical theories of meaning and truth. Those theories claim that it is first necessary to know what a sentence means before we can go about 'verifying' whether it is true. Davidson, on the other hand, maintains that truth is a primitive semantic concept, essential for interpreting the meanings of words and sentences, both foreign and domestic. Davidson, following Quine, does not think that we learn which of the sentences we commonly use (i.e. mundane indicatives, those often cited as paradigmatic examples of protocol or observation sentences) are true, only after we have

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[58] Ibid., 76. Cf. Rorty, <u>Mirror of Nature</u>, 301.

learned what they mean. Instead, to learn what words and the sentences in which they appear mean, is to interpret utterances in light of the conditions under which they were uttered and, according to Davidson, this requires that we assume, at least initially, that the utterances to be interpreted are true.

Davidson's conception of truth is, as Putnam remarks, "radically non-epistemic," which is to say, that saying what truth is (which is just another way of asking what the predicate 'is true' means for speakers of English), is a matter of semantics, rather than epistemology.[59] Davidson argues that a semantic theory is all that is needed, and precludes what is required of correspondence theories, namely, a justificatory relation between words and the world. On Davidson's theory, the extension of the truth predicate in English is uniquely definable in terms of Tarski's notion of 'satisfaction.' Furthermore, it is Tarski's recursive account of satisfaction which serves to call into question the notion of empirical content and, subsequently, the distinction between "total scheme (or language) and uninterpreted content."[60]

For Tarski, the notion of 'truth' is supervenient on that of 'satisfaction'. Whereas satisfaction applies to all sentential functions, truth applies only to sentences proper. The distinction is that between open and

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[59] Ramberg, 9.

[60] Davidson, "Conceptual Scheme," 70.

closed sentences. An open sentence is a sentential function with one or more free variables such a 'x is white', 'x sees y', etc. A closed sentence, on the other hand, is a sentential function with no free variables such as 'snow is white', 'Xerxes sees Yentl', and so on. Clearly, truth comes into play only in the latter, closed sentences. Closed sentences, then, constitute substitution instances of open sentences. It is, according to Tarski, 'infinite sequences' of objects which satisfy each sentential function, or, in the case of sentential functions with more than one free variable, ordered pairs of n-tuples.[61] With closed sentences, on the other hand, since there are no free variables, they are satisfied by all sequences, or by none. A closed sentence is, therefore, true if and only if it is satisfied by all sequences, and false if it is satisfied by none.[62] Thus, there is no way of distinguishing between true sentences on the basis of some object or set of objects which 'makes' them true. In other words, the result of defining the predicate 'is true' in terms of satisfaction is that a true sentence is one which is satisfied by all

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[61] The use of the term 'infinite' here, is not meant to reflect the infinite number of possible objects which might satisfy an open sentence of a natural language like English. Rather, Tarski restricts his own project to well-defined formalized languages (i.e., the calculus of classes), and raises powerful objections to the application of the present account of truth to natural languages. On the other hand, the term 'infinite' is employed in Tarski's attempt to characterize satisfaction in its most general form, where the number of free variables in an open sentence is not specified, but whose number is, instead, undetermined.

[62] Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages," in Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics: Papers from 1923 to 1938, trans. J.H. Woodger (New York: Clarendon Press, 1956), 194.

sequences, since there are no free variables of potentially true or false, closed sentences to be satisfied by specific sequences of objects.[63] To put the point another way, observation, or protocol sentences, etc., which are supposed to be non-inferentially justified by linguistically uncontaminated perceptions, and thus, true, cannot be true in virtue of their being satisfied by a specific sequence of objects. Instead, such sentences are just exactly that--sentences. That is, to articulate the awareness of a perception is to always already have a belief.[64] There is thus no question of a perception or sensation making a belief true:

> . . . no thing makes sentences and theories true. That experience takes a certain course, that our skin is warmed or punctured, that the universe is infinite, these facts, if we like to talk that way, make sentences and theories true. But this point is put better without mention of the facts. The sentence "my skin is warm" is true if and only if my skin is warm. Here there is no reference to a fact, a world, an experience, or a piece of evidence.[65]

Davidson, therefore, rejects the view that it is sensations or perceptions which justify our foundational beliefs, that these are what make these

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[63] Cf. Donald Davidson, "True to the Facts," in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation, 48.

[64] There is a bias here towards spoken language which runs through Davidson's work; a bias of philosophers of language generally, who have trouble seeing that signed languages, for example, are legitimate, and non-parasitic. Nonetheless, whether the awareness is articulated, written, signed, or otherwise made symbolically manifest, the point remains unchanged.

[65] See Davidson, "Conceptual Scheme," 76; "A Coherence Theory," 311.

sentences true. In opposition to this, he claims that the only things which

justify beliefs, that make them true, are other beliefs.

The rejection of the notion of empirical content is simultaneously

a rejection of the very idea of a conceptual scheme. As Davidson remarks:

> Content and scheme, as remarked in a quotation from
> C.I. Lewis, came as a pair; we can let them go
> together. . . . It is good to be rid of representations,
> and with them the correspondence theory of truth, for
> it is thinking there are representations that engenders
> thoughts of relativism.[66]

As we saw, relativism construed as a thesis which is only

relatively true, is neither self-refuting nor inconsistent. Furthermore,

unlike Protagorean relativism, it cannot be dismissed on the grounds that

it need not be taken seriously because it can account for objectivity within

a framework, for example, on the basis of shared presuppositions. The

relativist, it may be argued, must however be able to make sense of, first,

the notion of a conceptual framework or scheme and, second, of a diversity

of such frameworks. According to Davidson, it is a necessary and sufficient

condition that something be translatable into a language we know, if we are

to justified in calling it a language at all. He is thus, in effect, arguing that

the relativist cannot make sense of a diversity of conceptual frameworks

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[66] Donald Davidson, "Myth of the Subjective," in Michael Krausz, ed.,
Relativism: Interpretion and Confrontation, 165.

because of ". . . what we mean by a system of concepts."[67] As Davidson

suggests, however, many philosophers:

> are not satisfied with arguments like these because
> they think there is another way in which conceptual
> relativism can be made intelligible. For it seems that
> we could make sense of such relativism provided we
> could find an element in the mind untouched by
> conceptual interpretation. Then various schemes
> might be seen as relative to, and assigned the role of
> organizing, this common element. This common
> element is, of course, some version of Kant's
> 'content'.[68]

He thus goes on to argue that the relativist cannot make sense of the notion

of a conceptual scheme, for it only makes sense within the confines of the

dualism between scheme and content. Since we cannot make out the latter

notion, neither can we make out the former. So, conceptual relativism,

construed as a thesis that is either absolutely or relatively true, fails insofar

as it relies on making a distinction between scheme and content.

Elucidating the distinction required a brief discussion of analytic

philosophy up and until Quine. Given that these theories are not relativistic

ones, but do rely on the notion of empirical content, Davidson's arguments

would seem to also count against these other non-relativistic theories. If,

as I have been suggesting, these are characteristically foundational theories

of epistemic justification, then it seems we are in the presence of a position

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[67] Davidson, "Myth of the Subjective," 160.

[68] Ibid., 160.

which is both anti-foundational and non-relativistic. How this is so is taken up in chapter 4. First, however, I consider one further attempt to develop a viable relativism which is not susceptible to the arguments offered thus far.

CHAPTER 3

MARGOLIS'S RELATIVISM

i. Robust Relativism

My reasons for considering Margolis's relativism are, first, that Margolis explicitly sets up his relativism as an alternative to the two versions already discussed,[1] and second, because his relativism does apparently respond to the relativist's problem: how to ensure, in certain domains of inquiry, that there can be more than one fact-of-the-matter. Margolis's solution is, where the subject matter demands, to retreat from strong, bipolar truth values (i.e., 'true' and 'false') which would yield incompatible or contradictory claims to weaker, truth-like values (such as 'plausible' or 'apt') yielding simultaneously acceptable, yet 'incongruent' claims.[2]

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[1] See Joseph Margolis, <u>Pragmatism without Foundations</u> (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1986), xiii & 59. Also see Margolis, "The Truth about Relativism," in Krausz, <u>Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation</u>, 248ff.

[2] By 'strong, bipolar model' or 'truth values', I shall mean here the model of truth and falsity which accepts that there are only the two truth values (bivalence), and that these are interdefinable (false=not true).

An example of incongruent claims to which Margolis recurs states that,

> Relative to evidence available at time t, it is conceivable that the claims <u>Nixon knew about Watergate in advance</u> and <u>Nixon did not know about Watergate in advance</u> have, respectively the probabilities (of being true) $p1$ and $p2$.[3]

He points out that ". . . the probability of their conjunction, of course, is zero;" but, he goes on to argue, claims such as these, which carry weaker values than the bipolar pair, may without contradiction be "jointly affirmed".[4] So incongruent claims have at least the following two properties: they may be jointly affirmed without contradiction; but, if we were to assign the stronger value 'true' to each, they would turn out to be contradictory or incompatible and, thus, could not without inconsistency be jointly affirmed. Apparently Margolis is using the term 'incongruent' as a weaker variant of 'contradictory' or 'incompatible'. Weak enough, that claims which are incongruent may be consistently, jointly affirmed.

This leads to another important distinction of Margolis's relativism. To affirm both 'Nixon knew about Watergate in advance' and 'Nixon did not know about Watergate in advance' (relative to evidence available at time t), does not necessitate our treating these claims

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[3] Margolis, <u>Pragmatism without Foundations</u>, 17.

[4] Ibid. Note that part of Margolis's point here is that whereas the joint affirmation of incongruent claims is acceptable, affirming their conjunction would not be.

relativistically. "Ordinarily, to affirm the probability of a statement is to acknowledge that that statement could, in principle, be true or false (in the standard sense)."[5] Thus, given further evidence, we may be able to move from saying that 'Nixon knew about Watergate in advance' is probable, to saying that it is true. To treat truth claims relativistically more is needed.[6] That is, we need to be able to say that within this particular domain of inquiry, say, recent American political history, "such statements be assigned only truth values weaker than 'true' and 'false'."[7] In other words, it needs to be shown that in this domain further evidence is not forthcoming (i.e. because of the nature of the domain in question), so that 'true' and 'false' will not, in principle, apply.

It seems evident that whether Nixon knew or did not know about Watergate in advance is not an example we would be justified in construing relativistically, for an entry of Nixon's as-yet undiscovered diary may reveal that he did know about Watergate in advance and, thus, 'Nixon knew about Watergate in advance' would be true. On the other hand, we may want to treat knowledge claims relativistically in the domain of literary criticism. Imagine a poem which may be metaphorically interpreted in two equally compelling ways. Even if evidence were uncovered that the author herself

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

intended one of the two interpretations, does not preclude the possibility of the other interpretation's relevance or applicability to the poem. Perhaps it was discovered that the poem was only a fragment, and that on uncovering the poem in its entirety one interpretation obviously revealed itself to be superior. (We may still want to treat the fragment separately, but this exegetical difficulty need not concern us here.) If this were the only circumstance that would compel us to treat what was said about the poem non-relativistically rather than relativistically, we would be justified in treating at least some poems relativistically, since the possibility that evidence of this sort may show itself is so remote, even unthinkable, with regards to certain poems. In such a case, what was said about the poem would be capable of carrying <u>only</u> weaker truth-like values such as probable, plausible, apt, and so on.

Another aspect of Margolis's relativism worth noting is that the values particular claims support depends upon an investigation into the domain of inquiry in question whereby, on methodological grounds, what values that domain will support may be determined. Margolis further claims that the methodological grounds employed in determining whether relativistic or non-relativistic values obtain in a given domain is a matter of the domain in question, more than of the frailties of investigators. For example, in a particular domain there may be more than one plausible interpretation, or the domain may have a seemingly unavoidable evaluative

component.[8] Furthermore, Margolis holds that whether a particular domain carries relativistic values must not itself be a relativistic matter. This is what is involved in Margolis's relativism being 'robust'. In other words, the assessment of a particular domain--the judgement arrived at on the basis of an inquiry into whether that domain will only support relativistic values--must not itself support only relativistic values, but must instead be construed in terms of the bipolar pair.

ii. Margolis's Relativism and Self-Refutation

At first glance it appears as if Margolis has escaped the charges laid against conceptual relativism construed as a thesis that is absolutely true. For it is not incoherent to suggest relativism is 'plausible' in one framework and 'implausible' in another. It is not incoherent because the claims generated are not incompatible or contradictory, but incongruent. Margolis, however, does not invoke the idea of a conceptual framework. Thus, we cannot say, as was said of conceptual relativism, that his relativism leaves open the possibility that according to some other framework, relativism might be false. Moreover, in assigning Margolis's

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[8] Margolis hints at one point that his relativism need not be restricted to the subject areas where relativism is typically supposed to appear, e.g., anthropology, aesthetics, ethics, etc., because of a supposed ontological distinction between these and the 'hard' sciences. See Margolis, <u>Pragmatism without Foundations</u>, 28.

relativism either of the truth-like values, plausible or implausible, we are assuming that his relativism can only support these weaker relativistic values and, thus, that his relativism is being construed here as relativistic in Margolis's sense. On the other hand, we have been considering Margolis's possible escape from a relativism construed as a thesis that is absolutely true and we cannot, of course, take Margolis's relativism to be simultaneously both absolutely and relatively true. To avoid such paradoxes let us be careful not to confuse Margolis's relativism with what I have been referring to as conceptual relativism.

The argument against conceptual relativism (I) does, however, reveal an important fact about Margolis's relativism, namely, that relativism on Margolis's account may be regarded as either relatively or absolutely true. To construe Margolis's relativism as relatively true would mean that the domain of inquiry of which relativism is a part will not, on methodological grounds, support strong, bipolar truth values.[9] If Margolis's

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[9] 'Relatively true' may not be the appropriate appellation, for claims construed relativistically cannot, on Margolis's account, carry the values 'true' and 'false'. I shall continue using the term, however, in keeping with my discussions of Protagorean and conceptual relativism.

There may also be different ways of glossing the notion of 'the domain of inquiry of which relativism is a part': 'epistemology', for example, or more narrowly, 'truth theory'. The present argument does not require a clear definition of 'domains of inquiry'. It might be said, however, that they are historical entities whose boundaries shift, often in accord with conceptual innovation. It may also be useful to distinguish 'domains of inquiry' from 'interpretive strategies'. Thus, for example, psychology is a domain of inquiry whereas psychoanalysis is an interpretive strategy. This is then, roughly, a distinction between the kinds of departmental classifications one

relativism is, on the other hand, understood to be absolutely true, it will support strong, bipolar truth values, and hence, may be true or false. When we apply Margolis's account of relativism to itself, his relativism may thus turn out to be true or merely plausible (insofar as he does in fact favour the doctrine). For simplicity's sake, I shall regard Margolis's theory as one that allows claims to be either 'true' (or 'false'), or 'plausible' (or 'implausible'), and thus account for his distinction between relativistic and non-relativistic values.

If relativism is merely plausible, then the possibility is left open that other claims which would ordinarily be incompatible with or contradict relativism on the bipolar model, are eligible. In fact, one reason we would want to construe the domain of inquiry of which relativism is a part as only capable of supporting weaker values than the bipolar pair, would be that in this particular domain of inquiry there existed other, equally reasonable candidates which, on a strong bipolar model, would be incompatible with, or contradict, relativism as Margolis defines it. If, on the other hand, Margolis wants to argue that his relativism is true, then no contradictory or incompatible claims could emerge (that is, be jointly affirmed) because, in this case, he would be adhering to the bipolar model in relativism's domain of inquiry.

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finds in our universities, and the various theoretical approaches professed within these departments.

Let us consider, then, what happens when we take relativism and its sister doctrines (between which there may well be sibling rivalry) as our domain of inquiry. That is, let us consider what effect the self-refutation argument has on Margolis's relativism, employing the distinction which I have made here between absolutely and relatively true as Margolis might use these terms.

First, we must assess whether the domain of which relativism is a part carries relativistic or non-relativistic values. Accordingly, claims made within this domain may either be true or false just in case we have determined, on methodological grounds, that it is unwise to retreat from the bipolar model in this particular domain, or plausible or implausible just in case we have determined that it is wise to retreat from the bipolar model in this domain. Thus, statements of relativism, which we are assuming belong to this domain, will be assignable either the value 'true' or the value 'plausible'. If Margolis's relativism is true, then it follows that we will be justified, on methodological grounds, in retreating from a strong, bipolar model in certain domains of inquiry. In determining, as we have, however, whether it was prudent to do so with regard to the domain of which relativism is a part (and for present purposes we are assuming that it is not), we have presupposed what we are attempting to show, viz., that it makes sense in certain domains to retreat from bipolar truth values. This circularity, however, is not vicious, but adventitious. It was the attempt to

show that Margolis's relativism, construed as a doctrine that is absolutely true, might be self-refuting or incoherent which led us to apply it to itself. There is, however, nothing self-refuting or incoherent here, so let us move on.

We may, on the other hand, assume that relativism's domain of inquiry has been shown to support only relativistic values. Thus, relativism could be at best plausible. As a consequence (and as a reason for favouring relativistic values in this domain), it must be that relativism is confronted by contending doctrines which are also plausible. Turning now to any other domain of inquiry, the identification of what truth values it will support involves accepting a relativism that is only plausible. The point may be put this way: if relativism is only plausible, then it is only plausible that other domains of inquiry will support strong, bipolar truth values, or only weaker values. Again there is nothing inherently problematic about this. That is, putting things in this way has not proven Margolis's relativism to be self-refuting, inconsistent or incoherent.

iii. Is Margolis's Relativism really Relativism?

The strategies heretofore employed against Protagorean and conceptual relativism have shown them to be self-refuting, incoherent or to presuppose an untenable scheme-content distinction. Margolis's version has

so far been able to hold all of these criticisms at bay. Perhaps this is due

to the fact that Margolis's relativism is, as I have suggested, no relativism

at all. Margolis anticipates this objection when he says:

> I do not presume to define realism and relativism
> uniquely and correctly. I don't believe there is much
> point to the first, and I don't think the second can be
> done at all. I recommend rather a certain way of
> construing both notions in accord with my sense of
> what the best strategies for my own purposes require.
> Others, for their reasons, will want to construe these
> in other ways.[10]

I cannot be said to be doing something much different from this. I

recommend an alternative construal to Margolis's in accord with my sense

of what the best strategies for my own purposes require. There are,

however, a number of good reasons for limiting the use of the appellation

'relativism' in the way I propose. Margolis's appropriation of the title only

confuses what is at issue with regards to relativism, and hampers progress

in the development of an interesting thesis which is not susceptible to the

arguments launched against relativism thus far. There is a strong tendency

on the part of many members of the philosophical community to dismiss the

question of relativism as soon as it arises, on the assumption that one of the

strategies so far considered is sufficient to refute it. It might, therefore, be

a good idea to give a new name to those positions in the area (like

Margolis's) which are not susceptible to these sorts of criticisms. Already

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[10] Joseph Margolis, "Relativism Revisited and Revived: Replies to Critics," Social Epistemology 3, no. 1 (1989): 39.

this fact, that Margolis's relativism can evade these criticisms, should indicate that there is substantial discontinuity between relativism as Margolis and others define it. It should also be noted that the argument here is not that we should reject Margolis's position, but that Margolis should not be calling his position 'relativism'. It is for other reasons that we should not accept his position as it stands.

When the issue of relativism is raised, one criterion stands out which, it seems, would need to be fulfilled by any relativism. Any 'relativism' will make something (truth, rationality, moral judgements, etc.) relative to something else (individual seeming, conceptual frameworks, and the like).[11] We may thus divide left from right and say that any relativism requires that there be both a 'that which is relative' and a 'that which it is relative to'. The first criterion may thus be stated as follows:

> a. Any relativism must be formulable in the form, '$\underline{x}$ is relative to a $\underline{y}$', such that it is possible to identify an $\underline{x}$ which is relative, and a $\underline{y}$ which $\underline{x}$ is relative to.

In the context of epistemological relativism it will also be necessary to add a further criterion to the effect that:

> b. the content of $\underline{x}$ must be, or involve, some epistemic or alethic notion.

Furthermore, we may hold that truth is relative to a conceptual scheme, yet still assert that there is only one conceptual scheme, that is, ".

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[11] Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" 6 & 10.

. . even those thinkers who are certain there is only one conceptual scheme are in the sway of the scheme concept," but they are surely not relativists.[12] So, let us formulate a criterion to this effect:

> c. The content of y must be, or be capable of being, plural.

The last criterion is the most controversial:

> d. If the content of x is, or involves, entities capable of carrying truth values, or truth-like values, then the (possible) plural content of y must be able to account for the plural assignment of truth values, or truth-like values, to those entities.

It would thus be possible to evade this final criterion if x did not involve entities which carry truth values or truth-like values. As far as I can tell, however, all forms of epistemological relativism involve such entities.

There are only two possible candidates in Margolis's position which will fulfill the first criterion.

First:

> i. the truth value of a knowledge claim is relative to the domain to which it belongs.

The second candidate incorporates the first.

> ii. the truth value of a knowledge claim is relative to an assessment of what sorts of truth values claims, in the domain to which the knowledge claim (specified in x) belongs, may legitimately carry.

Both formulations fulfill the minimum criterion of making some x relative to some y. Furthermore, since the candidates for x in both formulations are

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[12] Davidson, "Conceptual Scheme", 66.

the same and explicitly involve truth values, the second criterion is also fulfilled. The candidates for x offered here differ, however, from the x of 'external' relativism (which in 'truth is relative to a conceptual framework' is simply 'truth', or more accurately, 'the truth values knowledge claims will carry')[13] in that it deals with the kinds of truth values knowledge claims can carry, rather than the specific truth values knowledge claims do (or will) carry. With regard to the candidates offered for y, (i) is more plausible and interesting than (ii) insofar as the domain to which knowledge claims belong bears more directly on what values these knowledge claims may legitimately carry, than does an assessment of that domain, on the basis of which it is possible to determine the kinds of values that domain will support. In other words, the assessment of a domain is a step removed from the domain itself in relation to the truth values knowledge claims within that domain may legitimately carry. In any case, both domains and assessments of those domains may justifiably be said to be capable of plurality.

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[13] Margolis dubs his relativism 'internal' in contrast with 'external' conceptual relativisms. The distinction which he sees between the two is that while the latter rejects the possibility of a ". . . procedure or method or practice or policy by means of which justifiably to eliminate, reduce, or disallow contending or divergent or 'incommensurable' paradigms, Gestalten, 'worlds,' ontologies, languages, frames of reference, conventions, or the like," the former holds that "we do indeed have a reasonable methodological basis . . . for epistemically supporting or confirming claims that, on a bipolar model, would be or yield incompatibles." Margolis, Pragmatism without Foundations, 56.

Is the plurality of domains sufficient, however, to fulfill the fourth criterion of relativism? Margolis's model does allow for divergent truth-like values within a domain. In fact, this is the upshot of his thinking that

> in particular sectors of inquiry, it is methodologically advisable to retreat from insisting on a strong bipolar model of truth and falsity, while not denying that the affected propositions or claims are genuinely such and, as such, are to be ascribed suitable truth-like values-- just such, in fact, that on the bipolar model (but no longer) would yield and confirm incompatibles.[14]

Margolis takes it as the central virtue of his theory (aside from the possibility that his relativism may be reconciled with an historicized realism) that what, on the bipolar model, would yield incompatibles does, on the weaker model, yield claims which are (consistently) incongruent, and for this reason is able to escape accusations of incoherence, inconsistency and self-contradiction. The plurality of incongruent claims for which Margolis's theory accounts and implies, however, is not the plurality of domains captured by his best candidate fulfilling the first criterion.

The formulation of what on the basis of the four criteria proposed would count as a relativism per se states that 'the truth or falsity of knowledge claims is relative to a conceptual framework.' This formulation does allow for one claim to be true in one framework and false in another. But knowledge claims belong to domains of inquiry and, thus, it does not make sense to say that the same knowledge claim could appear in more

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[14] Ibid., 111.

than one domain. The plurality of domains of inquiry is, therefore, not sufficient to account for a plurality of truth values, or truth-like values, predicated of knowledge claims within a domain as is required by the fourth criterion. As was pointed out, this is just what Margolis expects of his relativism and is just what Margolis believes is relativistic about his own version. It is not the case, however, that the best candidate for the first criterion Margolis's account supplies is capable also of fulfilling the fourth. I take the first to be relatively uncontroversial. Yet, Margolis would probably feel little pressure to put forward a candidate that would fulfill this criterion. Nonetheless, he would probably agree that the best candidate is something like (i), and we would not want to call that relativism.

Margolis's account thus either fails the first criterion insofar as he would be unwilling to formulate a candidate fulfilling it, or his position fails to fulfill the fourth insofar as I have interpreted Margolis's position correctly and have been charitable in formulating a plausible candidate fulfilling the conditions of the first criterion. If criteria (a) through (d) are accepted, then Margolis's relativism fails criterion (d) at least, and hence, Margolis's relativism is no relativism at all.

CHAPTER 4

FOUNDATIONALISM AND RELATIVISM

i. Anti-Foundationalism and Relativism

Much of the recent work on relativism has been an attempt to come to terms with the implications of anti-foundationalism for philosophy. But why should relativism and anti-foundationalism have been associated in this way? The reason most often cited is that in the eyes of the foundationalist there is only one alternative to foundationalism, namely, relativism. Even anti-foundationalists find it difficult to extricate themselves from the dichotomy, as it is so firmly embedded in the problems and projects which have traditionally characterized philosophy as a discipline. The rejection of foundationalism, then, is thought by many to entail relativism.

The either/or implicit in this way of thinking may be a consequence of the assumption that if knowledge is not to be based on something transcending the variety of historical culture, it must therefore be based on the cultural and historical. In other words, if the 'ground' of

knowledge--something we might identify as the source of truth, common to all true sentences--is not transcendent and absolute, then it must be some conventional determination. Of course the 'ground' for the relativist is not something fixed or immutable, but instead is everchanging and various. What is true for some, therefore, might not be for others because the truth value of a particular statement may differ in accordance with differences in worldview, or with the ways in which beliefs are inferentially related. The anti-foundationalist who is also a non-relativist makes no such claims about the truth value of beliefs. For her, it does not make sense to ask about a source of truth. The anti-foundationalist may go on to argue for relativism, but need not. As Richard Bernstein argues, "the relativist not only denies the positive claims of the objectivist but goes further."[1] Nonetheless, relativism is a form of anti-foundationalism insofar as it denies the positive claims of the objectivist.[2]

The usual strategy of the anti-foundationalist, who also rejects relativism, is to argue that the dilemma between foundationalism and relativism is a false one. Anti-foundationalist's of this sort will thus attempt

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[1]   Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 8. Emphasis added.

[2]   By 'objectivism,' [Bernstein means] the basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or rightness. Ibid.

to carve out a position which moves beyond the dichotomy, or attempt to effect a fragile reconciliation. Needless to say, such attempts have not always been successful.

In this chapter, I argue that, although relativism is a species of anti-foundationalism, it is possible to make out a position that is both anti-foundational and non-relativistic. Already implicit in the arguments of chapter 2, it remains to be shown how the rejection of empirical content is compatible with this position which challenges both foundationalism and relativism.

ii. The Case against Foundationalism

As was alluded to in chapter 2, there are, broadly speaking, two kinds of foundationalism: traditional and contemporary. Traditional foundationalism is the view that philosophy, as epistemology, is the queen of the sciences: a foundational discipline laying out the scope and limits of knowledge.[3]

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[3] Drew Christie claims that anti-foundationalist critiques by philosophers like Rorty and Gadamer are aimed not at contemporary, but at traditional foundationalism. It is here where I differ from Christie who regards Rorty's critique of foundationalism to be limited to the traditional idea of philosophy as a foundational discipline. As I suggested in chapter 2, the early analytic tradition thought of philosophy as a foundational discipline, and required that knowledge be based on privileged representations. But Rorty's critique is not restricted to the former. It seems clear that Rorty anyway would not be concerned with launching the far-reaching

Contemporary foundationalism, on the other hand, is the view that knowledge must, if it is to be truly knowledge, be based on indubitable foundations in the form of privileged representations. Jonathan Kvanvig points out that foundationalisms of this sort have a structural feature whereby beliefs are divided into two qualitatively different kinds: those which are justified because they constitute the simplest elements to which correspondence can be reduced, i.e., observation sentences like 'this is red' (or because they cannot be doubted, etc.), and those which are inferentially justified on the basis of these other foundational beliefs.[4] For the logical positivists, this involved positing an experiential intermediary between our

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attack against foundationalism that he has, unless he thought that it was still firmly entrenched in the activities of his peers; though Christie and others argue that these are criticisms which contemporary foundationalists have for the most part accepted, and therefore, that there are very few traditional foundationalists left.

Furthermore, part of what Rorty is rejecting involves his appropriation of Sellar's attack on the myth of the given and Quine's arguments against analyticity. Both of these critiques are bound up with the notion that there exist ahistorical foundations of knowledge to which human beings have privileged access, whether this takes the form of the application of a philosophical method, the givenness of 'sense data' or the necessity of analytic truths. See Drew Christie, "Contemporary 'Foundationalism' and the Death of Epistemology," Metaphilosophy 20, no. 2 (April 1989): 115. Cf. Evan Simpson, "Colloquimur, ergo sumus," in Anti-Foundationalism and Practical Reasoning: Conversations between Hermeneutics and Analysis, ed. Evan Simpson (Edmonton: Academic Printing & Publishing, 1987), 2ff.; Kai Nielsen, "The Withering Away of the Tradition," Philosophia 18, nos. 2-3 (July 1988): 214.

[4] Jonathan Kvanvig, "The Confusion over Foundationalism," Philosophia 16, nos. 3 & 4 (December 1986): 346.

beliefs and the world. It was, for them, sense data or the given, which were supposed to serve as justifications for our foundational beliefs.

Another aspect of foundationalism, common to Descartes and Chisholm alike, is the requirement that the foundations of knowledge be certain. Against this, Kai Neilsen and Richard Bernstein see the contemporary philosophical scene as tending towards fallibilism.[5] For Popper, however, fallibilism takes the form of an inability to identify which of our beliefs are certain, but he still has faith that a good many of them are, certainly, even some of the ones which we think are. Certainty then, even for the fallibilist, serves as an ideal of inquiry.

As Timm Triplett defines it:

> Foundationalism is the view that there are epistemically privileged 'basic' propositions which confer justification upon all other empirical propositions which are justified for a person. The classical version of the theory maintains that these basic propositions are epistemically certain and are about what is given to a person through sensory experience. Basic propositions are said to succeed in this justificatory enterprise because they provide for the subject accurate internal representations of the world as it exists external to that subject.[6]

Note that the three features of contemporary foundationalism I have described are present in this definition: (i) a two-tiered account of belief;

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[5] See Neilsen, 214; Bernstein, 12.

[6] Timm Triplett, "Rorty's Critique of Foundationalism," Philosophical Studies 52 (1987): 115.

(ii) what is supposed to justify 'basic propositions' is "given to a person through sensory experience"; and (iii) 'basic' beliefs are to be counted as "epistemically certain".

The foundationalist's basic position may be summed up as a commitment to two claims. The first is that there exist a class of beliefs which are non-propositionally justified, that is, not justified on the basis of being inferred from other beliefs. Second, the foundationalist claims that what it is that justifies these 'basic' beliefs is sensory experience, i.e. direct awareness of an external reality.

Triplett identifies chapter 4, section 3 of Rorty's Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature as the crux of Rorty's case against foundationalism. He argues that "Rorty's critique is unsuccessful against classical foundationalism," and a fortiori, unsuccessful against "more moderate analytical theories of empirical justification."[7] As Triplett presents it, Rorty's argument goes as follows:

> RA: (1) If nonpropositional awareness is to be the ground for knowledge, then there are justified beliefs which are nonpropositional and there is justification which is not a relation between propositions.
>
> (2) There are no justified beliefs which are nonpropositional.

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[7] Ibid., 116. On the model I have presented here, both 'classical' and the 'more moderate analytical theories' are to be counted as forms of contemporary foundationalism.

(3) There is no such thing as justification which is not a relation between propositions.

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(4) It is not the case that nonpropositional awareness is the ground for knowledge.[8]

According to Triplett, the foundationalist need not "get caught holding some incoherent view about nonpropositional beliefs;" though, he notes, there are those who hold such views more or less coherently.[9] Rather, ". . . belief appears to be a propositional attitude, a stance a person takes towards a proposition."[10] Thus, insofar as the foundationalist may agree with Rorty, or at least has no reason to invoke the contradictory of premise (2), this premise, and the corresponding part of the consequent of premise (1), may be dropped. Having done this, Rorty's argument then reads:

RA': (1) If nonpropositional awareness is to be the ground for knowledge, then there is justification which is not a relation between propositions.
(2) There is no such thing as justification which is not a relation between propositions.

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[8] Ibid., 119. Rorty says as much on page 183 of Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, ". . . there is no such thing as a belief which is nonpropositional, and no such thing as justification which is not a relation between propositions. So to speak of our acquaintance with redness as 'grounding' . . . our knowledge that 'this is a red object' or that 'redness is a color' is always a mistake."

[9] Ibid., 120.

[10] Ibid.

(3) It is not the case that nonpropositional awareness is the ground for knowledge.[11]

The way in which Rorty supports the second premise of this modified argument, Triplett maintains, is to argue against the foundationalist's belief that it is direct awareness, or sensory experience, which justifies--nonpropositionally--our basic beliefs. He further points out that as Rorty begins his argument it appears as if he is going to argue there is no such direct awareness in the first place, what Rorty refers to as "raw feels". His argument does not, however, proceed in this direction. Instead, he agrees with the foundationalist, "at least for the sake of argument, that there is some sort of rudimentary nonconceptual awareness."[12] Of course, Rorty does not think there is anything in this concession which will commit him to a foundationalist account of the relationship between direct awareness, and our beliefs about the objects of which we are directly aware:

> There is no reason for Sellars to object to the notion of "knowing what pain (or redness) is like", for this would only support the Myth of the Given . . . if there were some connection between knowing what pain feels like and knowing what sort of thing pain is. But the only connection is that the former is an insufficient and necessary causal condition for the latter. It is insufficient for the obvious reason that we can know what redness is like without knowing that it is different from blue, that it is a color, and so on. It is unnecessary because we can know all that, and a great

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[11] Ibid., 121.

[12] Ibid., 122.

deal more, about redness while having been blind from
birth, and thus <u>not</u> knowing what redness is like.[13]

With this much out in the open, Triplett feels ready to attack Rorty's

position:

> What Rorty has shown . . . is that causal relations
> cannot explain how nonpropositional awareness could
> serve to ground one's knowledge. But of course from
> the fact that causal relations do not explain how the
> nonpropositional can ground the propositional, it does
> not follow that nothing can explain this.[14]

Though the relevant sections of Rorty's text (pp. 139-209) are not

unambiguous on this point, Rorty is not offering a causal explanation of the

relation between direct awareness and 'basic' beliefs as a candidate for a

'justificatory connection', much less as the <u>only</u> candidate. Rorty's point is,

instead, that there is no justificatory relation. The only connection between

direct awareness and our beliefs is a loosely causal one.

In the first place, Rorty has already taken himself to have

disposed (albeit indirectly, in citing Quine and Sellars) of the foundationalist

thought that direct awareness of objects is supposed to justify our basic

beliefs about those objects, and thus, that his second premise (justification

is a relation between propositions) has, Rorty thinks, already been

established. As he indicates three pages prior to the quotation above:

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[13] Rorty, <u>Mirror of Nature</u>, 184-185.

[14] Triplett, 123.

> If what I have been saying so far is sound [i.e., that Quine and Sellars were right in calling into question the Kantian notion of two sorts of representations: intuitions and concepts, and thus, that we should be holists, and judge truth and knowledge by the standards of human inquirers, rather than attempting to 'ground' them], there is no way to argue for the views of Sellars and Quine except by replying to their critics.[15]

Rather than being the crux of Rorty's case against foundationalism, as Triplett claims, chapter 4, section 3 of <u>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</u> is an attempt to disentangle Sellar's attack on the Myth of the Given from the "'unfair to babies' implications of the claim that there is no such thing as pre-linguistic awareness."[16] Rorty's response to this criticism, as was suggested, is to claim that Sellar's attack in no way implies that there is no such thing as pre-linguistic awareness, though it does require making a distinction between 'knowing what pain is like', and 'knowing what sort of thing pain is'. The former preserves the intuition that babies, and other non-language using animals, experience pain, redness and the like, while the latter preserves Sellar's conclusion that it is only within the logical space of reasons that we can have beliefs about pain. The distinction is that the former sense of 'knowing' means "just being had or felt. [These sensations] are known without being able to be placed in classes, or related

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[15] Rorty, <u>Mirror of Nature</u>, 181.

[16] Ibid.

in any other way to anything else."[17] To relate or compare--to distinguish anything on the basis of its being in any way the same or different--is, in other words, a linguistic affair.

Furthermore, Rorty's dicussion of Locke's confusion between explanation and justification is not, as Triplett thinks, the basis of Rorty's arguments against foundational theories of justification. In his discussion of Locke, he claims:

> The reason for [Locke's] shuffling is that if one tries to model all knowledge on sense perception, then one will be torn between the literal way in which part of the body can have the same quality as an external object and the metaphorical way in which a person as a whole has, for example froghood "in mind", if he has a view about frogs.[18]

The point, I take it, is that theories which model knowledge on sense perception, or in some way make sense perception foundational for certain beliefs, are bound to end up confusing causation with justification because of the seemingly ineluctable metaphor between the way our perception works and the way our knowledge works. This applies equally to all empirical epistemologies--causal and non-causal alike: whether having a perception is just to have a sort of knowledge, as in Locke; the mind is supposed to synthesize concepts and intuitions, as in Kant; or true sentences are said to correspond to the data presented to us by our senses.

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[17] Ibid., 184.

[18] Ibid, 146.

We should not, then, suppose that Rorty's critique is limited to a consideration of causal theories of knowledge or reference, and thereby fails because he has neglected to consider non-causal theories. Though Rorty notes the causal relation between our beliefs and the world, he is not examining causal theories as such. On the contrary, in pointing out that we will never get justification out of the causal relation to which he has committed himself, Rorty is simply attempting to ward off accusations that he may himself be a casual theorist!

iii. The Case against Anti-Foundationalism

In contrast to foundationalism as defined, anti-foundationalism denies either: (i) that something independent of historical and cultural change, like direct awareness, non-inferentially justifies certain of our beliefs; or (ii) that there is anything which non-inferentially justifies our beliefs (whether direct awareness, intuitive self-evidence, coherence, power or something else).

The first route is that taken by the relativist, who argues that what makes true sentences true is, not direct awareness, but something sociocultural. According to the relativist, then, the truth value of a sentence is determined by its cultural or historical context. The second route, that taken by Rorty in the last section, questions whether there is such a thing

as justification which is not a relation between propositions; or, in other words, that there are non-inferentially justified beliefs, whether justified by direct awareness or something else.

Anti-foundationalism would lose much of its appeal if it were confined to making either of these two negative claims. The first strategy, that of the relativist, makes the positive claim that truth is relative to a conceptual framework in addition to denying that it is direct awareness which makes true sentences true. The latter form of anti-foundationalism has so far been restricted to making the negative claim that nothing non-inferentially justifies beliefs. We can, of course, squeeze a positive position out of this to the effect that the only way to justify a belief is to appeal to other beliefs. But, in denying privileged access to an objective reality--through, for example, being directly aware of it--the anti-foundationalist is making a broader, existential point about the finitude of human existence. Metaphorically speaking, our anti-foundationalist rejects the view that it might be possible to 'get outside of our skins', and take up a 'God's eye point of view' so that we may find some 'Archimedean point' which will ground our beliefs. It is in the context of debates such as these where we meet with Pindar's oft-quoted aphorism, "mortal things suit mortals best". The epistemological implication of such sentiments is that our knowledge can only and ever be the knowledge of human beings, who are neither immortal, nor omnipresent.

To acknowledge human finitude in epistemology is to recognize the contingency of knowledge. It is not meant by this that what were thought to be necessary (analytic) truths, are really, like synthetic truths, contingent. We might want to treat this as an implication of Quine's rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction, but this cannot be all that is meant by contingency for the brand of anti-foundationalist we are discussing. Quine does go part way with our (Davidsonian) anti-foundationalist, but falls short in failing to give up the dualism of scheme and content. Charactertizing knowledge as contingent, however, certainly does imply that absolute certainty, even with regards to our most dearly held beliefs, is impossible.

It is difficult to see modest analytical theories about how direct awareness might justify our basic beliefs as questing for certainty in the tradition of Descartes. There is, however, substantial continuity if we read the history of modern philosophy broadly. The 'Mind', according to this version of the tradition, was invented by Descartes.[19] This notion, in turn, made possible subsequent developments dealing with the relation between minds and the world. Kant, for example, supposed that it was the job of the transcendental ego to synthesize ". . . two radically distinct sorts of representations, concepts on the one hand and intuitions on the other."[20]

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[19] Ibid., 140.

[20] Ibid., 148.

The knowing subject was thus regarded as passive in her reception of raw sensations and perceptions, but as playing an active role in reworking these intuitions so that they could be thought. It is the idea of a subject as the source of objectivity in knowledge which continues through this long and venerable tradition; a subject who, surveying the passing show, secures indirect access to an external and objective reality by being directly aware of it. This direct awareness, itself a kind of knowledge insofar as it is supposed to justify, without remainder, our most certain empirical beliefs, is privileged not only because it speaks directly of Reality, but because it is the individual subject for whom reality is made manifest through these linguistically uncontaminated perceptions. It is, therefore, only a subject who can speak the truth about reality. In other words, only through such representations can we secure access to reality, and only a subject--the mirror of nature--who can have such representations. Whether it is language or Mind which serves here as the medium, it is still subjectivity, with its privileged, inner representations, which is taken to be the ground of certainty in knowledge. The anti-foundationalist, then, rejects the view that certainty is to be achieved by positing an Archimedean point or absolute standpoint, the standpoint of any human being qua subject properly placed. Instead, the anti-foundationalist may argue, which beliefs stand in need of justification and what counts as a good reason is contingent on the cultural and historical setting of the debate.

It is not difficult to see what the foundationalist might find problematic with the view that rejects privileged access however construed. Does the anti-foundationalist's view, that there exists no absolute standpoint outside history and culture which we may assume in order to ensure the objective validity of our knowledge, carry the tacit presumption of being absolutely true. If the anti-foundationalist is going to maintain that all knowledge is radically contingent on history and culture, then this claim must itself be contingent. But if it is contingent, why should we be compelled to take it seriously, to regard it as true. The foundationalist, however, does not stop there. If all knowledge is radically contingent, why should we take anything seriously? Does the anti-foundationalist's position not imply that 'anything goes'?

As is well known, the catch-phrase 'anything goes' is commonly applied to relativistic theories. In other words, it is thought that what is wrong with relativism generally is that it implies that 'anything goes'. The application of this catch-phrase to relativism, however, shows a deep misunderstanding of any interesting version of the doctrine. Insofar as relativism requires that we reject the law of non-contradiction, it would imply that anything goes. Relativism does not, however, require that we give up this law. Even for the Protagorean relativist, it would be inconsistent for the same person to hold contradictory beliefs. To assert that x is true for Socrates, yet false for Theodorus, is not to say that both x and

not x are true <u>simpliciter</u>; for truth, on the Protagorean model, is relativized to individuals. Furthermore, if relativism did require the rejection of the law of non-contradiction, it would make no sense to argue with a relativist that relativism is self-refuting, for the simple reason that the self-refutation argument relies wholly on the supposition that the law of non-contradiction stands. Moreover, even Protagorean relativism constrains what may be true. That is, only what appears to an individual can be true; and, we would assume, appearances cannot be manipulated to such an extent that <u>anything</u> could appear to an individual. Even with Protagorean relativism, then, it is not the case that <u>anything</u> goes, though a lot more goes, than if truth is construed univocally.

On the other hand, it makes perfect sense to think that the anti-foundationalist's position implies that anything goes. It is only in the attempt to evade contingency that the relativist makes the further claim that it is culture, history or language which grounds, albeit insecurely, our beliefs. To be the sort of person who:

> faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires--someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance,[21]

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[21] Richard Rorty, <u>Contingency, Irony and Solidarity</u> (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989),

is a very different thing than being the sort of person who thinks that what we think is true, and what someone in another time and place thinks is true, may both be counted right because there is no single, objective truth about reality. The difference is between being uncertain about our most certain beliefs, and being certain, that within our community, some beliefs are certain for us, though some day this may change. It is being uncertain about our most certain beliefs which calls into question the certitude of our most certain beliefs, and thus raises the possibility that anything (in the way of belief) might go.

What this criticism attempts to capture is the idea that if we give up what Rorty refers to as 'Philosophy', which attempts to ground knowledge in something other than the fallible and human justificatory procedures foundationalists and anti-foundationalists alike depend on, then what philosophers or scientists say might not be any closer to the truth than what a poet or journalist might say. There is, of course, a great deal of so-called rhetoric in the presentation of scientific and philosophical research. But we like to think that we can separate out the idea from its expression. But what could we mean in thinking this? Is not the technique for doing so simply the application of readily agreed upon formal and informal logical procedures? We might say of those who do not agree with us that these procedures are of any use, that they are, therefore, 'irrational'. But we do not have to conclude that because the epithet seems appropriate, that they

have not yet grasped the way in which human beings must proceed if they are to get at the objectively true. In calling those who do not agree with us as to the utility of these procedures 'irrational', we are saying something as much about ourselves as about them, that being rational is a good thing, and for a lot of us this means that certain ways of thinking about things result in sound arguments. To be rational in this sense is nothing other than to give 'good' reasons; 'good', of course, because both we and our interlocutors can accept them.

To suggest that anti-foundationalism implies that anything goes, is to suppose that we can readily give up anything which is contingent, and this must include the fundamental laws of logic, which surely would imply that anything does go. The foundationalist's arguments are, however, trebly fallacious: they beg the question, misrepresent the anti-foundationalist's position and commit a fallacious slippery slope.

The foundationalist's arguments as presented here beg the question against radical contingency in presupposing that strong objectivity is always already a possibility. It is only if we think that it is possible to avoid radical contingency that we will think because any view which argues for radical contingency must itself be radically contingent, that it is,

therefore, self-refuting. It is only self-refuting if we think that there are at least some truths that are not contingently so.[22]

The foundationalist misrepresents the anti-foundationalist's position in supposing that the anti-foundationalist's commitment to contingency entails that 'anything goes', or that the anti-foundationalist has no arguments which will arrest this slippery slope. The anti-foundationalist's arguments to this effect will, however, still leave the foundationalist hungry because he will not get from the anti-foundationalist what he wants, namely, foundations. Though the vegetarian gives up something in giving up flesh, she can nonetheless get along just as well without it.

There is, however, something to be learned from the foundationalist's argument. To argue for radical contingency, it must, as the foundationalist argues, be recognized that this thesis cannot by its own lights be some sort of overarching, absolute truth. There is a certain irony in the position that must be recognized. That is, the anti-foundationalist rationally advocates a position, i.e. makes certain truth claims, while at the same time denying the objective validity of these claims. This is the inevitable result of denying that there is any way to distinguish between truth and what passes for truth by, for example, appealing to a

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[22] Cf. Michael Stack, "Self-Refuting Arguments," Metaphilosophy 14, nos. 3 & 4 (July/ October 1983): 333.

transcendent source of evidence. The anti-foundationalist's position is, however, not self-refuting unless we are always already foundationalists.

It is in applying what looks like a self-refutation argument to anti-foundationalism, I contend, which makes the foundationalist think he is arguing with a relativist. To recognize the radical contingency of knowledge, however, is not to argue that something is relative to something else. Instead, what is being claimed is that the human condition is such that we will never be able to step outside of our skins to see what reality is 'really' like. It does not, therefore, make any sense to say that we are therefore "inside" something like history, language or culture. Instead, the metaphor of inside and outside, of empirical and transcendental, should itself be dropped.

iv. Anti-Ontologism

I argued in the section before last, that the anti-foundationalist may deny either of two claims attributed to the foundationalist. To deny the existence of non-inferentially justified beliefs, I argued, is equivalent to Rorty's claim that there is no such thing as justification which is not a relation between propositions. I would now like to suggest that both of these claims are equivalent to a position which I shall call 'anti-ontologism'.

Anti-ontologism is the view that there is nothing which makes true sentences true.

On the other hand, the anti-foundationalist may deny that what makes sentences true is something universal, like sensory experience, and proceed to argue that it is rather the community, consensus, power, or coherence which makes them true. This is, of course, the route taken by the relativist. Anti-ontologism is thus a form of anti-foundationalism of broader scope. It denies not only that sensory experience does not make sentences true, but that nothing does.

One argument offered in favour of this position arose out of Tarski's characterization of truth in terms of satisfaction. There we found that a true (closed) sentence is satisfied by all sequences, and therefore, that there is no way of individuating sequences which satisfy any particular closed sentence. In the words of Bjorn Ramberg, "a true sentence is satisfied by all sequences and it is therefore an impossible task to distinguish between true sentences on the basis of what 'makes sentences true'."[23] That is, there is no way of identifying those objects which make a sentence true, for example, in terms of a prior relation of reference.

Another way of putting the point is to deny that 'concrete state of affairs' (something we might apprehend through direct awareness) could ever play a role in justifying beliefs. For any 'knowledge' we might have of

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[23] Ramberg, 42.

concrete states of affairs must be propositional. In other words, concrete states of affairs can only play an epistemic role under a description. If so, not only do concrete states of affairs not play any justificatory role in and of themselves (if we can make sense of this); but, we may also conclude, justification is and can only be a propositional affair.

This is the point of the Davidson quotation in chapter 2. To acknowledge that such sentences as 'snow is white' are trivially true, if and only if, in this case, snow is white, is not only to understand what must be captured by any theory of truth for English [insofar as the totality of such (T-)sentences uniquely defines the extension of the truth predicate for English], but is also to recognize that this is merely a relation between two sentences: one a description of a sentence in a metalanguage, the other the sentence itself. The relation is between the two sentences, not--as is required of correspondence theories--between a sentence and a concrete state of affairs.

To conclude, as we have, that justification is and can only be a propositional affair, is to have gone beyond our original premises. From the fact that concrete states of affairs can only play a jutificatory role under a description, we may only conclude that justification must be propositional in this case, that is, an inferential relation between beliefs. This does not, however, mean that nothing could non-inferentially justify a belief.

Relativism, for example, may be formulated in such a way that

what is supposed to make true sentences true is, not direct awareness, but power, consensus and the like, that is, some conventional determination. The relativist thus agrees with the foundationalist that there do exist beliefs that are non-inferentially justified, but disagree that what justifies these beliefs is direct awareness of an objective reality. Note, however, that the relativist need not hold to the two-tiered structure characteristic of foundational theories of justification. Instead, the relativist may hold that all of our beliefs are non-inferentially justified. This would be to ignore the fact that there are inferential relations between certain beliefs, relations of which it is possible to assess the validity. At least many of us think there are such relations and, thus, that there is a form of justification which is not non-inferential. There is, of course, nothing which would lead us to believe that the relativist might actually hold such a position. Rather, the point is that it is not necessary for the relativist to maintain that those beliefs that are non-inferentially justified by power, or consensus, are intended to serve as the ground upon which we can move with certainty to ever more complex beliefs by making legitimate inferences from the former. We would think, instead, that beliefs which were non-inferentially justified on the basis of power or consensus, were simply those beliefs which we never thought of trying to justify. So it is not that these beliefs constitute some sort of ground, much less an epistemological ground aimed at securing as much certainty for our beliefs as possible. Instead, the relativist may argue, they

intrude at various levels and in various ways, sometimes even influencing (inferentially) our beliefs and actions.

It is relativism construed in this way which makes clear the relationship between relativism and anti-ontologism. To claim that there exist beliefs that are non-inferentially justified, whether these are justified by direct awareness of an external reality (as in the case of foundationalism), or by power, norms, consensus and the like (as in the case of relativism), is to commit oneself to ontologism. As Rorty maintains:

> On my (Davidsonian) view, there is no point in distinguishing between true sentences which are "made true by reality" and true sentences which are "made true by us", because the whole idea of "truth-makers" needs to be dropped. So I would hold [vs. Bernard Williams] that there is no truth in relativism, but this much in ethnocentrism: we cannot justify our beliefs (in physics, ethics, or any other area) to everybody, but only those whose beliefs overlap ours to some appropriate extent.[24]

On the argument, however, we are not justified in jumping to this stronger conclusion about all 'truth-makers'. The only candidate for a truth-maker we have considered in any depth is empirical content, and we can surely not conclude that because empirical content cannot play this role that nothing can. This does not mean that the above argument is not a good one, only that it is incomplete. What would be required to complete the argument

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[24] Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" 19n.

would be a deeper investigation of Davidson's theories of truth and meaning.

As Rorty makes clear, Davidson:

> wants to depistemologize [sic] the notion of truth--to
> keep it as separate from questions of justification as
> Sellars keeps the notion of picturing. He thinks that
> although truth is, indeed, "the basic concept in terms
> of which a theory of meaning is to be developed", only
> a de-epistemologized conception of truth will get that
> job done.[25]

Ultimately this is the notion of truth to which my Davidsonian anti-foundationalist is committed. Though the position I am advocating here, anti-ontologism, is precisely that form of anti-foundationalism which is also non-relativistic, I have not yet seen the argument which counts against all truth-makers. On the contrary, the only complete argument I have encountered which supports anti-ontologism does so indirectly, through the notion of empirical content. It is, then, the arguments which revolve around this notion which are important for the present work insofar as there is something unsatisfying about simply presupposing that there are no truth-makers, and then going on to point out that both foundationalism and relativism make use of them.

The rejection of empirical content is equally a rejection of both foundationalism and relativism, and is thus akin to anti-ontologism. It is explicitly anti-ontologist in rejecting empirical content (i.e. that which is

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[25]   Richard Rorty, "Representation, Social Practice, and Truth," Philosophical Studies 54 (1988): 217.

apprehended by direct awareness of an external reality) as a candidate for what makes truths true. On the other hand, it is implicitly anti-ontologist in its rejection of relativism. For insofar as relativism depends on making a distinction between scheme and content, the dualism is undermined, and relativism with it, if the rejection of empirical content can emerge as the conclusion of an argument. The rejection of empirical content is thus not only compatible with anti-ontologism in (i) serving as a platform from which to reject both foundationalism and relativism, but (ii) in explicitly being a form of anti-ontologism in rejecting what the foundationalist supposes makes truths true.

For both the foundationalist and relativist, untoward consequences result from holding to the scheme-content distinction. As we have seen, the foundationalist posits an experiential intermediary between ourselves and the world, but "if our knowledge derives entirely from evidence of this kind, then not only may our senses sometimes deceive us; it is possible that we are systematically and generally deceived."[26] This, of course, is a variation on Cartesian 'veil of ideas' scepticism.[27] Similarly, 'if our knowledge derives entirely from evidence of this kind', we might as well leave the world out of account and become idealists.

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[26] Davidson, "Myth of the Subjective," 162.

[27] See Rorty, <u>Mirror of Nature</u>, 139ff.

For the relativist, on the other hand, embracing the scheme-content distinction makes possible:

> the idea that conceptual schemes and moral systems, or the languages associated with them, can differ massively--to the extent of being mutually unintelligible or incommensurable or forever beyond rational resolve.[28]

Davidson goes on to point out that:

> Of course there are contrasts from epoch to epoch, from culture to culture, from person to person of kinds we all recognize and struggle with; but these are contrasts which, with sympathy and effort we can explain and understand. Trouble comes when we try to embrace the idea that there might be more comprehensive differences, for this seems (absurdly) to ask us to take up a stance outside our own ways of thought.[29]

I shall now consider two formulations of relativism, both of which make use of the dualism between scheme and content.

A. Relativism may be stated in Kantian terms as, for example, Whorf's linguistic relativism. On this model, what is true for members of a linguistic community who share a categorial schema--a schema which shapes their perceptual experience--might not be true for the members of another community whose framework shapes their experience differently. It may be the case, therefore, that what the members of one linguistic

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[28] Ibid., 159.

[29] Ibid., 160.

community are directly aware of, may not be the same as that of another community. Consequently, their basic beliefs would be correspondingly different, as we would suppose, would all of their other beliefs, since they are justified on the basis of these other basic beliefs. In other words, the basic beliefs of those who share a different schema might be different because what their direct awareness tells them differs in accordance with differences in the concepts which shape that awareness. We might even suppose that it is possible to be a foundationalist within such a framework, what we might call 'internal foundationalism'. Of course, no one could hold such a view without running into the same problems as Putnam's 'brains in a vat'. That is, it would be impossible for such a foundationalist to refer to her condition as 'internal', just as brains in a vat "cannot think or say that they are brains in a vat (<u>even by thinking 'we are brains in a vat'</u>)."[30]

B. A modified version of (A) maintains that it is language, or a theoretical framework with its central concepts and basic beliefs, which divides up or picks out the things of which we are aware, and that these may differ from culture to culture or change radically in the face of conceptual revolution. Where this version differs from (A) is in holding empirical content constant. In (A), conceptual schemes were seen to

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[30] Hilary Putnam, <u>Reason, Truth and History</u> (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 8.

gerrymander that of which we are aware. (B), on the other hand, claims that our awareness or perceptual experience remains unchanged regardless of conceptual difference. Though various conceptual schemes may identify, describe, etc. the world in radically different ways, the world is nonetheless experienced in more or less the same way.

Fundamental concepts, on this model, unlike the Categories of the Understanding, which were supposed by Kant to be preconditions of experience, are simply those which members of a linguistic community would find it particularly difficult to do without. Yet, we could imagine going without such concepts and still having much the same sensory experience, just as we can imagine babies or other non-language using animals having many of the same perceptual experiences we do. The things we are inclined to talk about, however, and what we say about them, may differ with differences in the concepts we use to categorize and individuate the things around us.

It is here where we run into the notion of something outside all schemes, something shared by all human beings, supplying a point of view from which to survey all schemes. On the argument, we cannot make sense of this notion, or the dualism with which it is bound up, so neither can we make sense of relativism construed in this way.

It might be argued that the argument fails because the notion of empirical content has been equivocated upon. For the foundationalist,

empirical content is supposed to play a justificatory role, which it does not play for the relativist. Relativism, however, is just the view that empirical content cannot play a justificatory role because different frameworks may divide up this content differently--so much so, that there could be no translating from one framework into another. It is, however, the same content, that is, the content of sensory experience which, for the relativist, serves as a fixed coordinate system in virtue of which it makes sense to talk about massive differences between conceptual schemes.

v. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to show that anti-ontologism is a position which is both anti-foundational and non-relativistic and, thus, that the foundationalist has no reason to accuse the anti-foundationalist-- who may also be an anti-ontologist--of relativism.

Throughout this thesis, there has been a presumption in favour of anti-foundational theories of knowledge, and to argue that these need not be relativistic, removes what has historically been a major stumbling block to the widespead acceptance of such theories. Note, however, that the more modest claim which this thesis makes does not require a commitment to anti-foundationalism. The foundationalist may, without being persuaded by the anti-foundationalist's arguments, still accept that there are anti-

foundationalist's, like Rorty and Davidson, who are also non-relativists. My hope, of course, is that the foundationalist will be less quick to dismiss anti-foundational theories because they are thought to entail some form of relativism. As for the anti-foundationalist, I hope to have given her some arguments with which to fend off accusations of relativism; while, at the same time, to have aided in arresting the vacillation which plagues some anti-foundationalists who are uncertain about there supposed, implied commitment to relativism.

In short, I have attempted to contribute to the growing literature aimed at deconstructing the mind-set which sees relativism wherever epistemic foundations have been abandoned.

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