PHILOSOPHY AND RELATIVISM:

A STUDY OF THE RELATIVIST POSITIONS IN THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE, MEANING AND MORALITY

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CERTIFICATE

I, Dr. P.V. Unnkrishnan, do hereby certify that this account "Philosophy and Relativism: A Study of the Relativist Positions in Theories of Knowledge, Meaning and Morality" is a record of bonafide research carried out by Mr. Mukudnaunni. A. P. under my supervision and guidance.

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Declaration

I, Mukundanunni. A. P., do hereby declare that this report Philosophy and Relativism: **A Study of The Relativist Positions in theories of Knowledge, Meaning and Morality** is original and carried out by me in the Department of Philosophy, University of Calicut. I further declare that this report has not been previously formed the basis for the award of degree in this or any other university.

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10-10-2006

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Mukundanunni. A. P.

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INTRODUCTION

Mukudnaunni. A. P. “Philosophy and relativism: A study of the relativist positions in theories of knowledge, meaning and morality” Thesis. Department of Philosophy , University of Calicut, 2006

INTRODUCTION

Relativism is mostly identified as a thesis, which claims that all points of view are equally valid. In theory of meaning a relativist thesis may hold that different meanings for the same sentence or word are possible as meaning is relative to different linguistic practices, cultures, epochs, and even forms life. In epistemology, it amounts the claim that all beliefs and belief systems are equally true, and in ethics, it amounts to claiming that all moralities are equally true. Critics usually dismiss relativist arguments claiming that they are self-refuting arguments, and that they discourage the enterprise of improving ways of thinking.

Relativism dates back to the first classical statement of the Sophist Protagoras that man is the measure of all things[1]. Since then, an enormous amount of discussion has taken place about relativism, particularly in the contemporary philosophy, and this has produced many illuminating insights that can throw light on the many-sided dimensions of the problem of relativism.

This is a study on relativist positions in philosophy. It aims to examine the strength and weakness of relativist arguments in theories of knowledge, meaning and morality. Arguments and standpoints, which have a relativistic consequence, in the analytic tradition of philosophy, will be examined in detail. This study consists of seven chapters. First chapter is an attempt to situate the doctrine of relativism in the discipline of philosophy. In this chapter this study attempts to define relativism, and examines various

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[1] Westacott, Emrys. "Relativism". The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Online. Internet. 1 October 2006. Available at : http://www.iep.utm.edu/r/relativi.htm

types of relativism with an aim to understand the characteristic features of each types of relativism. Relativism is divided up into different types and each type is studied, and arguments for and against each type of relativism are discussed.

Chapter two is devoted for the study of the theories in meaning. In this chapter W V O Quine's notion of indeterminacy of translation, especially the actual message of his ontological relativity is discussed. Quine presents his notion 'indeterminacy of translation' in his book "Word and Object", and he puts the analytic/synthetic division into severe analysis, before he rejects that distinction, in another of his work (this is best described in his essay "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"). How Quine presents his views, how he argues his points and develop them into a radical philosophy, and how he concludes from his premises, etc. are discussed in detail in this chapter. Not only that, how far his arguments have relativistic consequence too is discussed.

It is difficult to follow certain of Wittgenstein's philosophical views because his writings offer a heap of scattered views on everything, and therefore only two streams of his thought are examined in the third chapter. These two streams of thought are his use theory of meaning and his observations on certainty. Certain other theories and arguments of noted thinkers that are relevant to a study on relativism, connected with truth and relativism, too are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter four focuses on the relativist positions of Thomas. S. Kuhn in the area of philosophy of science. His historiography, his radical interpretation of science, his notions like 'normal science', 'puzzle-solving', 'scientific paradigms', and 'incommensurability' are discussed in detail, and the discussion is followed by a critique of Kuhn's philosophical treatment of science, and the scope and consequences of his arguments and standpoints.

Paul K Feyerabend is an overt relativist. He is proud of being a relativist. His notion of 'anything goes' is a critique of scientific methodology. Chapter five is devoted to a study of Feyerabend's interpretation of science. Feyerabend argues that rationality is the product of a certain kind of training. Enough space and importance have given to his critique of rationality too.

Issues of morality that are relevant to a study of ethical relativism are the subject matter of chapter six. Alasdair MacIntyre's tradition-constituted virtues and his notion of incommensurablitiy find a prime place in this chapter. After dealing with his elaborate study on virtues of tradition and his analysis of contemporary moral debate, his views are critically examined. A comparison of different notions of incommensurability is attempted here. Apart from MacIntyre's moral philosophy, this chapter discusses the nature of contemporary moral disagreement, and also postmodern ethics' radically different approach towards moral issues.

The final chapter of this study, chapter seven, is an attempt to draw some conclusive remarks on various types relativistic positions, both overt and covert. This chapter discusses not only the arguments of the philosophers so far discussed in previous chapters but also some other relativistic conceptions of rationality, for example, Richard Rorty's pragmatic conception of rationality, Hilary Putnam's internalist conception of rationality relativism, and Edmund Husserl's attempts to overcome relativism.

To conclude, this study is an endeavor to examine closely certain arguments that are often treated as having the consequence of relativism. In these seven chapters many aspects of those arguments are examined by critically reengaging them. The study focuses on the strength and weakness, logical interconnections, scope and limitation of the relativistic positions.

SITUATING PHILOSOPHICAL RELATIVISM

Mukudnaunni. A. P. “Philosophy and relativism: A study of the relativist positions in theories of knowledge, meaning and morality” Thesis. Department of Philosophy , University of Calicut, 2006

CHAPTER ONE

SITUATING PHILOSOPHICAL RELATIVISM

Relativism may be regarded as an attempt to avoid skepticism that almost inevitably follows when an absolute conception of truth is combined with the conception that judgments are differently rooted, variable, and mostly contingent. One can look at it from different angles. Different snapshots will give different facets of this doctrine. Relativism may be a global doctrine about all knowledge or a local doctrine about some area, for example, aesthetics, ethics, or judgment of secondary qualities. The aspects that are supposed to determine what truth is 'for them' may include historical, cultural, social, linguistic or psychological background, or sensory constitution. Relativism is said to be an attempt to take account of these contingencies between the believer and the truth believed. From this one can draw a tentative conclusion that relativism is not a single doctrine and that its arguments are not homogenous. It is a family of views whose common theme is that some central aspect of experience, thought evaluation, or even reality is somehow relative to something else. In other words, dependent variables like standards of justification, moral principle, or truth are said to be relative to independent variable like language, culture, or biological makeup. And noticeably contemporary philosophical debates, generally, seem to admit that relativist arguments have captivated a wide range of thinkers from a wide range of traditions.

One can distinguish between moral relativism and cognitive relativism, or discern epistemic relativism, semantic relativism, cultural relativism, paradigm relativism, historical relativism, linguistic relativism, etc. And also one can discriminate between the features of positive and negative

relativism and between strong and weak relativism. Furthermore, one can distinguish relativism from skepticism, antirealism, pluralism and anarchism.

There can be covert relativist positions. For example, suppose someone makes a moral statement like 'killing is evil' to a logical positivist, the latter may disagree with him or her by saying that it is an emotive statement, and that an emotive statement cannot be verified therefore not verifiable and hence meaningless. This disapproval is quite fitting to be regarded as based on a relativistic stance. Likewise there may be moments in an argument that can be treated as instance of one's argument turning relativistic. Similarly there can be instances of the whole body of knowledge being relative to something else; perhaps time, or for example, philosophy of science, or science as a whole. The gambit of knowledge, perhaps, may be relative to certain patterns. Furthermore, relativism is a likely outcome in cases where a social researcher uses explanatory tools like 'understanding' because 'understanding' involves interpretation. Interpretation is a kind of explanatory tool, and by its character it opens a space meaning. so far as meaning is involved, one can ask a question like 'What is the meaning of...? Relativism shows its face in inter-subjective knowledge too.

Most of the thinkers whose philosophical views have relativist consequences have not declared themselves as relativists. And most of the leading thinkers have been accused of relativism. According to Emrys Westacott[2], leading thinkers like Ludwig Wittgenstein, Thomas Kuhn, Richard Rorty, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida share some common grounds, which offers perhaps defensible relativistic positions.

There are different types of relativism. According to Westacott, these different types of relativism share two things in common. Firstly, they

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[2] ibid

all agree to the assertion that everything, be it moral value or beauty or knowledge or meaning, is relative to a particular framework or standpoint, be it an era or a culture or the individual, or a conceptual framework or language. Secondly, they all argue that no viewpoint is superior to any other.

Thus the types of relativism would be determined by what something is revitalized to. Moral relativism would assert about the relativity of moral values, epistemological relativism would speak about the relativity of knowledge, cultural relativism would assert about the relativity of culture, and so on. And all these different types of relativism can have its own subspecies. For example, moral subjectivism is a subspecies of moral relativism because it relativizes moral values to the individual subject.

Relativism is not a single doctrine. Relativism is a family of views whose central theme is that almost everything, for example, values, beliefs, and even reality, is somehow relative to something else, says Chris Swoyer[3] in his entry on relativism in the Stanford Encyclopedia of relativism. In other words, relativism is a claim about the state of affairs in which standards of values, knowledge, meaning, etc. are relative to particular frameworks, cultures, and language, even to biological make-up. Often relativistic lines of thinking are believed to have implausible consequences. But such a tone of injunction or warning of bad consequences has not stopped people espousing relativism.

Reports coming form anthropological and sociological enquiries, especially about alien cultures and about the societies of remote epochs, have fed relativism from time to time, especially in the last few decades. In

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[3] Swoyer, Chris. "Relativism". Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Online. Internet. 12 January 2006. Available: http://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/

philosophy of science, relativistic arguments emerge as part of the attempt to understand the theoretical shifts in the history of scientific ideas. Kuhn's 'paradigm' is an important notion that has made a radical break in the way the history of science has been understood so far. The notion of paradigm in science has changed the image of science altogether. It has been able to questing the accepted notions of science like 'progress', 'accumulated knowledge', 'science as a unified sphere of knowledge', etc. Questioning these accepted characteristics of science, Kuhn has replaced these with his notions like 'paradigm' and 'incommensurability'. This has opened up a way that would lead to relativism.

Among many others emotivism is a strong ground for the relativists. Emotivim is an offshoot of verification theory. Verification theory of meaning insists that meaning is the verifiability of a statement. Evaluative statements are not verifiable because they are not statements about facts. Instead they are about how something ought to be or the like. Verification principle cannot be applied to such statements. Consequently emotivists believe that such statements are the expression of one's attitude. In that pave the way for relativism.

Relativist claims in the area of meaning have raised remarkable questions against the universalizability of meaning. Wittgenstein's claim that meaning has no foundation apart from the use of language within a life situation is a deathblow to the absolutist claims of language and meaning. Similarly Quine's notion of 'indeterminacy of translation' claims that synonymy is an unachievable target, and that complete translation is impossible. He leads this notion to another notion called ontological relativity. Relativists copiously quote these writers, and therefore their philosophical messages can have something to do with relativism.

Sometimes relativism appears in other garbs. The content of those new or alternate garbs could be attempts to defend relativism. According to Swoyer[4], constructivism and pluralism are different alternate brands of relativism. However, it is not the banners, but the views are important.

Descriptive and Normative Relativism

Swoyer[5] makes a distinction between descriptive relativism and normative relativism. Descriptive relativism is a family of empirical claims such as there are different cultures, different groups with different moral values, etc., and also that the truth and the values in these different groups or cultures are not the same. To be clearer, the truth of a group or a culture need not be the truth of another group or culture. Descriptive relativists do not claim that everything is relative. For example, logical principles need not be relative to something else, according to descriptive relativism. Another feature of descriptive relativism is that it comes in stronger forms as well as in weaker forms depending up on the descriptive versions. Counter argument to descriptive relativism is the empirical claim that moral values, epistemic standards, etc. are universal.

Normative relativism is a family of non-empirical normative or evaluative claims. According to this, standards of values, reasoning or the like are right or wrong, correct or incorrect relative to a framework. It is possible to be a descriptive relativist about something without being a normative relativist about the same. Normative relativism is a Janus-faced one, says Swoyer[6]. Its first face is an anti-realist face. Normative relativists would agree with anti-realists in the claim that there is no absolute,

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[4] ibid

[5] ibid

[6] ibid

completely objective, framework-independent fact about moral truth or moral justification. From this one can say that anti-realism too is a relativist position. Second, normative relativism also has a realist face, that is, once things are relativized to frameworks, there are facts about moral justification, epistemic truth or the like. One objection Swoyer[7] raises here against the claim of the normative relativist's realist face is that framework-relative truth could be wrong. For example, if there is a dog in someone's room, and if that person believes that there is no dog in his or her room, then that person believes wrongly. His or her belief is framework-relative, but even then it is not true even within that framework.

The two faces of normative relativism are at times odd between each other. This happens when the realist face of normative relativism needs the notion of objectivity. The realist face of normative relativism needs a realist face when it requires the notion of objectivity not only to avoid idealism but also to argue for the possibility of intra-framework objectivity and truth. But this is quite contradictory with its other face, that of anti-realist. The realist face of normative relativism is quite threatening to its own anti-realist face.

Another objection, Swoyer's[8], to normative relativism is that it presupposes realism. The mere fact that groups differ with respect to concepts, beliefs, cultures, shows that there are concepts, cultures, and beliefs. If living in a particular culture and using a particular language would shape the thoughts of those who belong to it, then logically it follows that there is an objective causal connection between using a certain language or belonging to a culture and thoughts being shaped by the culture and the language. That shows that an all-embracing relativism is difficult to defend.

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[7] ibid

[8] ibid

Conceptual Relativism

Conceptual relativism is the view that different groups as they dwell in different languages and cultures may have their own central concepts, which may lead them to have different concepts about the world. Conceptual relativism can be global as well as local. Mostly local versions are being claimed prominently, for example, in the areas of ethics, science or the like. Kuhn's descriptions about the character of scientific revolution belong to the local type of conceptual relativism, since it is a case claimed only relevant within scientific communities

Descriptive conceptual relativism is the empirical claim that the members of some different cultures or linguistic communities or groups may have different central concepts, for example, the claim that the concept of modern individual rights did not exist in ancient societies. To show another example, Swoyer[9] cites Whorf's observation that what English thought as falling under the concept of an enduring object (rocks, horses), the Hopi thought as falling under the concept of an event.

Normative conceptual relativism holds that there is no single use in which the use of concept is right or wrong. According to Swoyer[10], normative conceptual relativists may go wrong in cases like misclassifying things now and then, sometimes misclassifying things in a systematic manner. Conceptual relativists deny, according to Swoyer[11], what Plato in Phaedrus claims that there are no concepts that carve nature at its joints. This claim of Plato entails the view that there is nature independently of how people parcel things out in their thought. This is what conceptual relativists want to refute.

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[9] ibid

[10] ibid

[11] ibid

In reply to Plato, a conceptual relativist may say that the notion of an independent nature is nothing but an assertion of another conceptual framework.

Swoyer[12] says, intending to elucidate Hilary Putnam's reality relativism, concepts underlie all mental process, and therefore classification is rarely an end in itself. As an example, he says, when someone sees a rattlesnake under a rock, he or she immediately infers that it is dangerous. Recognizing a rattlesnake could be treated as an instance of classification. But when someone sees a rattlesnake and recognizes it, what happens is not merely mental process of classification, but it is being classified as a dangerous thing. It shows that classification is not end in itself. The world is open to so many different schemes of classification. But one or the other concept determines what are out there to be sorted out. That means, it is the sortal concept that works behind every classification. This argument implies that different systems of concept may sort out the same group of pre-individuated things in different ways. These are the justificatory beliefs of a reality relativist. In this way the arguments for reality relativism holds that concepts play a central role in individuating and demarcating pre-individuated things. When a sortal concept individuates a thing, it means that the individuation is in accordance with the sortal concept. Therefore here, one can say that here the sortal concept is playing pivotal role. But Swoyer[13] thinks that it is not clear whether one can say concept is central in creating the things in its extension.

According to Swoyer, there is another problem with 'concept', that of expressibility and usability. Suppose modern society can come to understand

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[12] ibid

[13] ibid

the culture of an exotic group. Not merely understanding but to express the same using the concepts of the modern society. If that is possible, that means these two groups share some common concepts. Even if it is true, it is not the end of the problem. One can still suppose the possibility of using these concepts differently by different societies. If they continue to use the same concepts differently, in the long run, it might lead them to have different conceptions of the world. This can be seen when one group applies a concept to a wide range of things while the other group does not apply it at all. Historians have met with concept of divine rights of kings. It was an elaborately applicable concept in societies where king ruled. Although the same concept is meaningful to the people of today, there can be no instances to which this concept can be applied now.

Another problem with 'concept', says Swoyer[14], is that of how easily or with difficulty a concept is used. One can take a blindly superstitious group for example. They may believe in the existence of spirits. When any one in that group fall ill, they would easily attribute 'spirit' as the cause of the disease. If one takes the example of a mildly superstitious group, then one can see that the same concept does not work easily here. They would not attribute spirit as the cause of disease so suddenly. They may conceptualize disease as the work of the spirit, but only later or perhaps as the last resort.

Epistemic Relativism

According to Swoyer[15], descriptive epistemic relativism about a given inference or reasoning is the empirical claim that certain different groups are using different standards of reasoning and inference. For instance, if there were a pre-logical society, they might not have known about reasoning,

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[14] ibid

[15] ibid

inference etc. Descriptive epistemic relativism is an empirical claim; therefore empirical research can only prove whether different groups use different standards for reasoning and inference.

Normative epistemic relativism is the claim that different groups can disagree about what is good evidence without being unintelligent, irrational, unjustified or inconsistent. If there is disagreement about the standards of justification among different groups, and if knowledge requires justification, then it could lead to relativism about knowledge. The strongest version of epistemic relativism will lead to what P K Feyerabend calls 'anything goes.' But a number of writers endorse a subtle version of epistemic relativism. They justify their subtle version of epistemic relativism not with a reason built from within, but taking it from outside. What they say is that it is not easy to devise a defense of some of the most fundamental standards and practices like induction. Thus a normative epistemic relativist has to rely on realism to defend framework-immanent correctness, but at the same has to rely anti-realism to defend framework-transcendent correctness.

Ethical Relativism

It is possible to be a relativist, says Swoyer[16], on things like what constitutes a good and worthwhile life or the like, but not on 'rights'. 'Right' is easily universalizable. Though 'ethical relativism' and 'moral relativism' are often used interchangeably, Swoyer makes a distinction between them. Morality is often characterized as part of ethics. Morality involves obligation, justice and rights, whereas ethics involves larger notions like well-being (Aristotle's *eudaimonia*).

Descriptive ethical relativism is the claim that different groups differ on what they consider as moral, for example modern European society

[16] ibid

consider autonomy and individual freedom as important, whereas certain other groups consider heroism and submissiveness to divine commandments as import to their life.

Normative ethical relativism is the claim that what is good, virtuous, etc will hold only within a framework. That is, ethical values are relative to a framework.

Semantic Relativism

Some philosophers of science claim that seventeenth century scientists used the word 'mass' different from the way modern physicists use it today. Though both the seventeenth century scientists and the modern physicists use the same term 'mass', they designate different meanings to it. This sort of a claim for relativity is what descriptive semantic relativists make. The normative counterpart of semantic relativists makes the claim that a linguistic community, culture, or a historical period determines meaning of words.

Everyone one may agree that, says Swoyer[17], to a certain extent meaning of words is determined by the linguistic practice of a community. Semantic relativism, he says, is more a thesis of linguistic than an overt relativism. Semantic holism or meaning holism is a relativist position because according to it meaning of a phrase or sentence is determined by its relation to the overall web of beliefs. If semantic holism is true, substantially different theories cannot have common phrases and sentences with the same meaning. The notion of incommensurability adds to this that competing theories cannot even disagree with each other because their competing talks would be nothing more than talking past each other. Hence one can say that incommensurability thesis support a variety of descriptive relativism because

[17] ibid

different groups with different outlook will have different standards, concepts and beliefs.

According Swoyer[18], W V O Quine's notion of indeterminacy of translation and ontological relativity conjures up an extreme form of relativism. He says Quine's views are forms of anti-realist notion about semantic notions.

Truth-value Relativism

Philosophers call truth and falsity truth-values. That is why Swoyer calls relativism about truth truth-value relativism. Descriptive relativism is the claim that in certain cases different groups espouse different beliefs on what is true. Consider what Swoyer says:

> *Descriptive truth-value relativism* is the empirical claim that in some cases the members of different groups believe different things to be true[19].

Normative truth-value relativism is the claim that truth is relative to a particular framework. That means truth is an intra-theoretical term. The weak version of this claims that one and the same thing can be true in one framework, and not true in another framework simply because in the second framework it is not expressible. But the strong version claims that one and the same the same belief is true one framework and false in the other.

The traditional indictment of strong truth-value relativism, according to Swoyer, is that it is self-refuting. That is, the claim that truth is relative to a framework, by the light of the same argument, is true only relative to a

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[18] ibid

[19] ibid

framework. Therefore this claim of the relativist can be false in another framework.

Constructivism or Reality Relativism

There is a claim that reality it self is a construction or the product cognitive activity. This view has come through many names. Social construction of reality is one among them. Metaphysical relativism and constructivism are some others. Swoyer calls it reality relativism, and he considers this as the most extreme form of relativism. In his own words:

> In a phrase so arresting it couldn't help but catch on, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) spoke of the *social construction of reality*. The term suggests that the world, *reality itself*, is in some measure the product of our cognitive activity. Such views have gone by various names, including *metaphysical relativism* and *constructivism*, and they are the most extreme forms of relativism that there are. I will call the general view *reality relativism*.[20]

Descriptive reality relativism is the claim that certain groups think or experience the world as consisting certain things, for example: enduring objects, whereas certain other groups think and experience the world differently, for example: as events, as temporal units.

According to normative reality relativism, what is real is somehow relative to a framework. Swoyer asks, what could this mean? Perhaps, he say, it means people use concepts to construct world. But no one, he continues, would believe that the world is literally a construct. Immanuel Kant has held that mind plays a pivotal role in perception. But he never said

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[20] ibid

world is entirely a construction. He has only said that inputs have to be managed by the innate conceptual givens to have an idea of the world. It is the inputs that is shaped by beliefs, concepts, and cognitive practices, says Swoyer. If one commits that there is 'input', then one cannot justify the claim that the world is literally a construct.

Cognitive Relativism

Knowledge, belief, perspectives, etc., are the result of sense experience and the rationalistic interpretation of it according to different frameworks. Various kinds of worldviews seem to guarantee the possibility of different frameworks. And the net result would be a pluralism of equally valid interpretations, that is, cognitive relativism. However, there is no generally agreed up on definition of cognitive relativism.

Hilary Putnam defined reason as the norms of a local culture. Karl Popper believes that there is no such thing as objectivity, and that choice between competing theories is arbitrary. Earnest Gellner says there is no unique truth because there is no unique objective reality. There is no all-encompassing framework in which radically different and alternate schemes are commensurable, observes Richard Bernstein. Richard Rorty says that there is no truth or rationality apart from the descriptions of the process of justification, which a society uses in areas of enquiry. Westacott lists these ivergent remarks on relativism to show why it is difficult to have a consensus about what relativism precisely is[21]

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[21] Westacott, Emrys. "Cognitive Relativism". The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Online. Internet. 1 October 2006. Available at http://www.iep.utm.edu/r/relativi.htm

Another reason for not having a consensus about the definition of relativism is that very few philosophers are willing to apply the label 'relativists' to themselves. Even Richard Rorty who is widely regarded as defending relativism like to describe himself as a 'pragmatist', an 'ironist', and an 'enthnocentrist'.

Westacott's definition of cognitive relativism consists of two claims: first, truth-value of a particular any particular statement is relative to some particular standpoints, and two, no standpoint is metaphysically privileged over others.

Areas of Overlap

According Swoyer[22], there are areas of overlap among these species of relativism. Among them, ethical relativism overlaps normative truth-value relativism about ethical values. Another overlapping instance can be pointed out in the relationship between epistemic relativism and conceptual relativism. Life is not so compartmentalized like the various types of relativism, and therefore instances of overlapping could occur numerously. Also various types of relativism support each other, though falling short of entailment.

Arguments Against Relativism

The argument against truth-value relativism is that it is self-refuting. That is, the claim of truth-value relativism that truth is relative to a framework is applicable to that argument itself. Then it can be said that relativism can be false within certain frameworks.

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[22] Swoyer, Chris. "Relativism". Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Online. Internet. 12 January 2006. Available: http://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/

According to Swoyer, though Quine's notion of ontological relativity entails relativist consequence, his own belief in the fact of the matter undermines relativism badly[23]. Swoyer picks up another argument against relativism in the new versions of anti-realist theory of mind called eliminative materialism. According to eliminative materialism all sorts of concepts hitherto formulated are part of a defective theory and which will be wiped off once science develops further.

Swoyer poses Kant's transcendental as argument against relativism. Kant's argument does two things. His argument intends to show that any creatures that think with categories like space would think through concepts like object and property, causation, reality, negation, possibility and so on. There are principles associated with these concepts. These creatures must regulate their thought using these principles. Thus, Kant's transcendental argument assumes that certain in-built concepts and beliefs are indispensable for knowledge and experience.

Kant's argument has both indispensability aspect and justificatory aspect. Kant's indispensability aspect is present invariantly in all creatures that think through categories of space and time, therefore gives *a priori* refutation to relativist claim that different groups think differently. Kant's justificatory aspect is a direct consequence of his indispensability aspect. The indispensability aspect justifies the creatures' modes of thought from within.

Swoyer is aware that Kant's philosophy is subject to enormous scholarly dispute. Yet, he argues that the basic claim of Kant's philosophy is that the creatures that experience as beings in space and time cannot have even rudimentary self-conscious and coherent experience unless they are aware of an objective world. The general view of Kant is that coherent

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[23] ibid

temporal experience is not possible if there is no physical world outside with extensive and intensive properties, Swoyer adds.

Methodological relativism and philosophical relativism are to be distinguished. According to philosophical relativism, truth of a statement depends on who states it. That is, truth of a statement is not true in a broader sense. It is true 'in our culture', 'in our language game' etc. Perhaps this is almost true in the case of ethical or aesthetic judgments. However, some scientists believe that statements in science or at least some of them are partially true in an unconditional way. For example, if the fine structure constant of particle physics means anything, it is a number that was the same at the same time of the Roman Empire as it was in 12th century China.

Relativism Distinguished from similar claims

Relativism and relativity are to be distinguished. 'Relativism' is a position where as 'relativity' is a situation, i.e., some activity happens to be relative to certain other actions. Skepticism is not an equivalent of relativism neither is agnosticism nor is instrumentalism. Instrumentalists like Pierre Duhem, Poincoire, etc. hold that scientific theories are not representing reality, instead they are merely instruments that help us to cope up with world or to navigate through the world.

There can be concealed relativism as well as open relativism; for example, Thomas. S. Kuhn, Wittgenstein, Richard Rorty, etc. do not call themselves relativists. But their views may lead to relativism; for instance, Feyerabend and Lyotard (many other postmodernist too) were inspired by Wittgenstein, and quote him copiously.

Sometimes relativist claims vary in degrees. That is to say, there can be stronger and weaker forms of relativism. Sometimes both of these can be found present in an argument. Moreover, a tendency to oversimplify the

views of the other side is often found in debates over relativism. Similarly certain relativist views come up in disguising attire and labels. Consider Chris Swoyer's remarks on disguised relativism:

> Finally, relativistic themes are frequently defended under alternative banners like 'pluralism' or 'constructivism' (with a particular author's line between relativism and pluralism typically marking off those views he likes from those he doesn't). I will use the label 'relativist' for all such views, with the understanding that many species of relativism may be plausible or even true. But it is the views, not the labels, which are important[24].

However, there are many views that reject absolutism but fall short of being relativism. For example, there is a view in philosophy of science that scientific theses do not represent reality. This view is called anti-realism, and the view that scientific theses represent reality is called realism. Anti-realism is not a relativistic theory.

Relativism is frequently rejected on the grounds that it is not able to meet the standards any idea essentially has to meet. The central problem of relativism is one of giving it a coherent formulation, making the doctrine more than the platitude that differently situated people may judge differently and less than the falsehood that contradictory views may each be true. It is argued that much postmodernist thought may be regarded as a somewhat abandoned celebration of relativism, which has roots in both the continental and analytic tradition of philosophy. Postmodernism is a claim that there are no universal or trans-cultural standards of rationality. Among the sources of this new form of relativism are the failure of logical positivism and the shift

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[24] ibid

within anthropology from a single evolutionary model to several models for understanding human culture.

Rationalists hold that what is known through sense experience is deceptive, real truth can be known only through reason. Many rationalist philosophers have arrived at ultimate truth by means of mysterious processes of reason. However, no rationalists agree each other among themselves about what truth ultimately is.

Empiricists have criticized rationalists for downplaying sense experience. For empiricists, sense experience is the source of acquiring knowledge. Sense experience too is problematic. Search for the basic experience, prior to the knowledge, has been a great attempt from their part. Contrary to what is told and held, experience is not so straightforwardly a thing because prior knowledge, beliefs, judgments of some sort, or the like influence experience. Experience involves interpretation. Interpretation depends upon a lot of other factors. For example, an x-ray picture is one kind of experience to a doctor and another to a layman. The former deciphers a disease in it, and for the latter it is a picture of blurred edges. At this point, an empiricist may argue that there was only one seeing experience for the both and the interpretations were only different. Then comes the question: can such a distinction be made? The answer to this question depends on what perception is. As far as perception is concerned, what is directly available for the perceiver is the experience of perception. The experience of perception always involves interpretation. Perception is colored by the interpretation of the perceiver, which shows that experience is theory-laden.

If sense experience is not free from interpretation and if background beliefs will always influence experience, then the empiricists cannot defend their basic claim. This shows that both empiricism and rationalism can be accused of one-sidedness. In his 'Critique of Pure Reason' Kant has pointed

out this. For him, experience is necessary for knowledge but sense experience is basically an unintelligible confusion of sensations. Human being is endowed with a framework of faculties that has to organize, interpret, and make sense to these scattered data provided by the sensation. Kant shows that both reason and sense experience is at work. According to him reality as such, in itself, is not accessible to human experience.

If knowledge is the result of a person's experience and the interpretation of the same by his or her mental faculties, then his or her knowledge is the perspective of a framework. This implies that a particular instance of knowledge could be valid only to that particular framework. Kant had not meant this. Kant had resisted the slippery into subjectivism. Subjectivism is the claim that the validity of knowledge is relative to the interpretation of that particular individual. According to him, human mental faculties are the same for all, all have similar or the same infrastructure of tools for interpretation. That is why he talked about universals. And it goes without saying that his theory has influenced theory of knowledge tremendously.

Relativity and Relativism

Anthropological and sociological research in the last few decades has clearly shown the culture diversity supporting a plethora of epistemic and value positions. These reports have made it easy to think that relativism in all spheres of life an obvious case of matter. Therefore it is now the burden of those who like to argue against relativism to prove that what is obvious is not the case. Braulio Munoz is one among those thinkers who made an attempt share that burden.

As a first step in trying to argue against relativism Munoz makes a crucial distinction between relativity and relativism:

> I shall attempt here to discharge this burden by showing that indeed, the obvious relativism is not really so. To this end I shall draw from classical sociological theory and make crucial distinction between *relativity* and *relativism.* That is, I acknowledge that relativity is indeed a fact of life[25].

He admits that relativity is indeed a fact of life. According to him, all ideological-practical positions shared by cultures or by individuals are not transparent. Munoz distinguishes social life into two: presented and given. Social life has a conspicuous side as well as a hidden side. The former represents the *presented* and the latter stands the *given.* Relativity refers to the level of social life called *presented,* which does not exhaust social life. There is another level of social life called *given.* This level has more to do with more permanent social constructs both within and among societies.

Munoz asks two questions. Is not attempting for any sort of universality a serious misunderstanding of tradition? The second question is whether today's sociologists and anthropologist are not staunch supporters of relativism. These questions can be answered after further discussion. During the rise modern sociology in 19th century, says Munoz, advocates of the universality of human nature fell into two broad categories. The first category based its claim on god. They overcome relativism by appealing to an outside factor called god. Immanuel Kant's philosophy helped to develop a secular version the same. He overcome relativism seeking universality by invoking the postulate called noumenae.

The second category viewed, either scientifically or romantically, nature as the ground human being in cosmos. Though Darwin's theory

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[25] Munoz, Braulio. "On Relativity, Relativism, and Social Theory". Rationality, Relativism And The Human Sciences. Ed. J. Margolis, M. Krausz and R. M. Burian. The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. 1986. p. 209.

shattered the teleological conceptions of natural things, he too found a way to universalize by considering human being as a partaking in the natural practices. With either god or nature both these categories had recourse to a fundamental conception of human nature. But in both cases human life was treated as an epiphenomenon.[26]

The founders of modern social theory differed much from these people. They found both these ways of universalizing inadequate. Karl Marx, Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, etc., carry forward a tradition based on enlightenment and considered deity just as a human construct. According to Munoz here in lies the ground for relativism. Having questioned both ways of universalizing, commentators believed social theory inevitably led to relativism. But they forgot the fact that Marx, Weber, and Freud were guiding to reintegrate the social fabric without succumbing relativism. The collapse of the role of the church had shattered social integrity. These people were trying to integrate the shattered social life. For which they had to rely fundamentally on the assumption of cultural universals both within and between societies.

Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Freud had one thing in common. That is, they all felt the need to probe what is underneath the appearances. Description was not enough for them. They did not welcome the available universals, instead they actively sought one. It is this search made them finds out the distinction about social life that there is a social life that is presented and another part of social life that is given.[27]

What is presented is the surface of human activity. For Marx the "presented" were superstructure and market relations. For Durkheim the

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[26] Ibid. p.210

[27] ibid. p. 211

"presented" meant the veil of appearance of the social life. One can find the noncontractual element of contracts only if sought beneath the appearance of contract. For Freud "the presented" was the consciousness available for self-reflection. To seek beneath the surface in his case is the job of the patient and the psychoanalyst. Weber's entire effort was geared up developing a methodology that can penetrate the surface of the everyday life. Everyday life is constrained by the hegemonic structure; beneath it is the fact of life, relativity.

The "given" is what is given as biological organism by natural constitution. And also what is acquired through history. The founders of the social theory agreed on the view that human is a natural being, it has some natural and universal characteristics like the ability to work, speak, develop cultures, etc. Pertaining to this view they were not relativists. The attribution of relativism to early social theories came from not from the concern of 'natural' but from 'cultural' considerations. The claims of social theory became a serious challenge to religious as well as to modern biology. The challenge was this. The fact that conception of divine is pervasive in human affairs does not entail the conclusion that it is part of the human nature. Likewise the fact that there are biological givens does not entail the reducibility of cultural into natural. Such attempts are visible in Durkheim's supposition of society as an entity, and Freud's attempt to rescue psychology from biology, Marx's attention to history, and Weber's sociological understanding of religion.[28]

According to Munoz, these social thinkers never meant to say that variety of cultures is a manifestation of random manifoldness human life. They were not relativists, says Munoz. They agreed that there are socially

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[28] ibid. p.212

produced constructs in all societies. Durkheim was misunderstood as a predecessor relativist. Munoz says Durkheim's concepts 'sacred' and 'profane' were universal. He uses this conceptual tool to understand all societies. Likewise Freud's conscious-unconscious distinction was meant to be a universal distinction.

QUINE AND ONTOLOGICAL RELATIVITY

Mukudnaunni. A. P. “Philosophy and relativism: A study of the relativist positions in theories of knowledge, meaning and morality” Thesis. Department of Philosophy , University of Calicut, 2006

CHAPTER 2
QUINE AND ONTOLOGICAL RELATIVITY

Indeterminacy Of Translation

W.V.O. Quine takes language as a social art. According to him, an enquiry into the various aspects of language as a social art may depend entirely on intersubjectively available cues. Hence men's dispositions to respond overtly to socially observable stimulations play a major role. The theme of indeterminacy of translation comes from this problem. Recognizing this limitation Quine traces out a systematic indeterminacy involved in the enterprise of translation.

Quine talks about the paradoxical situation language put its users into. He says that we knew physical things only through their effect on our sensory surfaces. But the primordial conceptual schemes are things glimpsed, not glimpses. The conceptual scheme of commonsense is not much different from that of primordial conceptual scheme. But at the same time language is learned not by observing things of the world, but it is learned intersubjectively, learning through observing what and how other people talk. Things referred to do not come to direct reference, instead what is being referred to is just what is agreed upon publicly about it. To study the immediate data about sensation, the point of reference should be sensory data. Sensory data without brain's manipulation of the same is different from men's belief of things. But the paradox is that the language being used to study immediate data of experience is that of the same old conceptual scheme in which the posits are things of the world, not the perceptual data.[29]

Quine says:

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[29] Quine, W. V. O. Word and Object. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.1960. pp.1-5.

> No enquiry being possible without some conceptual scheme, we may as well retain and use the best one we know – right down to the latest detail of quantum mechanics, if we know it and it matters[30]

However, according to Quine, it is possible to recognize the conceptual trappings retrospectively and thereby revise the theory while saving the data. One can see traces of relativist thinking in Quine while he calls science as "the last arbiter of truth".[31] According to him, scientific method produces theory whose connection with all possible surface irritation consists solely in scientific method itself, unsupported by ulterior controls.

Quine is critical of Peirce's notion of truth, his belief in "nearer than", his belief in scientific method. "Nearer than" is all right with numbers, not with theories. Quine never entertained the thought that science can offer the ultimate and unchangeable truth. Quite the contrary, Quine thinks,

> "Scientific method is the way to truth, but it affords even in principle no unique definition of truth. Any so-called pragmatic definition of truth is doomed to failure equally".[32]

Here it is clear that Quine takes science as the best way to truth, but only as the current option available, but doomed to failure if taken in comparison with possible alternative theories. This also shows that at least indirectly Quine does not support the notion of incommensurability. In incommensurability comparison between alternative theories is not possible. But Quine has talked about better theories, alternative theories, etc. That

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[30] Ibid. p.4

[31] ibid. p. 23.

[32] Ibid. p. 23.

means he never takes incommensurability seriously, though his notion of indeterminacy of translation is very close to incommensurability.

According to Quine, a sentence is meaningless except relative to its own theories or pretty firmly conditioned to sensory stimulation. That is, intertheoretically a sentence is meaningless. Here meaningfulness is dependent on being within a theory. Here meaningfulness is being relativized to a theory. This is a relativist position indeed. In his own words:

> It is rather when we turn back into the midst of an actually present theory, at least hypothetically accepted, that we can and do speak sensibly of this and that sentence as true.[33]

But just after saying so Quine turns self-reflective. He asks whether he is just giving a relativistic doctrine of truth and remain content. He adds an account of how even philosophy is done. Unlike Descartes, philosophers see truth earnestly within the total evolving doctrines. A process of evolving involves correction.

Enquiring about the place of meaning in translation, Quine sees a correlation in totality in spite of the variance between sentences and its corresponding non-verbal stimulation. To examine the problem, in a less abstract way, Quine proposes to take the case of translation: radical translation. By radical translation he means translation of the language of a hitherto untouched people.

Quine's thought experiment goes like this: A linguist tries to translate a remote tribal language. When a rabbit scurries, the native says 'gavagai.' It could be anything like 'it is rabbitting here', 'a white animal', etc. The jungle linguist has to learn a few more native words to confirm his hypothesis that

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[33] ibid. p.24

'gavagai' means 'rabbit'. First of all he has to learn the equivalents of 'ye' or 'no'. To exact such words the linguist talks to the tribal. He hears 'Evet' and 'Yok' as answers to several questions that will follow 'yes' and 'no' in his language. Then he comes to believe that "Evet' is 'Yes'. Native's face expression too is counted. Anyway he takes it as a working hypothesis because he can correct if further experience compels him to do so. Whatever it may be, it is important to note that here stimulation is native's assent or dissent to 'gavagai' and not the rabbit.

Quine uses this thought experiment to introduce the notion of stimulus meaning. This is his proposed remedy of the relativist position he himself pointed out when he said about the interdependence of sentences. Stimulus meaning resolves the problem, since there are stimulation pattern that would prompt assent to a sentence than others. Nevertheless, Quine holds that even for such simple sentences as "Gavagai" and "Rabbit", sameness of stimulus meaning has its shortcomings as a synonymy relation. The difficulty is that the native's assent to or dissent from "Gavagai?" depends upon his collateral information. He may give his assent on the occasion of an ill-glimpsed movement in the grass because he expects a rabbit there and which is unknown to the linguist. Not only this, many possibilities of difference in stimulus meaning can be imagined.

The task of the linguist in radical translation is to understand the stimulus meaning of "Gavagai" objectively. In order to have an objective understanding, the linguist has to strip away all sorts of collateral information that influence the native's understanding of "Gavagai", and also other sorts of interferences. But there is no evident criterion to judge when can the stimulus meaning be called ideal. Synonymy requires sameness of stimulus meaning. But collateral information and other interferences will always cause discrepancies in stimulus meaning. If it is a color word, for example: red,

even if there is a word for red in native language, equating it with "Red" would be troublesome, just because of the vagueness of color boundaries in both languages. The stimulus meaning of "Red" tends to vary from person to person, occasions to occasions. In this regard Quine observes:

> Color words are notoriously ill matched between remote languages, because of differences in customary grouping of shades. But this is no present problem; it means merely that there may well be no native occasion sentence, at least no reasonably simple one, with approximately the stimulus meaning of 'Red'. Again, even if there is one, there may well be a kind of trouble in equating it to 'Red', just because of the vagueness of color boundaries in both languages.[34]

The stimulus meaning of "Gavagai" and "Rabbit" could be the same. But even then it cannot be said what object is being applied to by "Gavagai." The native may be meaning brief temporal segments of rabbits. The linguist is just taking for granted that the native is enough like him.

Quine finds that the distinction between concrete and abstract object, as well as that between general and singular term, is independent of stimulus meaning and so he asks himself whether it is because of some fault in the formulation of stimulus meaning. As a corrective measure he tests some devices like supplementary pointing and questioning. But pointing to a rabbit could be pointing at a stage of a rabbit, to an integral part of a rabbit, to the rabbit fusion, to where rabbithood is manifested, and so on. To try supplementary questioning, the linguist has to have enough command in native language. According to Quine, even the term-to-term equivalence is illusory because the whole apparatus of a particular language is independent

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[34] ibid. p. 41

and the very notion of term is as provincial to one's culture as are those associated devices. Quine concludes the discussion of the problem of term-to-term translation by saying that terms and reference are local to one's conceptual scheme.[35] .

Quine sees intrasubjective stimulus synonymy a better option than a two-speaker situation. But it too is not problem-free. His example of a Martian visitor understanding the synonymy of "Bachelor" and "Unmarried man" faces the same problem the native and the linguist faced, that the Martian can very well apply the term not to men but to their stages or parts or an abstract attribute.

"Bachelor" and "Unmarried man" have social acceptance as synonymous, but "Indian nickel" and "Buffalo nickel" do not enjoy that status, though both are the same. Quine says this difference is part and parcel of the way a native English speaker learns these words. The word "bachelor" is learned through associative words whereas "Nickel" is learned through familiarizing the sample. That means, the first is knowledge by description and the other is by acquaintance. Here the "Nickel" has stimulus meaning whereas "Bachelor" has no socially constant stimulus meaning. 'Bachelor', 'brother', 'sister', etc are non-observational. Hence their stimulus meanings vary over society. These words get the fixity needed for communication from verbal links, not by stimulus synonymy. Quine says many terms of systematic theoretical science are of these types.[36]

Translation of logical connectives too is problematic because the linguist would translate the equivalent words in the native's language into English as 'not', 'and', or 'or' as the case may be. But it is well known that

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[35] ibid. p. 53

[36] ibid. 56.

these three English words do not represent negation, conjunction, and alternation, argues Quine.[37] Suppose, says Quine, certain natives are said to accept as true certain sentences translatable in the form '*p* and not *p*'. Under semantic criteria this claim is absurd. A dogmatic translation can make the natives sound queer. A better a translation would impose translator's logic on them, and would beg the question of prelogicality. Quine provides a foot note in this regard in which he tells that Malinowski had spared his islanders the imputation of prelogicality by translating certain terms so carefully as to sidestep contradiction, and as a result of this, Levy-Bruhl gave up his original doctrine of prelogical mentality.[38]

Here one can observe Quine brooding over the problem of relativity involved in translation. Though a logician, Quine is ready to imagine a society who cherishes semantically absurd sentences without being prelogical and queer. Yet Quine's own remarks are available which are careful to not to draw a relativist conclusion. He softens his argument by saying that the correspondence is rather poor, and only that one has to give full weight to the word 'approximation', as the translator's semantic criterion makes demands beyond extension.

Rather than being relativistic, Quine is advocating a sort of holism, a sort of relativity of the parts to the whole. This is evident from the way Quine argues. According to him, the etymology of 'synonymous' applies to names. But in use the term is intended to mean simply sameness of meaning. Quine says he intends the word 'synonymous' to carry the full generality of 'same in meaning'. He has distinguished synonymy between a broad and a narrow type of synonymy. This is to say that synonymy of parts is defined by appeal

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[37] Ibid. p. 58

[38] ibid. p. 58-59

to analogy of roles in synonymous wholes; then synonymy in the narrower sense is defined for the wholes by appeal to synonymy of the homologous parts.

While translating, the translator employs analytical hypotheses. It needs thinking up. The translator may think up a parallelism, which leads to translating a native's sentence to English, be it a plural ending or an identity predicate. Here it is to be noted that the thinking up is just the projection of translator's habits to the native. This shows that stimulus meanings never suffice to determine what words are terms. The question of what terms are coextensive comes only later. To explain this, Quine observes:

> Since there is no general positional correspondence between the words and the phrases of one language and their translations in another, some analytical hypothesis will be needed also to explain syntactical constructions. These are usually described with the help of auxiliary terms for various classes of native words and phrases. Taken together, the analytical hypotheses and auxiliary definitions constitute the linguist's jungle-to-English dictionary and grammar. The form they are given is immaterial because their purpose is not translation of words or constructions but translation of coherent discourse; single words and constructions come up for attention only as means to that end.[39]

Quine is aware of the controversy his "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" has made. That must be why he foresees accusing indeterminacy of translation as trivial and stalls possible claims of solving indeterminacy of translation by using analytical hypotheses, or by scientific method. The point

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[39] ibid. p. 70

of Quine's argument is not whether analytical hypotheses are provable or not. His point is that analytical hypotheses have nothing to speak of as objectivity. Stimulus meaning has better anchorage on objectivity than analytical hypotheses, though two speakers would have different stimulus meaning. In equating "Gavagai" to "there is a rabbit", roughly there is, in a sense, sameness. Indeterminacy of translation is quite radical because it exposes the sameness brought about by analytical hypotheses. Such sameness, linguistic synonymy, can be made sense 'only within the terms of some particular system of analytical hypotheses'[40].

The point of Quine's thought-experiment in radical translation was to provide a critique to the uncritical notion of meanings, and his concern was to expose the empirical limit of it.

By questioning meaning and analyticity, Quine rejects the classical definition of knowledge, and thus naturalizes epistemology. As the name of one of his works shows (From Stimulus to Science), he tries to connect knowledge and its stimulus. The main points in his philosophy can be summarized as: no entity without identity, to be is to be the value of a variable; there is no first philosophy.

In paraphrasing synonymy is not something that is aimed for. What is aimed for could be a better informative account in order to avoid alternative interpretation.

According to Quine, even in a case of an attempt to paraphrase, synonymy cannot be claimed for. Actually synonymy is not aimed for; rather a better informative account is aimed for, and also with an aim to avoid alternative interpretation.[41] The predicament in radical translation was that

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[40] ibid. p. 75

[41] ibid. p. 159

even full knowledge of the stimulus meaning would not suffice for translating an observation statement, or even to spot a term.[42] At the end of the book "Word and Object", Quine is making it clear that no vantage point is available for anyone. Even philosophers are not free from conceptual scheme, but they "can scrutinize and improve the system from within, appealing to coherence and simplicity..."[43] This position can have relativist consequence, but it is not outright relativism. Anyhow, this position is far from absolutism.

The linguist in Quine's thought-experiment is trapped in a circle. He has to know other words first to translate "gavagai", but it is an endless process because there is no initial point on which to base a uniquely correct translation.

The Genesis of Indeterminacy of Translation

Quine's notion of indeterminacy of translation is the product his critique and rejection of the analytic-synthetic division of Kant. David Hume's 'relations of ideas and relations of truth' is a division similar to this. Leibniz spoke of the distinction between truths of reason and truths of fact. Analytic-synthetic division makes denying analytic truth a self-contradiction. According to Quine, this definition has no explanatory value because the notion of self-contradiction needs clarification as analytic truth is in need of. "The two notions are the two sides of a single dubious coin".[44] Quine contends that the notion of analytic truth has two shortcomings. One is that it

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[42] ibid. p. 236

[43] ibid. pp. 275-76

[44] Quine, W. V. O. Two Dogmas of Empiricism. Online. Internet. 24 May 2006. Available: http://www.galilean-library.org/quine.html

limit itself to subject-predicate form. The second is that it appeals to a metaphorical notion of containment.

According to Quine, analytic statements fall in to two categories. The statement "No unmarried man is married" belongs to the first category. This statement does not lean on synonymy. On the contrary, a statement such as "No bachelor is unmarried", which belongs to the second category, leans on synonymy. Here the notion of synonymy is used for clarifying the notion of analyticity. However, the notion of synonymy is also equally in need of clarification.

In Two Dogmas of Empiricism Quine is rigorously analyzing the concept of synonymy. "Bachelor" can be defined as "unmarried man." Here Quine asks on what ground this is done. It is clear that by resorting to dictionary is this done. But a lexicographer only takes for granted antecedent facts. A lexicographer is just reporting an observed synonymy. Quine says this is no enough ground for synonymy. The interconnections, which are held as ground for synonymy, are grounded in usage. Hence this definition comes as reports upon usage. Quine rejects the claim that synonymy of two linguistic forms consists simply in their interchangeability in all contexts without change of truth-value. For the synonyms "bachelor" and "unmarried man" are not interchangeable everywhere. Quine says, "... Synonym so conceived need not be free from vagueness, as long as the vagueness matches."[45] Quine gives two examples where interchangeability does not work: 'bachelor' in 'bachelor of arts', and the 'bachelor' in the statement, "Bachelor has less than ten letters." The 'bachelor' in these examples is not rightly interchangeable with "unmarried man." However these counter

[45] Ibid.

instances can be tackled. "Bachelor of arts" can be treated as one word. But then the notion of synonymy would rest on the notion of word hood.

When Quine says 'synonymy' he means cognitive synonymy, not poetic or psychological, which according to him is impossible. If interchangeability is a sufficient condition of synonymy, then the particular language must contain a word that can express the meaning of 'sufficient condition.' Here analyticity is presupposed. Definition of Analyticity is conceivable by an appeal to a realm of meaning, but the appeal to meaning gives way to an appeal to synonymy, and synonymy depends on a prior appeal to analyticity itself.

Quine has shown that better understanding of the meaning of words would not help distinguish synthetic statements from analytic. For example, one cannot say whether "Everything green is extended" analytic or not, even if one is quite clear about the meaning of the words, because the trouble is with analyticity. If analyticity is explained by means of artificial language, it explains only as 'analytic for' this statement. In such cases 'analytic for' and 'semantical rule of' are relative terms, which require further clarification.

According to verification theory of meaning, the meaning of a statement is the method of empirically confirming or infirming it. If this can be accepted, statement synonymy is said to be likeness of method of empirical confirmation or infirmation. The question then arise is what the nature of the relationship between a statement and experience is. Empiricism takes individual statements for verification. Quine rejects this. According to him, total field of science is undetermined by its boundary conditions, experience. According to this view, whole determines its individual parts. That is, "Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough

adjustments elsewhere in the system."[46] In science theoretical statements are far removed from experience than certain peripheral statements. Physical objects are rather imported into the situation as useful intermediaries. Quine finds no epistemological difference between these irreducible posits and the gods of Homer. He says physical objects and the gods differ only in degree, not in kind, and both entities are cultural posits. In Quine's view, even rationality is a myth. Rational numbers get its prominence only by gerrymandering.

Quine's thesis of the inscrutability of reference and its attendant notions of indeterminacy of translation and ontological relativity have relativist consequences because it implies that ontology is relative to languages or frameworks. His theses undercut many forms of relativism. His notion of inscrutability of reference implies that it make no sense in absolutely saying what objects a speaker is talking about. His own example makes his thesis clear. Pointing towards a rabbit and calling it 'gavagai' cannot make sure what the other person thinks about it. It could be anything, an enduring object called rabbit or an event, a temporal stage called rabbit.

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[46] ibid.

WITTGENSTEIN AND FORM OF LIFE, AND OTHER DEBATES ON MEANING

Mukudnaunni. A. P. “Philosophy and relativism: A study of the relativist positions in theories of knowledge, meaning and morality” Thesis. Department of Philosophy , University of Calicut, 2006

CHAPTER 3

WITTGENSTEIN AND FORM OF LIFE, AND OTHER DEBATES ON MEANING

On Certainty

In his work 'On Certainty' Ludwig Wittgenstein is raising some interesting questions aimed at the ground of one's belief that something is certain. According to him, a proposition like "There are physical objects" cannot be formulated because it is an instruction about how to use terms that are logical concepts.[47] What someone regards as 'certainly true', according to Wittgenstein, also characterizes his or her interpretation of experience. The feeling that one is certain of something comes from his or her learning. He or she is certain of that because he or she has learned it earlier. Wittgenstein's thoughts on certainty find that the certainty that one feels about something is actually interpreted or learned certainty.

Wittgenstein thinks that the feeling of uncertainty about the meaning of a simple sentence is the result of thinking about it philosophically. Here the focal point where meaning lies is not focused. Once philosophizing is stopped, and sensed its meaning in its everyday sense, then the meaning is quite clear and ordinary. Wittgenstein holds that meaning is determined by situation, that is, relative to its situation. He says, for example, when someone is sitting face to face with each other, and says one to the other "I am here"; it does not make sense because here the meaning of the sentence is not determined by the situation. He gives another example: a person with his

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[47] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. On Certainty. Ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1974. p. 7e

hand makes the movement of sawing a plank without a saw or a plank. Here it cannot be said that the person is sawing, as the context is missing.[48]

Wittgenstein is advocating a kind of holism. According to this, a proposition gets its meaning from a nest of propositions and proceedings. This argument matches with what Quine says about science, that the individual statements in science depend on science as a whole. Here the relation between part and the whole is relativistic.

Wittgenstein shows that certainty is presupposed in language game. The certainty of the train leaves at two o'clock can be made reliable by looking at the timetable. Similarly multiplication table is the ground on which the certainty of 12 multiplied by 12 is equal to 144 is established. He even says language-game is only possible if one trusts something.

Language-games are not similar. It is different at every time. One may say he or she knows water boils when put on fire. Wittgenstein asks how one knows it. Of course, experience tells it. But experience does not tell always. If someone is asked whether he had breakfast that day, he may say yes. Here it is not experience that tells. Wittgenstein makes it clear here how different the language-games are at every time. Facts too get fused into the foundation of language-game. Water may change its behavior in future. However, so far, water has shown the tendency to boil if heated. This assurance is the factual foundation of the language-game in which the concept of knowledge is coupled with the language-game. If, as Wittgenstein says, the ground of certainty of a scientific proposition is trust, no knowledge can be certain outside its language-game. This argument of Wittgenstein can have relativistic consequence because it may help conclude that truth and knowledge are relative to language games, and that nothing but trust is the

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[48] Ibid. p. 45e

justification for one to hold something as true or certain. Trust is more a pragmatic notion, and pragmatism is tolerant towards relativism.

One of Wittgenstein's thought experiment shows that the subjective certainty that he is not mistaken may not be believed by others. A person happen to fly to a particular part of the world where no one had any idea of the possibility of flying to whom he tells how he came there, and none believes it. He can give them all the actual procedure about flying and convince them that he is not mistaken. They may trust that he is not mistaken, but still they will think that he may be dreaming or magic has made him imagine so. No amount of evidence would make doubting again impossible.

Wittgenstein's threadbare analysis of the notion called certainty is a strong critique to rationality though the tools he used to analyze were that of rationality. It is critique of rationality within rationality.

Teaching language to a child means training the child to how to use language. It is not explanation, but training. What is called ostensive definition is actually ostensive teaching of words; therefore "with different training the same ostensive training of these words would have effected a quite different understanding."[49]

According to Wittgenstein, naming is like attaching a label to a thing because there is noting necessary about the relationship between the label and the thing. Wittgenstein takes a concrete situation to question the basis of ostensive definition. He imagines a situation where someone is asked to look at the blue sky. The person who is asked to look at the blue sky may screw up

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[49]Wittgenstein, Ludwig. Philosophical Investigations. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. 3rd Ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1967. pp. 4e-5e.

his or her eye or ignore the outline or other spreading colors in order to see the blue sky. The mere act of ostensive pointing can be interpreted in so many ways. Two people belonging to two different training may get two totally different results, if exposed to a test of ostensive pointing of an object. There would require a laborious process of defining, if these two people were to agree each other. But the agreement would be a kind of conversion of either of them into one. This means that pointing as well as understanding the meaning of pointing one gain from training. One can draw from this argument that meaning is not something fixed, but it is the product of training, and therefore meaning is relative to the prevalent use pattern of a society. That is to say that fixation of meaning is relative to one or another way of training. Or in other words meaning is not determined by something outside, but something inside: culture.

Wittgenstein says: "... meaning of a word is its use in the language."[50] However, Wittgenstein has not said that language-games are incommensurable to each other. Nor has he said two or more language-games cannot be fused together. That shows that, though one can read relativism in Wittgenstein's position, his position is equivalent only to descriptive relativism, and not normative relativism.

Wittgenstein's language-games are not isolated islands; it would have been if he were a normative relativist. He says:

> They (language games) are related to one another in many different ways. It is because of these relationships, that we call them all "language".[51]

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[50] ibid. p. 20e.

[51] ibid. p. 31e.

There is no aspect that is common to all instances of language-games, but there is a whole series of overlapping, crisscrossing, similarities, and relationships. Wittgenstein calls these similarities as 'family resemblances'. Following his arguments one can say the so-called language is the family of language-games. However, the kinship between different language-games is as indefinable as its difference. The boundaries of different language-games are blurred. One would have a boundary in mind, but for the other a more extended or less extended one.

Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks contain a strong argument, which makes subjectivism impossible. If pressed more, normative relativism would end up as subjectivism. He is apprehensive about the possibility of a private language. Wittgenstein says, "One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we cannot talk about 'right'".[52] This means that language is the family of various shared language-games, and hence right and wrong cannot be private. Drawing from this argument one can argue against the subjectivism.

Wittgenstein goes beyond descriptive relativism. Many of his ideas anticipate postmodernism, for example:

> Compare a concept with a style of painting. For is even one style of painting arbitrary? Can we choose one at pleasure? (The Egyptians, for instance.) Is it a mere question of pleasing and ugly?[53]

Philosophical remarks of Wittgenstein seem to say that meaning will change as forms of life change, and therefore there is no timeless concept.

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[52] ibid. p. 91e.

[53] ibid. p. 230e.

According to him, generalizations would only help misunderstand things; instead one must look into details with vigilance. He does not consider meaning as psychological, if it is so meaning would be different from person to person, making communication impossible.

Wittgenstein's stand has nothing to do with that of the realists as well as of the anti-realists. Realists believe that language can be compared and could make agree with the outside reality, whereas anti-realists think that one cannot go out of language to compare language with reality. Wittgenstein's stand is different. He is interested in only what make sense. One cannot say that Wittgenstein's philosophy has arguments that lead to relativism, or postmodernism, because he has rejected the advocacy of philosophical theories. However, his anti-theoretical and anti-scientism stance has made him fashionable in post-analytic schools of philosophy.

Wittgenstein takes philosophy seriously. His attempt is to dissolve problems by analyzing it rather than producing more and more theories about them. A certain kind of relativism can perhaps be traced to Wittgenstein's use theory of meaning. When he explains Augustine's approach to what meaning is, he admits that Augustine's theory of meaning fits some occasions but not all. Here itself his view that use is the criterion of meaning begin to show its face. Consider what Wittgenstein says in this regard:

> Augustine, we might say, does describe a system of communication; only not everything we call language is this system. And one has to say this in many cases where the question arises "Is this an appropriate description or not? The answer is: "Yes, it is appropriate, but only for this narrowly circumscribed region, not for the whole of what you were claiming to describe."

> It is as if someone were to say: "A game consists in moving objects about on a surface according to certain rules..." – we replied: "You seem to be thinking about board games, but there are others. You can make your definition correct by expressly restricting it to those games.[54]

But this reaction of Wittgenstein was simply to show how "over-simple" Augustine's conception of language is. Wittgenstein calls Augustine's theory of meaning as "ostensive teaching of words." He agrees with Augustine that ostensive teaching of words would help learning language, " ... but only together with a particular training. With different training the same ostensive teaching of these words would have effected a quite different understanding."[55]

Here also one can see a relativist, especially in his expression "With ... effected a quite different understanding." Meaning depends up on the training one gets—this implies a relativistic conception of meaning. Yet, the next paragraph speaks about the relatedness of everything. Here the whole gambit of language is relative to certain other factors.

Wittgenstein's conception of language as "language games" relativizes meaning of words to a particular language game to which it belongs. Same words get different meaning in different language games. Here meaning is conceived in terms of a pluralistic-relativism.

Words are like tool in a toolkit. Each serves different purposes. Meaning is its use. Observing like this, Wittgenstein asks what we gain from assimilating all these uses in the name of similarity. Inclination towards pluralism is apparent here

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[54] ibid. p. 3e.

[55] ibid. p. 4e-5e.

Debates on meaning

Many philosophers, especially those who belong to analytic tradition, have dealt the notion of meaning along with the notion of truth. For example, there are philosophers who believe that meaning of a sentence, while translating, depends on the truth-value of the sentences. There are contrary claims too, for example, Wittgenstein's claim that meaning depends on use-value. While characterizing meaning and truth philosophers have come to draw a variety of relevant conclusions and these conclusions demonstrate the disagreement they have between each other on various aspects of the concept of truth and meaning.

History of ideas digs up a rich tradition of polemics over the question of meaning. One of the earliest attempts in this area is that of Protagoras. According to the Protagorean design of theory of meaning, meaning is not a static property external to human being but rather an aspect of dynamic human thought grounded in human nature. Much of the recent debate in relativist theory of meaning testifies to the survival of this Protagorean design. On the contrary, referential theory of meaning takes a trip to the opposite direction. Wherein meaning is external to human being, something that passes through the human brain. For them meaning is a precipitate of formal computations, and therefore, they think that the real job of the theory of meaning is to find out the nature of this formal computation.

Another way of looking at meaning can be witnessed, relevant to debates in relativism, in David Hume's theory of meaning. It holds that experience is the limit; one cannot go beyond experience. His project is embedded in the impression – idea relationship. Hume does not admit any idea that is not dependent upon impression. According to him all ideas are traceable to impressions and so, it seems, the implications in his theory of meaning, if extended further, may yield relativism.

Recent attempts in analytic tradition turn towards a different direction. Certain assumptions lead to the setting up of the following framework. If the term "Theory of meaning" stands for a systematic theory of meaning in a given language, then there is a wide agreement as to the shape of such a theory of meaning should take. According to this widely shared assumption, the task of a theory of meaning is to specify what is for sentences of a given language to have the meaning they have. The next reasonable step is to suppose that the meanings of sentences in their assertoric use are constituted by the conditions of their truth. If pressed further, the logical conclusion of this supposition yields a truth-conditional theory of meaning. And it is commonly held that a truth-conditional theory of meaning is the standard theory in that area.

Definitions of Truth and Meaning

The definition of truth, which finds their expression in the well-known words of Aristotle's metaphysics: "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, true."

Tarski updates this definition in modern terminology. He does this step by step and at every step tries to remove the vagueness it carries with it. Aristotle's definition means, to put it in a different garb, truth of a sentence consists in its correspondence to reality.[56]

If one extends the popular usage 'designate' not only to names but also to sentences, and if one agrees to speak the designate of the sentence as 'state of affairs', one can say, Tarski says, the sentence "Snow is white" is

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[56] Tarski, Alfred. "The Semantic Conception of Truth". Truth. Ed. Simon Blackburn &Keith Simmons. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999. p. 118.

true if, and only if, snow is white (ibid 119). On the right side the sentence itself and on the left side the name of the sentence. One can replace 'x' for the name and 'p' for the sentence, then: (T) X is true if and only if, P. When X is replaced by the name of the sentence and P is replaced by the sentence, one will get an equivalence of the form (T). If all these equivalences follow from it, he says, then one can say that the definition is adequate.

'(T)' is not a sentence but only a schema of the sentence. Tarski says that this, though a partial definition, explains wherein the truth of this particular individual sentence consists. A language may admit the construction of infinite number of sentences. Hence, for a general definition, one has to have a logical conjunction of infinitely many sentences. Tarski call this concept the semantic concept of truth.

Some philosophers like Bertrand Russell refuse to distinguish between the name we use in a sentence and the object it stands for. Because for those philosophers, the meaning of name in a sentence is the object for which the name stands for.

When it is said that something is true, Michael Dummet asks, whether it is the sentence or something that is expressed through words that is true. To clarify this ambiguity Dummet makes use of the distinction between token sentences and type sentences. He illustrates this by visualizing an imaginary situation. Were the students in class asked to translate a sentence ' the man has broken all the wine glasses,' will they ask the teacher who the man was or where it happened, etc? No. They won't, says Dummet. If at all they ask there would be no point in it, because the sentence is a type sentence, there is no reference has given, and if truth is a property of sentence, that is, sentences uttered by a speaker at a particular time and place, and so truth will only be the property of token sentences. When Dummet say so, he means that there is no framework-independent meaning available. Such a claim has close

affinity to normative conceptual relativism; therefore one can conclude that Dummet's theory of meaning may lead to relativism.

According to Dummet, a successful theory of meaning must be full-blooded and rich. That is, a theory of meaning has to be a theory of understanding, and also it must explain what it is for a speaker to have the knowledge involved in knowing a language.

Dummet enquires whether truth is, primarily, attached to a sentence or a proposition. He is conscious of the problematic nature of opaque contexts. Some philosophers think that a proposition is a statement uttered by somebody, for instance, 'John believes that Tokyo city is crowded.', but the expression 'it is true that Tokyo city is crowded' is not the same, here 'that' though a sentence operator, makes the context opaque.

Dummet's discussion on the concept of truth goes like this. It is vain to try to explain either the notion of truth or the notion of meaning separately. They have to be explained together. Then only the truth-conditional theory or anything resembling to that will be correct. But to explain them together is a very complicated task because it will be tantamount to explaining the functioning of language as a whole.

While trying to explain truth and meaning together, truth must be taken as a property of the sentences. Not as a property of propositions, but rather as a property of particular utterances of them. The reason Dummet gives is that if truth must be taken as a property of proposition, then it will like trying to explain meaning without appealing to the notion of truth. Contrarily, to speak of proposition is to assume the meanings of sentences to be already known. Listen Dummet's own words:

> In this explanation, truth must be taken as a property of sentences, or rather of particular utterances of them, not as a

> property of propositions: for to speak of proposition is to assume the meanings of sentences to be already known (and therefore as explained without appeal to the notion of truth).[57]

According to Dummet, a minimalist account of the theory of meaning is incompatible with the truth-conditional theory of meaning because it is unable supply the link between the truth-condition of a sentence to be true and the use of that sentence in a discourse. And so, if a minimalist account is to be correct, the theory of meaning should turn out to be one in which the notion of truth plays no essential role. But Dummet thinks that it is unlikely.

Donald Davidson is of the opinion that truth in indefinable. According to him, Socrates had tried to define several things, but mostly he quit defining in the middle of such attempts. Plato too, in his Theaetetus, attempted to define empirical knowledge, in which he, like many other philosophers, defined knowledge as true belief plus something else – justified or warranted belief.

According to Davidson, the combination of causal and rational elements that must enter into analysis of justified belief may not be amenable to sharp formulation in a clearer vocabulary. The same difficulty will occur in attempts of analyzing accounts of memory, perception, and internal action. It is due the nature of the case, here analysis of justified beliefs. But this has not occurred to Plato and many others. Davidson observes:

> It seems no more to occur to Plato than it has to most others that the combination of causal and rational elements that must enter into analysis of justified belief (as it must into accounts of

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[57] Dummet, Michael. "Of What Kind of a Thing is Truth a Property?" Truth. Eds. Simon Blackburn & Keith Simmons. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999. p. 281.

> memory, perception, and intentional action) may in the nature of the case not be amenable to sharp formulation in a clearer, more basic, vocabulary.[58]

According to Davidson, Plato confessed his defeat only about warranty, and did not worry much about the equal involvement of knowledge with truth and belief. David Hume and others followed the same puzzling way. Those who follow them may have to pretend that they understand, adds Davidson. They forget their skepticism about the external world when they formulate their doubts concerning knowledge of other minds.

Indefinability does not mean that nothing can be said, argues Davidson. Instead one has to learn a lot from the history of attempts to relate basic concepts. Even if one's attempt to relate various basic concepts to each other is feeble or faulty, such attempts are worthy ones, and it will be only productive to go on attempting. By contrast, it would be less rewarding if one is attempting to produce revealing definitions of basic concepts in a clearer vocabulary.

According to Davidson, truth, knowledge, belief, action, cause, good and right are the most elementary concepts. Hence he asks why certain philosophers are concerned with reducing these elementary concepts into simpler concepts, and for this reason he disagrees with those who try to reduce these concepts, without which we would have no concepts at all, into simpler ones so as to reach deeper into bedrock. Davidson is not alone; G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and Gottlob Frege share the opinion that truth is an indefinable concept. Frege insisted that truth is indefinable, and called 'logic' the theory of truth. The indefinability argument implies that one can reveal

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[58] Davidson, Donald. "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth". Truth. Eds. Simon Blackburn & Keith Simmons. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999. p. 308.

more by relating the concept of truth to other concepts like belief, desire, cause, and action than defining it. This implication makes it clear that indefinability of truth is not to be taken as a sign of mysteriousness, ambiguity, or untrustworthiness.

It is possible to characterize truth by using some fairly simple formula, argues Davidson, and many formulas are available too. Among them minimalist or deflationary account is gaining increasing popularity. Davidson sympathizes with deflationary theories for the reason that they are against pumping more content into the concept of truth. But he is critical about their conclusion that truth is a trivial concept with no important connections with concepts like meaning and reality.

Davidson prefers Aristotle's definition of truth to Tarski's who claims to have updated Aristotle's definition into modern parlance. Davidson offers the following reasons to defend his preference:

1. Tarski mentions states of affairs, thus suggests postulating entities correspond to sentences. But, one of the strongest arguments for Tarski's definition is that in them nothing plays the role of facts or states of affairs. Tarski's truth definition makes no use of the idea that a sentence corresponds to anything at all, a persuasive argument traced to Frege or Kurt Godel (this is why Frege said all true sentences name the True).

2. Aristotle's definition has no blank space, a blank very hard to fill in, like the 'so and so' in the Tarski's definition of truth.

3. Aristotle's definition makes it clear that the truth of a sentence depends on the inner structure of the sentence, that is, the semantic features of the parts.

Comparing Tarski's definition of truth with Aristotle's, Davidson remarks that the latter's definition is better in its attempts to state the intuitive idea, though incomplete in a minimal way. Of course, someone might question the feasibility of characterizing natural languages by using such limited resources. But Tarski's definition of truth too cannot escape this charge.

Many of the partisans of correspondence theory believe that Tarski is giving a comforting nod to them. However, Davidson argues, neither Tarski's definition of truth nor Aristotle's has such an implication. They never introduce entities like facts or states of affairs for sentences to correspond to. Davidson points out that Quine was of the impression that disquotation exhausts the concept of truth, and therefore Quine seems to agree that meaning and truth can be segregated. However, some scattered remarks in Quine's work suggest otherwise. Quine's one of such remarks is that a word may be said to be determined to whatever extent the truth or falsehood of its contexts is determined. Here, Davidson asks how truth could have this power to determine meaning if the disquotational account would only say about truth. For Davidson, Quine's 'ontological commitment' is an unfortunate relic of old metaphysical thought.

Many are still under the spell of the Socratic idea that one must keep asking for the essence of an idea. Due to this, definition becomes an act of piety. That is why one falls for the freshman fallacy, which demands that one should define one's terms first of all as a prelude to saying anything further.

One is interested in the concept of truth, clarifies Davidson, only because there are actual object and states of the world to which it can be applied. In addition to formal phenomena, empirical phenomena too matter here. Tarski's definition makes no mention about the empirical phenomena. Davidson thinks that a theory of truth should be like a theory of rational

decision. One should observe directly what people mean by what they say. That will help in giving a propositional content such as belief, desire, intention, and meaning to a propositional attitude.

The concept of meaning is more obscure than the concept of truth because if one wants to know what an utterance means one has to know its truth-conditions first. Moreover, the problem of connecting truth with observable human behavior is inseparable from the problem of assigning contents to human attitude. To fulfill this, according to Davidson, there requires a theory that embeds a theory of truth in a larger theory that includes decision theory itself.

Truth and Relativism

According to Richard Rorty, Davidson is not a pure pragmatist (Rorty has called himself a pragmatist) because Davidson has admitted that his is a correspondence theory in an unassuming sense. Davidson shares much with Quine also. Davidson draws the theoretical tools he wants from different quarters like pragmatism, truth-conditional theory, correspondence theory, coherence theory, etc. Only by dropping the whole idea of "correspondence with reality" can one avoid pseudo-problems, says Rorty. It is in this claim that his definition of pragmatism largely consists in.[59]

Nevertheless, Rorty considers Davidson a half pragmatist. According to Rorty, Davidson's philosophy is that of a field linguist. Davidson had said that Quine saved philosophy of language by getting rid of analytic-synthetic distinction. Rorty holds this against Davidson, for; the best reason for Quine to do this was the thought that such a distinction is of no use to a field linguist. Rorty attacks Davidson mainly for his 'less is more' theme.

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[59] Rorty, Richard. "Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth". Truth. Eds. Simon Blackburn & Keith Simmons. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999. p. 330.

Rorty points out that one of the desires said to be universal by certain philosophers is the desire for truth. Such philosophers have based their claim on the premises that truth is correspondence to reality, that reality has an intrinsic nature, and that there is a way the world is. On the basis of these premises they proceed to argue that Truth is One. They also claim that the rise of relatively democratic, relatively tolerant, societies in the last two hundred years is said to be due to the increased rationality of modern times. Here 'rationality' denotes the employment of an innate a truth-oriented faculty.

Rorty refutes these views. He wonders at these views and says that on the contrary truth is an indefinable, sublime object of desire. He says that there are many differences between truth and justification. Justification if often achieved. But that achievement is usually not a lasting one. Usually, sooner or later, some new objections to the temporally achieved belief will develop. The notion of unconditional truth is nothing more than a yearning. But this yearning is unhealthy, because the price of unconditionality is irrelevance to practice. According to Rorty it is the over-attention to fact-stating that makes one think that there is something called 'truth' as the target of an enquiry, quite distinct from 'justification'.

Rorty agrees with Jurgen Habermas on his suggestion that it is important to talk about discourse rather than about consciousness. But, for Rorty, to talk about discourse is to justify one's belief and cultivate a competent audience, and therefore, it would have no connection with truth and reality. The gist of what he says is: let alone truth as an unrevealabe subject.

Rorty, ironically, confesses that he does not understand if someone asks whether he believes the statement P uttered by Rorty himself. He wishes to ask, with Wittgenstein, what that question mean? Does it imply, Rorty

asks, that he himself believes that the statement uttered by him as it were a context-transcendent truth? Here again a pragmatist like him wants to know what difference will make it in practice. Habermas holds that whenever one raises a truth-claim on the basis of good arguments or compelling evidence one takes the epistemic conditions prevailing here and now to be ideal. And raising this truth-claim presupposes that no arguments or evidence that would put this claim into doubt will come up in the future. Rorty, in reply, asks how one can know what future will make of his or her statement.

According to Habermas, both relativism and the absolutism are antonyms of truth. More precisely, critique of relativism need not end in absolutism. In response to this argument Rorty's response is that here the claim for truth is what makes it to end up in either relativism or absolutism. Rorty says that one need not justify what one already justifies in practice. On his view, the only function of truth, right and good or such notions is to caution about the danger of future possibilities. But, unlike many other relativists, Rorty believes that closed language does not exist. Rather he believes that there would be something that is commonly sharable between each other, be its contexts cultural or local.

In contrast to Habermas' argument that democracy is something deep and which has some genuine affinity with the true nature of human beings, Rorty says it makes no difference if democracy was popped up from nowhere in the brains of Socrates, Christ, Jefferson, etc.

Wittgenstein has said that to imagine a human form of life we need a coherent whole of meaning and beliefs. Davidson extends this further. He gives no room for a relativized concept of truth. For him, the source of both objectivity and communication is the triangle formed by speaker, interpreter and the world. This triangle determines the content of thought and speech.

According to Davidson most of our beliefs are true. Coherence, for Davidson, is not a better theory than correspondence. But to ascribe truth to a belief is automatically to ascribe a place for that belief in a largely coherent set of mostly true beliefs. If all are false beliefs, communication is impossible. Mutually exclusive private-closed languages are impossible. Any community of justification can form language users, howsoever distorted the beliefs may be, for example a community of Priests. But Habermas thinks that such non-inclusivist beliefs and justification commit performative self-contradiction. For communication implies an inclusivist community free from power domination; therefore they claim for truth a universal validity. But Rorty and Davidson do not share this claim. Rorty says he would join force with Habermas – against Lyotard, Michael Foucault and others – in favor of his stand that there are no incommensurable languages. Davidson also denounces the very idea of a conceptual scheme. However, Rorty criticizes Habermas for believing in linguistic representation, epistemic relation to something in the world, the belief that every statement represents a reality, to which view neither Davidson nor Rorty extends support.

Rorty says that he and Habermas agree on fraternity, universal education, critical thinking, etc., but they begin to disagree on the point of answering Nietzsche's scornful suggestion that we are simply inculcating our own ideology: the ideology of what he called *'Socratism'*. Rorty is of the view that there are no non-local and non-contextual arguments, while Habermas advises Rorty to leave ethnocentrism. His remedy for sweating the ethnocentrism out is the exercise of thinking through the symmetrical structure of perspectives built into every speech situation.

Inclusivist stand need not be purely inclusivist when closely examined. That is what Rorty points out when he says of Habermas' visualization that his argument is inclusivist is mistaken one. An example can

show this: while educating the children of fundamentalists, the teachers educate the children in such a way that their parents are stripped of their fundamentalist character, and thereby they find themselves excluded. Rorty has no problem with this predicament because he thinks that at least it is for a better cause. But for Habermas and Putnam, this is a problem.

Habermas Vs Rorty

Rorty's problem lies in the problematic understanding of philosophical paradigms, argues Habermas. Contextualism is an offshoot of the linguistic turn. Before, the subject's encounter with reality was understood as the philosophical paradigm. It is with the linguistic turn that the intersubjective sharing of the communicative horizon comes into being. Here even reality is already interpreted.

Habermas states that we cannot isolate facts from language. The intersubjective nature of the life-world will put unjustified beliefs into rational debate. According to Habermas, absolute fallibilism will put a brake to life, though we know reflectively that knowledge is fallible. However incomplete, it is the implicit validity of the knowledge that helps us to lead our daily life with all its existential uncertainties. In his own words:

> Just as skepticism does not simply assimilate being to appearance but rather gives expression to the uneasy feeling that we might be unable to separate the one from the other convincingly, neither does contextualism, properly understood, equate truth with justified assertability. Contextualism is rather an expression of the embarrassment that would ensure if we did have to assimilate the one to the other. it makes us aware of a

problem to which cultural relativism presents a solution that is false because it contains a performative self-contradiction.[60]

Against Rorty's contextualist claims, Habermas holds that in a discourse of truth all the participants are sincere and desiring for the good reason, and so it aims to achieve a validity not limited to just the justifying context, but all possible contexts, and against anybody. According to Habermas, a proposition is true if it withstands all attempts to refute it in a demanding condition, and a proposition is held to be true if it could win argumentatively reached agreement in an ideal speech situation.[61]

An ideal and sincere argumentative situation will give ground for realizing the approximate truth. If the truth of a proposition is justified as true through argumentations, and if no one feels like to continue or there is no motivation for that, that proposition is ready for action in the life-world, and the actors by their action confirm the truth of it. But it is different in the case of reflexive debates. In every day practice, it is in the pre-reflexive level (coping with the world). But in argumentation it depends solely on reason whether the claim deserve rationally motivated recognition or not.[62]

In the practical world, there requires behavioral certainties. There is a necessity for winning a validity-claim namely 'unconditionally held-to-be-true.' This is justified within a communicative community, but this is translated back into discourse where it faces validity claims beyond the frame of contextual justification of community, where it needs to face measures beyond the immediate justification. Justified beliefs may have to face counter

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[60] Habermas, Jurgen. "Habermas' Response to Rorty". Rorty and His Critics. Ed. Robert. B. Brandom. USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2000. p. 39.

[61] Ibid. p. 46.

[62] Ibid. p. 48.

claims, and thus to win unconditional truth-claim-validity. Thereby it decentres the community.

Habermas claims that that there is an internal connection between justification and truth, which explains why one may, in light of the evidence available to him or her, raise an unconditional truth-claim that aims beyond what is justified. Rorty's response to this is that the explicandum, which Habermas mention, is not just there. Habermas finds that Rorty is not sensible to certain conceptually clear distinction. For example, Rorty refuse to differentiate between the strategic and non-strategic use of language, between success-oriented and understanding-oriented action. This refusal to differentiate deprives Rorty of the conceptual tools to do justice to the intuitive distinctions between rationally convincing and persuading, between motivation through reasons and causal exertion of influence, between learning and indoctrination. In response, Rorty retains his position by claiming that these distinctions are context-dependent. For him, the whole idea of context-independence is part of an unfortunate effort to hypostatize the adjective 'true.'

Another criticism on Rorty by Habermas is that if the concept of truth is eliminated in favor of context-dependent epistemic value, then there lacks a reference-point that would explain why a proponent should try get acceptance to his truth beyond the group. To this Rorty bluntly says that there is no compulsion to go beyond.[63].

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[63] Rorty, Richard. "Rorty's Response to Habermas". Rorty and His Critics. Ed. Robert. B. Brandom. USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2000. p. 61.

Obligation is rather a product of upbringing than a fact about what it is to be a human being. Rorty does not fear relativism, that is why he holds that reason is not something distinct from our culture; rather it is, in our culture, to listen to the other side, that is, the social virtues like tolerance, respect, etc. To underscore his point, Rorty reminds us of Hume's remark that universal rationality is a residue of authoritarian patriarchy.

Daniel Dennet says Rorty's view that truth or justifiability is relative to a particular audience does not apply to many instances. 'Whether the cold fusion has occurred or not' has nothing to do with a particular audience. Here, this is justified not by any audience but validated in the light of the facts.

Deflationism, Use Theory, etc.

The point the pragmatists make is that truth as traditionally held is not provable objectively. But they seemed to embrace the view that truth is a norm for which to strive. Davidson says both these traditional views are wrong, and Davidson calls the latter tendency as deflationism.

Correspondence theory has no explanatory content. Coherence theory is attractive as an epistemic theory, but cannot account for truth. Michael Dummet and Hilary Putnam are for epistemic theories. They view truth as warranted assertability. Davidson respects it. He respects pragmatists too, for, pragmatists relate truth to human attitudes like belief, intention and desire, and Davidson believes that any complete account of truth must do this.

Deflationism has taken a number of forms in recent years. Davidson cites the comment of Ramsey, one of the exponents of deflationism, that there is really no separate problem of truth but merely a linguistic muddle.[64]

Ramsey says "It is true that Caesar was murdered." means no more than "Caesar was murdered." 'It is true that', 'it is a fact that', etc. are not indispensable. To this Davidson says that in sentences like 'it is always right', 'whatever he says is true', etc., the truth predicates seem indispensable. Hence Davidson's judgment about Ramsey's attempt is that he could not solve this problem satisfactorily. Deflationism speaks through Paul Howrich too, another minimalist, when he says that correspondence theory, though he agrees that it is true, is trivial and a self-referential tautology.

What deflationalists had in mind when they thought Quine was on their side must be Quine's idea of disquotation, according to which quotation does not make any difference in a truth sentence. However, Davidson says, Qunie is not right and he finds Tarski more important.

According Davidson, Tarski's truth definitions are not trivial. They reveal something deep about languages. Tarski has introduced a sophisticated version of reference. Tarski call it satisfaction. "Tarski's satisfiers are infinite sequences which pair the variables of a language with the entities in its ontology."[65]

If a translation is to be meaningful, the truth-value of the sentences or the meaning of sentences in both the languages should be the same. Here one may dispute. Thos who dispute may argue that meaning has only use value. Davidson is ready to agree, but would say Tarsky's 'S is true in L iff p' have

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[64] Davidson, Donald. "Truth Rehabilitated". Rorty and His Critics. Ed. Robert. B. Brandom. USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2000. p. 68.

[65] Ibid. p. 69.

use value. And he says it is (may be) perhaps due to the truth conditions that language has use-value. So the use-value theory does not dispute with Tarski's concept of truth.

One thing is clear, say Davidson, that someone who knows under what conditions a sentence true understands that sentence. If the sentence has a truth value (true, false or neither) then someone who does not know under what conditions it would be true does not understand it. Use theory of meaning implies that sentences mean what they do because of how they are used. It may be that they are used as they are because of the truth-conditions. But again it can be claimed that they have truth-conditions because of how they are used. According to Davidson:

> What is clear is that someone who knows under what conditions a sentence would be true understand that sentence, and if the sentence has a truth value (true, false or neither) then someone who does not know under what conditions it would be true does not understand it. This simple claim does not rule out an account of meaning which holds that sentences mean what they do because of how they are used; it may be that they are used as they are because of their truth-conditions and they have the truth-conditions they do because of how they are used.[66]

Davidson says it is not right to think that the theory that meaning is use is a non-question-begging one. He says that it is empty to say meaning is use unless we specify what use we have in mind. And when one specifies, in a way that helps with meaning, one finds oneself going in a circle.

The bridge that connects between sounds and language is the interaction between the adult and the child, the adult as a teacher and the child

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[66] Ibid. p. 70.

as a learner. Through trial and error the child learns how to use language and here in this process the child recognizes when she or he makes mistakes, through certain ostensive references. As Wittgenstein says, for him though meaning is use, there are rules to follow; in the same vein Davidson finishes what Wittgenstein has begun to say by adding 'while following one may err.' In daily conversations one may normally use hyperbole, irony, metaphor, etc., and in rare occasions one may also use straight truth-value sentences. And one may use language for varied purposes. For example one might express metaphorically that 'sound is scarlet.' This may be false for Frege. But one may have a certain concept of truth in his or her for saying so. And the truth-value of this can be checked too.

Davidson finds truth important. Not because it is especially valuable or useful, though of course it may be on occasion, but because without the idea of truth one cannot imagine oneself as a thinking creature. And also, without the idea of truth, one would not understand what it is for someone else to be a thinking creature. It is one thing to try to define the concept of truth, or capture its essence in a pithy summary phrase; it is another to trace its connection with other concepts.

Correspondence theory does capture the thought that truth depends on how the world is. According to Davidson this is a better theory than epistemic and pragmatic theories. Nevertheless, epistemic and pragmatic theories have the merit of relating the concept of truth to human concerns, like language, belief, thought and intentional action. It is these connections that make truth the key to how mind apprehends the world. According to Rorty truth is no more than just one of the concepts among a number of other related concepts, which one uses in describing, explaining, and predicting human behavior. Why, Rorty asks, say truth is any more important than such concepts as intention, belief, desire, and so on? Davidson's answer is that

importance is a hard thing to argue about. All these concepts are equally important, and very difficult to choose between them and say one is more important than the other. Nor one can say one of these is more fundamental. These are irreducible ones. Davidson asks, why be niggardly in awarding prizes. He is ready to hand out golden apples all around.

Rorty says that he and other Wittgensteinians are happier with uses than meanings and that truth-conditions make them nervous. He asks why Davidson erased the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around the world. Rorty agrees with Davidson on the arguments like there is no non-question-begging theory of use and it is empty to think of use without some idea of use in one's mind before hand. But Rorty says he prefers to be a therapeutic rather than a constructive Wittgensteinian.

How, Rorty asks, one can ensure that one has exhausted the concept of truth? He says Wittgensteinians would not participate in issues like whether disquotation was the last word or not, because they think it is pointless to ask whether the content of the concept exhausted unless specification is given about which uses of the word signifying the concept are to be included and which excluded. And he points out that Davidson excludes quite a few uses of 'true' and 'truth', for instance 'She was a true friend', 'Truth is one'. Davidson concentrates only on two uses, namely, cautionary use and the use of 'true' to name the property preserved in valid reference. He says Wittgensteinians like him, who are dubious of the concept of 'concept', and would be happy to just talk about the utility or disutility of the uses of various terms, have only sympathy with these kinds of arguments.

Davidson argues that the pragmatist ways of describing the concept of truth as 'truth is a goal', or 'truth is what works' are irresponsible rhetoric. To this, Rorty responds that he should drop the inside outside contrast, and

perhaps, should drop the concept 'concept', for the same reason that he has dropped other forms of the scheme-content distinction.

Rorty is ready to agree if truth is a non-competitive irreconcilable belief. As James, his guru, has tried to conjoin science and religion, Rorty cites an evolutionary scientist's belief in god and in attending mass as the evidence of co-habitation of irreconcilable beliefs if they are not juxtaposed as opposing beliefs. And he points out that here the evolutionary scientist does not think in terms of systemic interconnections among these beliefs as Davidson thinks.

About Davidson's triangulation of speaker, interpreter and the world, Rorty says it points towards moments of recontextualisations rather than anchoring down to an ultimate truth.

Antifoundationalism

According to Rorty the history of Western philosophy, both continental and analytic, is the history of a persistent attempt to underwrite claim to knowledge. He calls these philosophers' philosophical enterprise as epistemological foundationalism. According to this epistemological foundationalism, to know is to represent accurately what is outside the mind; so to understand the possibility and nature of knowledge is to understand the way in which the mind is able to construct such representations. This programme seems to say philosophy's central concern is to provide a general theory of representation. This is the leitmotif, though played in different keys, one can notice in much of what Rorty has written.

According Rorty, universality, necessity, correspondence theory, rationality, realism, structuralism, representationalism, objectivism, cognitivism, essentialism...are all members of the same family which presuppose the feasibility of epistemological project. For him, Wittgenstein,

Heidegger, and Dewey are the three most important philosophers of this century because each of the three came to see his earlier effort as self-deceptive, as an attempt to retain a certain conception of philosophy. Thus their later works are therapeutic rather than constructive, edifying rather than systematic, designed to make the readers question their own motives for philosophizing rather than to supply them with a new philosophical program.

Rorty's radical antifoundationalism leaves no room even for a trace of the idea 'the world' to determine our knowledge. Though Rorty claims himself as not a relativist, his views seem to imply the contrary. According to him, relativism is the view that every belief on a certain topic or perhaps on any topic is as good as every other. He says no one holds this view. Except in very rare occasions, one cannot find anybody who says that two incompatible opinions on an important topic are equally good. And if there were any relativists, they would be very easy to refute too. One has merely to use some variant of self-referential arguments Socrates used against Protagoras. But, Rorty says, such tactics will work only against lightly sketched fictional characters. The relativist who says that one can break ties among serious and incompatible candidates for belief only by nonrational or cognitive considerations is just one of the Platonist or Kantian philosopher's imaginary playmates. This is a realm of fantasy same as that of the solipsist, the skeptic, and the moral nihilist.

The same argument can be used against Rorty. Rorty's criticism against naïve Platonism is equally applicable to Rorty himself. Charles Taylor observes:

> Certain suppositions [that] seem to be made in the various invocations of [Rorty's] argument: that the only candidate for a general account of truth is in terms of correspondence; that correspondence is to be understood in a rather simple minded

> way, approaching at times a picture theory, that believers in the correspondence theory are raving Platonists. Underlying all of this is a continuing imprisonment in the model basic to the whole epistemological tradition which understands thinking in terms of representation.... Rorty cannot really believe that hard-faced scientific realists, who think that mechanic materialism is literally true, subscribe to raving Platonism.[67]

Richard Bernstein's remarks echoes the remarks of Taylor. In Bernstein's words:

> According to this story, the real villain is Plato – at least the Plato identified (mythologized) by Platonism... I want to maintain that this narrative is itself rapidly becoming a blinding prejudice that obscures more than it illuminates. What was once a stinging critique is becoming a bland, boring cliché. One begins to wonder if there ever was a "foundationalist thinker" – at least one who fits the description of what Rorty calls "foundationalism". Even Plato – the Plato of the Dialogues – fails to fit this description... Rorty's characterization and caricature of the history of philosophy is rapidly running itself into the ground... What is now needed is to demythologize the narrative of the invidious falleness of Platonism. For it is only to the extend that we will accept some version of Rorty's mythologizing about what philosophy and metaphysics are, and what "philosophic justification" must be that his playful skepticism has any sting... It is time that Rorty himself should

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[67] Taylor, Charles. "Rorty in Epistemological Tradion". Reading Rorty. Ed. Alan Malachowski. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1990. p. 268-69.

appropriate the lesson pf Peirce, "Do not block the road to inquiry..."[68]

Davidson's Radical Interpretation

Davidson had written on a wide range of subjects. However, a great deal of his works was focused on theory of meaning, particularly during 1960s and early 70s. He was of the opinion that it is better to approach meaning via the concept of truth because he thinks truth is a less opaque concept than meaning. He accepts Tarskian truth theory but he is of the opinion that a theory of meaning must be an empirical theory. For incorporating empirical theory to Tarskian structure and to make a general theory of interpretation, Donaldson draws form Quine's notion of 'radical translation'. Moreover, since his interest is more properly semantic than Quine's, Davidson puts 'interpretation' in the place of 'translation'. Radical interpretation is a matter of interpreting linguistic behaviour of the speaker 'from scratch' even without any prior knowledge about the speaker's belief or meaning of his or her utterances. So one has to provide both a theory of meaning and a theory of belief and this is done by means of the so-called principle of charity or rational accommodation.

Davidson's 'radical interpretation' is often attacked on the strength of the idea of an untranslatable language, an idea often found in association with conceptual relativism. To this argument, Davidson retorts that inability to translate counts as evidence, not of the existence of an untranslatable language, but of the absence of a language of any sort. His rejection of an untranslatable language is in effect the rejection of conceptual relativism as well as the notion of 'incommensurable' system of beliefs.

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[68] Bernstein, Richard. "One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward: Richard Rorty on Liberal Democracy and Philosophy". Political Theory. Vol. 15. No. 4. 1987. 538-563. pp. 559-60.

Self-refuting Thesis of Relativism

The thesis of relativism is said to be: 'No beliefs and claims are absolutely true, or all beliefs and claims are only relatively true for X.' If this thesis is not applied to relativism itself, then the thesis not 'relatively true' but 'absolutely' true. Therefore, relativism must accept the 'absolute truth' that it tries to deny. If the thesis applied to relativism itself, then the thesis is not 'absolutely true', but only 'relatively true.' That is to say, the relativist must accept that the 'thesis is not true' is true to the non-relativist. Therefore, relativism must accept the 'absolute truth' that it tries to deny. Or this thesis is the concept of relative truth: 'true for...' But the understanding of this concept presupposes that of non-relative concept of truth: 'true.' Therefore relativism presupposes the non-relativistic concept of truth that it tries to deny.

Relativistic Defence of Relativism

In 'On The Paradox Of Cognitive Relativism' Jack. W. Meiland tries to defend relativism and argues that relativism is not self-refuting. Meiland's argument is to the effect that relativism, being itself only relatively true, is not self-refuting, and so the only alternative for the relativist is to say that relativism itself is only relatively true. Therefore, what the relativist should accept is not absolute truth itself; but that it is only relatively true that absolute truth is true. Relativism rejects the ground of absolute truth itself. More precisely, it is due to non-relativism, not to relativism, that relativism appears to be self-refuting.

Another claim against relativism is that relativism is self-vitiating or that a relativist cannot present his or her relativist claim convincingly or effectively. Meiland's answer to this argument is that all this self-vitiation criticism tells is that it is impossible for the relativist to non-relativistically convince the non-relativist to adopt relativism.

Reengaging Putnam

Putnam has accepted conceptual relativism. Putnam did not reject all form of relativism, but he, according Ramakanta Bal, thinks relativists commit many mistakes when they put their theory into practice[69]

Putnam avoids extreme relativism and also tries to rectify the defects relativist commits. He gives an alternative to extreme relativism namely 'internal realism'. 'Internal realism' holds that the world does not exist outside our conceptual domain. Ramakanta, a prominent Indian philosopher, discusses here Putnam's position on relativism to determine whether his internal realism entails a problematic form of relativism. Ramakanta speaks about the features of Putnam's epistemology thus:

1. In ordinary circumstances, there is usually a fact of the matter as to whether the statements people make are warranted or not.
2. Whether a statement is warranted or not is independent of whether a majority of one's cultural peers would say it is warranted or unwarranted.
3. Our norms and standards of warranted assertability are historical products, as they evolve in time.
4. Our norms and standards always reflect our interests and values. Our picture of intellectual flourishing is part of, and only makes sense as part of, our picture of human flourishing in general.
5. Our norms and standards of anything – including warranted assertability – are capable of reform. There are better and worse norms and standards. Our norms and standards can be reformed.

According to Ramakanta, out of these above-mentioned features, 1, 2, and 5 are anti-relativist, and the 3rd and the 4th are partially relativist. At the

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[69] Bal, Ramakanta. "Against Relativism: Reengaging Putnam". Journal of Indian Philosophical Research. Volume xix number 3, July-September, 2002.

same time, Putnam argues against relativism; Ramakanta quotes: "That [total] relativism is inconsistent is a truism among philosophers. After all, is it not obviously contradictory to hold a point of view while at the same time holding that no point of view is more justified or right than any other?"[70]

Protagorean relativism lays down that no utterance has the same meaning for oneself or any one else. According to Putnam, says Ramakanta, this is not only regressive but also unintelligible. Ramakanta comments on Putnam's position: "It is rather that the notion that the relativistic justification of a relativistic system of evaluating knowledge claims simply does not make sense."

Ramakanta points out that Putnam's views too are relativistic, despite his claims that he avoids it, because Ramakanta catches Putnam saying that totality of forms is a metaphysical fantasy and this seems to imply that reality is a certain kind of way about the world. This view will lead to relativism. And also that Putnam accepts conceptual relativism, which implies that everything we accept as real is relative to some conceptual structure. However Putnam hopes, says Ramakanta, that there must be some empirical levels for knowing the truth.

Postmodern Relativism

Saral Jhingram, an Indian author, while speaking about the theses of postmodernism relevant to relativism, says that postmodernism questions the claims of reason and asserts that there are no universal or necessary truths, and all truths are relative to various contingent factors, especially the conceptual framework of the subject's culture, and also that there is an irreducible plurality of such conceptual frameworks.

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[70] Ibid.

If relativism is true, and if every beliefs and theory are relative to a culture or framework, then relativism may be a local viewpoint. It cannot have any validity beyond the local culture to which it is related. Jhingram calls this postmodern conceptual relativism. Here it acts as a meta-epistemological theory. However, the moment this theory can claim universal validity for itself, that moment itself it cannot sustain its relativist epistemology.[71]

Independently of conceptual schemes no objects exist. With the introduction of one or another descriptive scheme, the world is broken into objects.[72]

Hilary Putnam's reality relativism is a view in which objects themselves are as much made as discovered. Objects are the invention of conceptual schemes, but it is also an objective experience, as a factor independent of one's will. Concepts put the invented objects under certain labels. It is using these labels as tools that one constructs a version of the world.[73]

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[71] Jhingram, Saral. "Postmodern Relativism Revisited". Journal of Indian Philosophical Research. Volume xix number 3, July-September, 2002.

[72] Putnam, Hilary. Reason, Truth and History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1981. p. 52.

[73] Ibid. p. 54.

INCOMMENSURABILITY AND KUHN

Mukudnaunni. A. P. “Philosophy and relativism: A study of the relativist positions in theories of knowledge, meaning and morality” Thesis. Department of Philosophy , University of Calicut, 2006

CHAPTER 4

INCOMMENSURABILITY AND KUHN

Launching a different historiography, T S Kuhn claims that scientific activities of each period have made sense in their own times. Viewed from this historiography, the history of science is the history of various scientific schools with their incommensurable ways of seeing the world and of practicing science within their framework. A scientific belief espoused by a scientific community at a given time may include arbitrary elements like personal and historical accidents as formative ingredients.[74]

Scientific research involves rigorous training. Received beliefs are embedded in it. Mastering these educative aspects gives a peculiar efficiency for the professional normal practitioners of science. With all these, scientific research would look like 'a strenuous and devoted attempt to force nature into the conceptual boxes supplied by professional education'.[75] According to Kuhn, normal science functions with an assumption that scientific community knows what the world is like, and they would defend their vision at any cost, and so all sorts of novelties are suppressed just because novelties are subversive to the basic commitments of the scientific community. However, when an anomaly is revealed, and normal science repeatedly goes astray in solving it, as a matter of course novelties would attract attention. This would gradually lead to a scientific revolution.

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[74] Kuhn, Thomas. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. 2nd Ed. USA: The University of Chicago. 1970. p. 4.

[75] Ibid. p. 5.

Paradigm

By normal science, Kuhn means research based upon scientific achievements of the past. For a time, the researchers acknowledge past achievements for supplying the foundation to their scientific practice. The famous classics of science such as the works of Aristotle, Ptolemy, Newton, etc., served to define legitimate problems and methods of a research filed for the succeeding generation of scientists. Their achievements was unprecedented, and therefore the adherent group was not attracted by competing models of scientific activity. Not merely that they left all sorts of problems open-ended for the practitioners to resolve. Achievements that share these two characteristics Kuhn refers to as 'paradigm'. A student of science, who enters into a scientific community, masters these paradigms, and since the student is trained by their models, his or her subsequent practice will seldom evoke overt disagreement over fundamentals. Researchers who work within shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice. This consensus is a prerequisite for the continuation of research tradition. Kuhn calls this tradition as 'normal science'.[76]

Kuhn characterizes the development pattern of mature science as a transition from one paradigm to another via scientific revolutions. He notes, taking the example of light, that the period between remote antiquity and the end of seventeenth century, there were only competing theories, there were no single generally accepted view about the nature of light. Instead all theories of light emanated from their own metaphysic, though at various times these schools made contribution to science in terms of concepts and techniques. Later Newton drew much out of the accepted paradigms near to his time in order to formulate his physical optics.

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[76] Ibid. pp. 10-11.

The developmental pattern of science before and after Newton was characteristically different. There were scientists before Newton, and they had practiced science, and they had contributed to science invaluably in terms of concepts and techniques. Nevertheless, the end result of their scientific activities was not science because their theories were more like a dialogue between other scientists than a dialogue with nature. All of them drew strength from their own metaphysic, and hence no schools were universally accepted. The history of electrical research in the first half of eighteenth century provides a better picture of how science developed before getting accepted universally as a paradigm. During that period, though different schools conducted electrical research in different manner, they all had something in common namely mechanico-corpuscular philosophy.

In pre-paradigm science, fact gathering was more random, and also restricted to the wealth of data that lie ready to hand. For Kuhn, normal science is the scientific activity that develops upon the previous paradigms. The difference between normal science and paradigm is visible in the case of a period where a not so unequivocal paradigm does not exist. For Kuhn, science does not look much rational. Collection of facts is guided by beliefs implicit in the theory and methodology, and if there are no implicit beliefs, external sources will supply it. Such a body of beliefs may, by accident, take a decision to turn towards a particular direction, and that would mark a turning point in the history of science. To give an example, Kuhn showcases the way electrical research was led by accident towards a turning point. Those who studied electricity, who called themselves electricians, believed electricity a liquid, and this belief directed their efforts to make a jar in which electricity can be collected. Such an idiosyncratic idea at last resulted in developing a device called Leyden jar. Later Franklin was very concerned with this apparatus, and when he explained it revealingly, his theory was

universally accepted as a paradigm. A paradigm need not have to explain whatever that confronts it; it needs only to be superior to competing theories.

When a new paradigm emerges, the older versions would disappear, and most of the scientists who worked within the older version would switch over to the new paradigm, and those cling to the older versions would gradually be ignored and forgotten. Astrology was once part of astronomy, but later got isolated due to paradigm-change. Paradigm makes its field precise by making science a discipline, characteristically different from its pre-paradigm form: science as a study of nature.

For Kuhn, paradigm is an accepted model or a pattern. However, he distinguishes a paradigm from a pattern, as pattern is replicable where as paradigm is not. For example, in grammar, patterns like

Go went gone

See saw seen

are replicable, whereas paradigm is not applicable. "Instead, like an accepted judicial decision in the common law, it is an object for further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions."[77]

Paradigm gains its status by solving certain problems that certain scientists recognize as acute. When a paradigm becomes successful, it would still be a most incomplete one. It is the normal science that extends the implications of the paradigm to a better match with the natural phenomena of a certain field of enquiry. It is the task of the scientists to complete the project of a paradigm. Thus scientists spend their life doing a kind of mopping-up operation within the scope of that paradigm. Kuhn describes this operation as, "Closely examined, whether historically or in the contemporary

[77] Ibid. p. 23

laboratory, that enterprise seems an attempt to force nature into the preformed and relatively inflexible box that the paradigm supplies."[78]

This is the nature of normal science. In normal science whatever that do not fit into their box (paradigm) are ignored. Mostly scientific community is intolerant towards novelties. They stick on to articulating theory supplied by the paradigm. What the argument of Kuhn shows is that the greater part of science is determined by the paradigm, which is dominant in a certain period. If this is true, the nature and the result of science can vary from paradigm to paradigm.

Normal science, according to Kuhn, deals with three classes of problems namely 'determination of significant fact, matching of facts with theory, and articulation of theory.'[79] Normal science exhausts its activity with these problems. However, the enterprise of science does not exhaust with these. There are extraordinary problems. Extraordinary problems arise form normal science itself; it is this encounter with extraordinary problems that makes science worthwhile.

Nature of normal science

Kuhn observes that scientific activity in normal science is limited to mere paradigm articulation. In scientific researches, everything is as expected. Unexpected novelties have no place in it. Kuhn uses the terms like 'puzzle' and 'puzzle-solving' in order to capture the character of normal scientific practice. In normal science, bringing a normal research problem into its conclusion is just achieving what is anticipated. The stake of the scientist is the challenging puzzle. The role of the scientist is just like a puzzle-solver. Kuhn uses the term 'puzzle' because in normal research what

[78] ibid. p. 24.

[79] Ibid. p. 34.

requires of a scientist is the ingenuity or the skill for solution. Puzzle is similar to 'jigsaw puzzle' and 'crossword puzzle'. Puzzles have solution, whereas really pressing problems like cure for cancer or design for lasting peace may have no solution because they are not puzzles. For the scientific community, the criterion for choosing a problem is the assurance that the problem has a solution. The scientific community admits only problems that have solutions. Others are rejected either as metaphysical, or as too problematic to worth the time. Because such problems are too difficult to state in the conceptual and instrumental tools supplied by the paradigm. Like this, the paradigm insulates the scientific community from those socially important problems, which are not reducible into puzzle form.

Another striking characteristic of normal science similar to puzzle-solving is the existence of a strong network of commitment – theoretical, conceptual, instrumental, and methodological. Rules and existing knowledge would make the scientist believe that the immediate challenge before her is to use her skill to bring the residual puzzle to a solution. Rules restrict the scientist to the work set by the paradigm. Various kinds of researches would be going on in a single scientific tradition, and therefore, they need not agree to the same kind of rules. Kuhn interprets the scene scientific activity going on within a single tradition using Wittgenstein's concept called 'family resemblance' to describe how rules are to different researches. Kuhn has differentiated paradigm with rules. One may have an impression that both rules and the paradigm are the same since both restricts and guide research. But paradigm's role is different. Paradigm guides research directly by giving a model as well as controls abstractly through rules.[80] When paradigm is strong, rules will be not very import, and if the paradigm is insecure, rules attain much importance. During the pre-paradigm period, debates about

[80] Ibid. p. 47.

legitimate methods, or debates of that kind were very important. During the time of paradigm change, the same happens. The transition from Newtonian to quantum mechanics has evoked debates about the standard and the nature of physics, some of which are still continuing, says Kuhn.

Kuhn has spoken of small as well as big revolutions. The small revolutions affect only a few members who belong to some professional subspecialty. This can happen in the form of an unexpected discovery of a new phenomenon. But, how can this happen if normal science is monolithic, and which will either stick here with the paradigm or fall off. However, Kuhn corrects this impression about normal science by saying that normal science is not monolithic, etc.

According to Kuhn, a scientific community is not very close-knit. Scientific fields are very diversified. Though they are educated in the same paradigm, as they belong to different specialties, the way they apply the paradigm is not alike. For example, each member of the community constituted by physical scientists today is taught the laws of quantum mechanics. Though they all learn the same laws, they do not learn the same application of these laws. Hence all of them are not affected in the same way by changes in quantum-mechanical practice. This means that though quantum mechanics is a paradigm for all, it is not the same paradigm for them all. In this sense, paradigm is like an umbrella under which several traditions of science crisscross or overlap each other. But a revolution produced within one tradition among them need not extend to others.

To show how paradigm difference produce two different but true answers to a question asked to two scientists from different fields, Kuhn reports an incident. Two scientists, one a chemist and the other a physicist, were asked whether an atom of helium is a molecule or not. The former said 'yes' because helium behaves like a molecule with respect to the kinetic

theory of gases, whereas the latter answered 'no' because helium atom displayed no molecular spectrum.[81]

Scientific Discoveries

Discoveries are not isolated events. They are 'extended episodes with a regularly recurrent structure.'[82] When normal science proceeds its way, quite often, nature may violate the expectation projected by the paradigm. When scientists notice such an anomaly, they try to adjust their theory to accommodate it. By adjusting so, a stage may come when the scientists learn to see nature in a different way. Until then an anomaly or a new fact is not a scientific fact at all.

Kuhn finds discovery as a process that takes time. Commonsense notion of discovery is similar to seeing or touching something all of a sudden. Kuhn also notes that not all discoveries are caused by paradigm shift. Paradigm-change depends upon the estimate of the extent to which the discovery violated paradigm-induced anticipation.

Kuhn's views on scientific practice is different from Feyerabend's 'anything goes'. For Kuhn asks, "Ought we conclude from the frequency with which such instrumental commitments prove misleading that science should abandon standard tests and standard instrument?", and he answers, "That would result in an inconceivable method of research."[83]

Kuhn cites an experiment done in psychology, in order to explain the nature of science. In this experiment, a number of playing cards, in which some cards are not normal and some are normal, are shown to a group of

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[81] Ibid. p. 50.

[82] Ibid. p. 52.

[83] Ibid. p. 60.

people. When these cards were shown to the group, none of them were able to recognize the difference. Only after repeated exposure some of them could identify the anomalous cards. Similarly scientific community too do not recognize anomaly easily. Only gradually, they become aware of it, and finally letting the discovery emerge. Normal science is strict, and precise. Not easily succumbed to novelties. However, Kuhn legitimizes these characteristics of normal science. Resistance to novelties guarantees that scientists will not be lightly distracted. If at all they are ready to accept new scientific facts, that means they have exhausted the tools of the existing knowledge, or it is a sign that they penetrated existing knowledge to the core in order to accommodate the anomaly as something anticipated. Thus normal science reaches at completeness before it prepares the way for its own change.

Scientific Theories

Kuhn describes the nature of paradigm change as a constructive-destructive process. Constructive in the sense, the new paradigm offers a widened horizon, and also gives more precision to the already known facts. However, earlier paradigm and all its procedures are discarded, in that sense destructive. New discoveries are not the sole reason for paradigm shift; it can be caused by the invention of new theories too.

Paradigm shift is caused by small as well as big revolutions. According to Kuhn, paradigm shift caused by Copernican, Newtonian, Einsteinian revolutions are dimensionally different to an incomparable extent from the paradigm shift caused single discoveries. For instance, Maxwell's electromagnetic theory has caused bigger paradigm shift than the discovery of electricity has caused. Most of the big paradigm changes were preceded by long period of paradigm insecurity caused by persistent failure of puzzles, claims Kuhn. Long period of insecurity is actually a period of crisis. To come out of a crisis is to make large-scale changes in theories as well as in

other components. Profound sense of the anomaly works behind all major paradigm shifts.

It is said of Kuhn that he is advocating a kind of pragmatism, but if it were true, he would not have said, "But to be admirably successful is never, for a scientific theory, to be completely successful."[84] According to Kuhn, Ptolemy's astronomy is still successful in certain areas. It was first developed two years before and two years after Christ. Still, for planets, Ptolemy's predictions are as good as Copernicus'.

Kuhn argues that science is paradigm dependent. Without paradigm, one cannot do science. His argument implies that if some people wanted to do science without paradigm, that means only that they are quitting science. He likens such people with creative artists. He notes that many scientists have quitted science for its essential tension. If one paradigm does not work, another will replace it, that is the way of science. If someone rejects science altogether, Kuhn says, "That act reflects not on the paradigm but on the man. Inevitably he will be seen by his colleagues as "the carpenter who blames his tools.""[85]

Scientific Revolutions

Why does Kuhn call the change of paradigm in science a revolution? What are his justifications to draw a parallelism between politics and science? These questions can guide one to the heart of Kuhn's thoughts on the nature of science. The metaphor of revolutions in science stands for the non-cumulative developmental episodes in which as an incompatible new one replaces the older paradigm in whole or in part. In science too, as in politics, revolutions are inaugurated by a growing sense of malfunction. Political

[84] Ibid. p.68.

[85] ibid. p. 79.

revolutions change a society in ways that the institutions by which the society is constituted themselves prohibit. In history of science, Kuhn has seen that the issue of paradigm choice is never settled by logic and experiment alone. He has also seen that there is nothing intrinsic of logical structure of scientific knowledge, which necessitates the rejection of an older scientific theory by a new one.

The image of science, according to Kuhn, as science as-cumulation has more to do with a dominant epistemology that defines knowledge as a construction using a raw sense data by mind than to historical facts. Because in his history assimilation of new theories in to a paradigm has demanded the destruction of the older paradigm, and this has consequently resulted in provoking competition between different schools of thought.

Historicism

Historicism is regarded as relativist position in philosophy of science. It became a debatable theme just after Thomas Kuhn published his "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" in 1962. Kuhn's work introduced an unprecedented historiography that made people rethink about the scientific rationality. Unlike previous attempts to understand science historically, his work focused on scientific practice. Instead of taking theory as the unit of rational exchange, he focused on structure as the unit, which persists even minor theoretical changes. He argued that in scientific practice it is usual to revise a theory instead rejecting it altogether. He introduced 'paradigm' as the key notion in understanding the history of scientific practice. Also, he reveals that there could be no trans-historical rule for rational scientific procedure.

How does the paradigm change differ from interpretation? If there is no difference, one can say both Priestly and Lovoisier have seen oxygen, only

that they interpreted differently. Kuhn agrees that in normal science scientists interpret observed data, but such interpretations are done from a paradigm. Therefore, for Kuhn, interpretation and paradigm change are not the same. When looked at swinging stones Aristotle saw constrained fall, and Galileo saw pendulum. Kuhn says this is not interpretation because there is no fixed datum for them to interpret. That is why Kuhn holds that with the paradigm change though the world does not change, the scientists start working in different worlds. That is to say, what occurs during a scientific revolution is not reducible to reinterpretation of individual or stable data: neither a pendulum is a falling stone nor oxygen is dephlogisticated air. Therefore one can say for interpretation fixed data are inevitable, and in paradigm change fixed data are absent. Kuhn characterizes paradigm change with a relatively sudden and unstructured change like the gestalt switch. He says, "No ordinary sense of the term 'interpretation' fits these flashes of intuitions through which a new paradigm is born."[86]

From Kuhn's point of view, all paradigms are mutually incompatible to each other. For example, Einstein's theory is compatible with Newton's. One of the arguments against Kuhn's notion of incompatibility is that in many fields Newtonian theories are unchallenged. Addressing to this argument, Kuhn says, if such an argument is plausible, then pre-Newtonian theories too are unchallenged. For example, phlogiston theory is still able to explain some phenomena. Actually what those scientists believed as phlogiston is later proved as oxygen. None seem to believe now that it is phlogiston, and not oxygen; nevertheless phlogiston theory can still explain some phenomena.

Those who defend an older paradigm for reasons of successfully being applicable in a limited area are, according to Kuhn, confining scientists

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[86] Ibid. p. 123.

to an unproductive area of research. And the scientists, blinded by the belief, may not be able to step out of what they already know, and therefore they cannot speak about anything out of bounds scientifically. And, Kuhn argues, they will not have any puzzles to solve; consequently there will have no extraordinary science. Such a restricted theory can only restate what is already known, though it may have utility in terms of economy in applicability. Such a community, as seen in pre-paradigm science, cannot yield any results. The purport of the argument in favor of the image of science as a cumulative process is that Newton's law is a limiting case of Einstein's.

In reply to this argument, Kuhn says:

> For in the passage to the limit it is not only the forms of the laws that have changed. Simultaneously we have had to alter the fundamental structural elements of which the universe to which they apply is composed.[87]

Due to the paradigm shift, Einstein's theory had made the concepts to change its meaning that Newton's theory was using.

Arguing as mentioned above, Kuhn concludes that the difference between paradigms is both necessary and irreconcilable. Because different paradigms tell different things about what is there in the universe; about what are the things exist, and how they behave, for example: subatomic particles, materiality of light, etc. This is what successive paradigms claim to have known. Paradigms also turn back upon themselves, and thus paradigms become the source for choosing or defining the research field, method, and standards of accepting solution to problems. That is to say, paradigm change

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[87] Ibid. p. 102.

necessitates redefinition of whatever that the new paradigm considers as science.

Kuhn further argues that each newly accepted paradigms would have its own corresponding sciences. This implies that what one sees in history is not a monolithic science, but sciences. In the new paradigm some old problems are relegated into new science or declared as unscientific, and some, which were treated as trivial by the earlier paradigm, become significant achievement. Problems too change radically, and the change would alter the standard by which metaphysical speculation, word-game, mathematical play, etc were distinguished from science. It is with these arguments that Kuhn introduces the notion of incommensurability.

To give an example of a complete paradigm shift in history of science, Kuhn cites the shift brought in by Newton's theories. The new science in which he was born had been able to reject Aristotelian and Scholastic traditions. According to these traditions, a stone falls because its nature drives it towards the center of the universe. This was true to according to these traditions, but according the new science, it was a mere tautology or word-game.

It may be argued that science is cumulative in the sense its methodology is progressing from lower type to higher type. But the counter argument goes like this: when Einstein succeeded in explaining gravitational attraction, scientific activity began to deal with problems that are more like the problems of the predecessors of Newton than that of the successors. Similarly quantum mechanics has reversed the methodological prohibition that came with the chemical revolution. Again, one can see similar states of affairs related to paradigm change. In contemporary physics, conceptualization of space is not like the inert substratum in theories of Newton and Maxwell, but some of its new properties is like the ether

attributed by previous paradigm. Shattering the belief that science is cumulative, Kuhn observes what actually the character of paradigm shift:

> Space, in contemporary physics, is not the inert and homogenous substratum employed in both Newton's and Maxwell's theories; some of its new properties are not unlike those once attributed to the ether; we may someday come to know what an electric displacement is.[88]

Incommensurability of Paradigms

Paradigms talk through each other. That is the nature of the debate among paradigms. All competing paradigms will have their chosen problems, that is, they will have difference of opinion about which problem is more significant for them. This difference in choice will keep their debate logically incomplete. This is the gist of Kuhn's argument in defense of his notion of incommensurability.

Kuhn's relativist position is very pronounced when he says:

> ...When paradigms change, the world itself changes with them. Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before.[89]

A new paradigm engages the community with its own new research scheme. In this sense, scientists begin to see the world anew through the framework of the paradigm. More than characterizing a paradigm change metaphorically, Kuhn is trying to explain what research is engaged with.

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[88] Ibid. p. 109.

[89] Ibid. p. 111.

However, Kuhn's relativist argument is getting softened when he says that the new vision is determined both by the environment as well as the particular normal scientific tradition. For Kuhn paradigm change is similar to the perception-change in gestalt psychology. Here he extends his analogy to the level of cognitive relativism. Especially when he says what one sees depends upon what that person looks at and also upon the training he or she got previously. Hence paradigm is a prerequisite for perception. Here Kuhn uses the term 'paradigm' in a bit contradictory way because elsewhere he had talked about pre-paradigm science. If paradigm is a prerequisite of every perception, how can Kuhn conceive a pre-paradigm science?

However, the perceptual change that happens after a scientific revolution is not like the duck/rabbit perception. That is, looking at moon a convert to Copernicanism would not say, "I use to see a planet, but now I see a satellite." One would rather say, "I once took moon to be a planet, but I was mistaken, it is a satellite."

Is interpretation another word for paradigm change? Kuhn argues that paradigm change is different from interpretation. He says paradigm change is like the perception change in gestalt switch experiments. Interpretation is possible only when there is individual or stable data to interpret. During scientific revolution, the new paradigm and the old paradigm do not share the same data, though in normal science scientists do observe and interpret. If paradigm change and interpretation are the same, both Priestly and Lovoisier have seen oxygen, only that they interpreted it differently. Kuhn argues this is not how extraordinary science behaves. Though all paradigms encounter the same world, scientists in different paradigms live in different worlds. That is why when Aristotle looked at swinging stones saw constrained fall, and Galileo saw pendulum.

Another analogy Kuhn uses for elucidating what kind of change a paradigm change brings forth is that of a child's addressing its mother with the word 'mama'. Here the child denies that term to all except the woman who behaves like a mother to the child. Kuhn says that the same thing is happening when Copernicus denied the term 'planet' to sun. Before Copernicus, sun was called a planet. Recognizing sun not a planet was a great revolution, which amounted to a great change in the knowledge about the world.

Invisibility of Revolutions

Scientific revolutions are mostly invisible. Kuhn lists many reasons to why it is so. One's knowledge of science is always depending for its surety on authority. Scientific textbooks too are responsible for the invisibility of revolutions. Textbooks are written for pedagogic purpose. Young scientists and students get trained through such textbooks. Textbooks are rewritten after every paradigm change in order to fit science to paradigm's definition of science. Thus textbooks, give a picture of science both to normal scientific practitioners as well as to the laymen. Contents include stories of past heroes in science. However, a new paradigm would relate such stories in such a way that they fit the requirement of the paradigm; consequently the scientific community would feel that they are part of the great traditions of science. Hence it would make the impression that science is cumulative, and behind that image revolutions would remain in the invisible mode.

Kuhn's notion of incommensurability comes from his interpretation of the competition between paradigms. While competing each other, according to Kuhn, the paradigms would not come to complete contact. They would rather talk through each other, and therefore pre and post revolutionary sciences are incommensurable with each other. Paradigms disagree in different levels. They cannot agree about the list of problems to be solved or

enquired into. Not only that, they may not come to an agreement about the meaning concepts. Kuhn commends: "Communication across the revolutionary divide is inevitably partial."[90]

Another case where incommensurability between paradigms is quite obvious, Kuhn points out, is that of Copernicus. The scientists who belong to the paradigm according to which earth is stationary thought of Copernicus as mad when he claimed earth is moving. Kuhn says here neither of them was wrong because the meaning the earth for each of them was mutually incommensurable. For one group earth is stationary, they call it earth because it does not move. On the other side Copernicus invented a new approach to physics as well as astronomy, and which changed the meaning of both the 'earth' and 'motion'. This shows, Kuhn argues, each paradigm is its own world. Scientists in both the paradigm see the same world, but differently. The way they relate what they see is altogether different, and thus they see different worlds while looking at the same nature. However, they cannot see anything they like to see. Only what can be seen can be seen again in a different ways. The nature of this change is not slow. The change occurs all at once, just as in a gestalt switch. This is how Kuhn argues against the image of science as cumulative. This is how he questions the notion of progress, one of the key notions of modernity. Kuhn's arguments imply that science is not progressing, but changing. Change happens through revolutions, and both pre and post revolutionary sciences are incommensurable to each other in terms of concepts, meaning, etc. History of science is a collection of different sciences at different levels.

Conversion into new science is not an easy process, notes Kuhn. He gives a list of scientists who were never accepted in their time. He also quotes Max Planks sad in words from his "Scientific Autobiography and other

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[90] Ibid. p. 149.

papers", "a new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it."[91] Here it is plausible to ask a question like why scientists do not accept the scientific truth. Kuhn answers to that question by saying that paradigm change is not justified by proof. Paradigm change is like conversion, but not a forced one. Those who hold up old paradigm may resist life long. Scientists may believe that everything can be solved by their paradigm, that is, nature can be shoved into the box of their paradigm. Otherwise no normal science is possible. It is an inevitable part of science. Owing to this stubbornness to stick to their paradigm that they are able to exploit the scope of the paradigm and the aspects of precision. Then constant failure to accommodate the anomalies would give rise to revolutionary change.

Kuhn has also noted the reasons for successful conversion of scientists and laymen into a new paradigm. One of them is the immense appeal of the new paradigm. Another argument is that it is the aesthetic aspect that attracts scientists to opt for a theory, or in other words, individuals may accept a theory as it is neater, more suitable, simpler, etc. However, Kuhn is aware that mostly new paradigms are presented in its crude form, and therefore its aesthetic quality would be missing. Rather it is in the post-revolutionary phase of science qualities like precision and simplicity gained. That is the task of normal science. Such aesthetic questions do not even arise in paradigm debates.

Science and progress

Science is always treated as progressing. Kuhn was asking whether science is called science because it is progressing. In the image of science,

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[91] Ibid. p. 151.

science and progress are inextricably connected. There was a period in which science (pre-paradigm) was not very distinct from other fields, observes Kuhn. Even art was considered to be progressing. That was when the goal of painting was representation of nature. Chiaroscuro was a considered a progressive step in representing nature. Only when art gave up representation of nature as its goal, and began to take interests in primitive models, the cleavage between science and art became distinct. Any field in which a group works successfully can be called making progress within its context. In such a sense even philosophy can be said to be progressing. However, Kuhn says, other competing schools need not accept it. That is why the term progress does not fit in philosophy. For example, in philosophy even today there are Aristotelians. But, in normal science because of the absence of competing schools progress can be seen in quite clearly.

Examining why progress is inextricable with science, Kuhn sees more reasons. The character of normal science as an insulated world far away from the public is one of them. This distance from the laity helps scientists concentrate more deeply into their specific issues than any other fields. Another reason is the way students of science are educated. Textbooks play an incomparably greater role in molding scientists. Unlike in science, in music and other arts exposure to past masters play only a formative role. Whereas in science students are molded by the textbooks in which the contributions of past masters are recapitulated concisely. Scientists are never pressed by a situation in which immediate solutions are the need of the hour. They only need to communicate with their peer groups. All these sharpen the effectiveness of the research in normal science, and eventually it will help science to solve its puzzles effectively. This will inevitably be progress. When a revolution comes, it will be interpreted as progress by the post revolutionary science. Unlike art and other fields, science will not give any importance to museum pieces; rather they would draw a straight line from

past to the present and interpret it as progress to their vantage. Kuhn picturizes the plight of a member of the scientific community as:

> ... the member of a mature scientific community is, like the typical character of Orwell's *1984*, the victim of a history rewritten by the powers that be.[92]

The common notion of progress in science is that it is progressing towards a goal, say, truth. However, Kuhn makes it clear that it is a mistaken belief that science is progressing nearer and nearer to truth. Kuhn asks why there should be only one goal or one ultimate truth, and how it will help the endeavor of science. The notion of a set goal is part and parcel of the image of science. Any alternate model will disturb it. That is why, Kuhn states, many professionals were bothered when Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution by natural selection. What bothered them were neither his notion of species nor the idea of evolution. The idea of evolution was already present. What disturbed them was the abolition of the teleological kind of evolution because Darwin's *Origin of Species* recognized goals set neither by god nor by nature.

Postscript

As a result of objections and criticisms, Kuhn has written a postscript to his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In it Kuhn is answering his critics. He was criticized for trying to make science rest on unanalyzable individual intuitions rather than on logic and law. In reply to this criticism, Kuhn says that what he meant was not individual intuitions, but something that shared by a scientific community. He does not think that it is unanalyzable. He says he was suggesting a process that was not fully explicable in terms of neuro-cerebral mechanism. Furthermore, he clarifies

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[92] Ibid. p. 167.

what he meant by 'world change'. By 'world change' he meant that people do not see stimuli; their knowledge of them is highly theoretical and abstract. Much neural processing takes place between the receipt of a stimulus and the awareness of a sensation. The path from stimulus to sensation is in part conditioned by education. Hence very different stimuli may produce the same sensations, and the same stimuli may produce very different sensations. The notion of 'world change', according to Kuhn, is this.

Another charge directed against Kuhn is that his notion of incommensurability makes communication between proponents of different theories impossible; as a result, there can be no role for reason in debates over theory-choice. Instead theories are chosen for personal or subjective reasons. Kuhn defends his position by saying the following. In a debate over theory-choice, communication between competitors can be partial, as different theories attach terms they use with nature differently. They may use the same terms, but the meaning could be different. Hence nothing can result except just talking through each one's theories. One or the other succeeds at last by persuading the other to believe the successful theory. As this is how debate over theory-choice happens, one cannot claim superiority of any theories over others.

However, according to Kuhn, nothing in the notion of incommensurability implies that there is no role of reason in theory-choice. Nor does it imply that the reasons for choosing a theory are different from accuracy, simplicity, fruitfulness, and the like. Only difference, Kuhn thinks, is that these factors of reason function like values, and therefore scientists who honor them differently can apply them differently.

Critics think that the viewpoints of Kuhn that the proponents of different theories are like the members of different language-communities as relativistic. Because this viewpoint implies that both groups may be right.

Kuhn agrees that applied to culture that position is relativistic. However, according to him, science is different from culture, that is, applied to science it is far from mere relativism. Kuhn stresses the point that he is not a relativist:

> Later scientific theories are better than earlier ones for solving puzzles in the often quite different environments to which they are applied. That is not a relativist's position, and it displays the sense in which I am a convinced believer in scientific progress.[93]

The underlying impression when it is said science is progressing is that the theoretical entities and the 'really there' entities are getting closer and closer. It is this aspect of the notion of progress that Kuhn rejects. He agrees with the view that Newton's theory improves on Aristotle's, and Einstein's theory improves on Newton's, and so. Kuhn, even, thinks that the notion of a match between the ontology of a theory and its 'real' counterpart is very illusive in principle.

In many aspects Kuhn's notion of incommensurability is different from that of Feyerabend's. He himself has noticed it. He says Feyerabend talks about incommensurability *tout court*; where as his notion of incommensurability is partial communication that can be developed further. However, Kuhn not only disagree with Sir Karl Popper when he said framework relativism is 'Pickwickian' but does not suppose that one can break out of one's framework at any time into a better and roomier framework, and break out from it again. Kuhn himself differentiate his notion of incommensurability from that of Feyerabend thus:

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[93] Ibid. p. 206

> Unlike Feyerabend (at least as I and others are reading him), I do not believe that it is ever total or beyond recourse. Where he talks of incommensurability *tout court*, I have regularly spoken also of partial communication, and I believe it can be improved upon to whatever extent circumstances may demand and patience permit, a point to be elaborated below. But neither do I believe as Sir Karl does, that the sense in which 'we are prisoners caught in the framework of our theories; our expectations; our past experiences; our language' is merely 'Pickwickian'. Nor do I suppose that 'we can break out of our framework at any time... [into] a better and roomier... [from which] we can at any moment break out again.[94]

From this it is clear that Kuhn's notion of incommensurability is different from Feyerabend's, and also resists Popper's counter argument. Also, he argues that Popper's phrase 'culture clash' does not make much sense as the stimulant of revolutions.

Kuhn has retorted to the critical remarks of Imre Lakatos that Kuhn's conceptual framework is socio-psychological by saying that rather Lakatos' position is socio-psychological because of his repeated reliance not on logical rules, but on the mature sensibility of the trained scientists. Critical remarks addressed to Kuhn are clustered around the set of issues related to the nature of transition from one normal-scientific tradition to another and the techniques involved in settling the conflicts. Regarding the explanation of the nature of change, Kuhn is charged of irrationality, relativism, and the defense

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[94] Kuhn, Thomas. S. "Reflections on My Critics". Criticism and Growth of Knowledge. Ed. Imre Lakatos and A Musgrave. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1970. 231-278. p. 232.

of mob rule. Feyerabend has defended Kuhn using the same labels. Nevertheless, Kuhn has rejected all these labels.

In response to these charges, Kuhn says that he did not mean that logic and observation are bad reasons for favoring a theory. What he said was that the force of logic and observation is not very compelling. He says he never defended mob rule. He says he meant that in deciding matters of theory-choice, trained scientists are the highest court of appeal, and this does not entail a defense to mob rule. Nor it suggests that this court of appeal will accept any theory at all.

Popper and his followers think that theory-choice can be solved by means of semantically neutral techniques. That is to say, cannons of rationality derived from logical and linguistic syntax provide enough bases for deciding between two competing theories. To achieve that goal, Kuhn argues, philosophers of science will need to examine to an unprecedented depth how language fits the world, and how the members of a language community have transmitted it from generation to generation. The notion of paradigm was very fundamental to his attempt to answer questions of that sort. Against Popper's argument that the problem of theory-choice can be solved, Kuhn replies:

> To achieve that goal, however, philosophers of science will need to follow other contemporary philosophers of science in examining, to a previously unprecedented depth, the manner in which language fits the world, asking how terms attach to nature, how those attachments are learned, and how they are transmitted from one generation to another by the members of a language community. Because paradigms, in one the two

separable senses of them, are fundamental to my attempts to answer questions of that sort...[95]

Popper has criticized Kuhn for drawing observations from sociology and history. According to Popper such observations are not relevant to philosophy of science. To this, Kuhn replies that his endeavor was to study science from the viewpoint of a historian, and while examining closely the facts of scientific life, he discovered that much of the scientific practice, including the greatest scientists, had violated accepted canons. Later he found out that these violations had not hampered science. At first he thought these violations were aberrations. But at a closer look he understood this kind of scientific behavior is quite fitting to theory of scientific knowledge. According to Kuhn the problem with his critics is that they are not interested in describing science fully, what they are interested is only in rational reconstruction.

According to Lakatos, there are two kinds of psychological philosophies of science. One of which holds that no science is possible, only a psychology of individual scientist is possible, and the other holds that there is a psychology of normal mind or a scientific ideal. Lakatos says Kuhn is not aware of this distinction, and that Kuhn belongs to the first type.[96] Kuhn replies to the critical remark by saying that his is sociology, a field quite different from individual psychology.

Kuhn thinks that his views are not far apart from that of his critics. Like them Kuhn also believes that the central episodes in scientific advance

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[95] Ibid. p. 235

[96] Lakatos, Imre. "Falsification and the Methodology of Research Programmes". Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1970. p. 180.

are scientific revolutions. Nevertheless, Kuhn does not agree with them in their claim that science is a series of revolutions. He claims that something called normal science goes between from one revolution to another. Kuhn agrees with Popper that scientists necessarily develop their ideas within a definite theoretical framework. For Kuhn, this is only in case of revolutions, and in normal science that is not the case. It is the case in revolutions because revolutions always involve rejection or replacement of earlier framework. Normal science is quite opposite. It is a research within an already established framework. The main point of difference between Popper and Kuhn is on Kuhn's distinction of science as normal and revolutionary. Popper thinks that a scientist should be an all time critic, and should proliferate alternate theories. Here Kuhn reserves this role to deploy in times of revolution. Kuhn criticizes Popper that his notion 'revolution n permanence' is nothing but an ideological imperative, not something that describes scientific reality. According to Kuhn, Popper's notion of revolution in permanence is quite fitting to fields like art and culture, but not fitting to developed sciences where technical puzzles take much of space.[97]

In normal science, Kuhn says, scientists ordinarily take current theory for granted. They exploit it, instead of criticizing it. In that way they explore nature to an esoteric depth and detail otherwise unimaginable. But when they encounter serious crises, they would stop and think. It is only here Popper's methodology becomes relevant. That means, according to Kuhn, Popper's methodology is nothing more than a puzzle solving technique they inevitably need in times of crisis.

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[97] Kuhn, Thomas. S. "Reflections on My Critics". Criticism and Growth of Knowledge. Ed. Imre Lakatos and A Musgrave. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1970. 231-278. p. 247

Kuhn admits that he did not analyze the notion 'partial communication' in his work 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions' in which he only named it. In his paper 'Reflections on My critics' he confesses that the notion 'partial communication' is neither complete incomprehension nor inscrutable. Another admission he makes is that he would have written 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions' in a different manner because the question to whom an episode in science is normal or revolutionary is a matter of how far a group or a community gets closely affected by it. There are communities in science. Each one is cognitively committed in various ways; therefore he thinks that his book would have been written concentrating on the community structure of the scientific communities. It is with the assumption that science is the product of specialist communities that Kuhn makes the distinction: normal science and revolutionary science. If it were asked whether an episode in science is normal or revolutionary to each community, then the answers may vary from community to community. "Many episodes will then be revolutionary for no communities, many others for several communities together, a few for all science."[98]

For Kuhn, proof meant the assent of his peers, an idea very close to Wittgenstein's linguistic turn. Kuhn's historicism can lead to relativist position just because he suggests that there may be no trans-historical rule for scientific procedure. Many different interpretations of Kuhn's account exist. It must be because the internal consistency of Kuhn's positions still stands in some doubt. For example, there is considerable disagreement over the proper interpretation of the word 'paradigm'. Some of the possible interpretations based on Kuhn's use of paradigm are: a set of exemplars, solved problems, a text book, a famous experiment, an entire theoretical world view, a set of

[98] ibid. p. 253.

laws, a list of methodological prescriptions, a set of fundamental values for science, etc.

Kuhn says truth may be a term with only intra-theoretical applications.[99] This is a relativist claim. It fits quite well with the claim of normative truth-value relativism. The claim of normative truth-value relativism is that truth is relative to a framework. Kuhn's 'intra-theoretical' is only just another word for 'framework'.

Kuhn's most influential work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* has a markedly relativistic flavor to it, though often qualified; Kuhn was perhaps not wholly convinced by relativism: – indeed he shied away from relativism later on in response to criticism. In this classic *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, he writes:

> "The very ease and rapidity with which astronomers saw new things when looking at old objects with old instruments may make us wish to say that, after Copernicus, astronomers lived in a different world. In any case, their research responded as though that were the case."[100]

In the absence of some recourse to that hypothetical fixed nature that he "saw differently", the principle of economy will urge us to say that after discovering oxygen Lavoisier worked in a different world.[101]

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[99] Ibid. p. 266.

[100] Kuhn, Thomas. S. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. 2nd Ed. USA: The University of Chicago. 1970. p. 117.

[101] Ibid. p. 118.

Yet at other places he shrinks from this radical view:

> Whatever he may then see, the scientist after a revolution is still looking at the same world.[102]

One key and highly influential concept employed by Kuhn is his notion of a paradigm. Kuhn says these are 'constitutive of nature'[103]and that scientists working with different paradigms are 'practicing in different worlds'[104] (Though on the very same page, he says that both are looking at the self-same world). What does Kuhn mean by 'paradigm'? It is not all that clear what he means, as Kuhn later admitted. Whilst rejecting the claim of one critic (Margaret Masterman) that he had employed the term with twenty-two different meanings in his Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Kuhn conceded that the term had been confusingly ambiguous and ought to have been dropped.

Kuhn then distinguishes between on the one hand, normal science, science carried out under an agreed paradigm, in which anomalies are puzzles to be solved from within the paradigm, and on the other hand revolutionary science. Scientific revolutions occur when anomalies build up, new paradigms are put forward and there is no agreed shared basis of principles governing change from one paradigm to another.[105] The comparison with political revolution is direct: just as in a political revolution the old constitution is torn up and change is effected by means not allowed in any hitherto accepted set of rules, so too revolutionary change in science (Copernicus replacing Ptolemy, atomic chemistry replacing phlogiston chemistry, Einstein replacing

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[102] Ibid. p. 129.

[103] Ibid. p. 110.

[104] Ibid. p. 150.

[105] Ibid. p. 94.

Newton) does not proceed in accordance with some fixed, atemporal set of rules of scientific method.

But what about the method of rejecting a theory if it conflicts with observation? Is that not constant across scientific revolutions? This Kuhn rejects because of his rejection of theory-neutral observation sentences and his espousal of incommensurability,[106] the idea that distinct theories cannot be compared because there is no theory-neutral observation language that could be used to compare them.

Though somewhat hesitant here too, Kuhn comes down fairly heavily against the idea of a theory-neutral observation language which can function as an objective vantage point from within which to compare theories:

> Is sensory experience fixed and neutral? ...In the absence of a developed alternative, I find it impossible to relinquish entirely that viewpoint. Yet it no longer functions effectively, and the attempts to make it do so through the introduction of a neutral language of observations now seem to me hopeless.[107]

Why does he reject theory-neutral observation sentences? One main argument seems to be from the fallibility of observation as evidenced in psychological experiments, which showed that what one see often depends on one's 'perceptual set'. If one is expecting a normal sequence of playing cards dealt from the pack one does not notice a red three of 'clubs' slipped in amongst the rest.

However the fact that human observations are fallible does nothing at all to show that human observational concepts are incommensurable nor even

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[106] Ibid. p. 104.

[107] Ibid. p. 126.

that persons taking in by these cases have visual experiences (rather than distinct perceptual beliefs), which are distinct from those who do not. For instance, Kuhn has done nothing at all to show that Newton and Einstein meant different things by 'Jack is taller than Jill' and it is this he needs to show if he wishes to show, e.g. that classical physics does not conflict with relativity though it seems to imply electrons will take much longer times and distances to accelerate to near light speed. The Kuhnian argument is that the Newtonian concepts of space, time, and mass differ from the Einsteinian ones. This is true when we have in mind the highly theoretical notions of space, time and space-time, mass and rest mass etc; but Kuhn needs to show in addition that these highly theoretical notions in both theories aren't both linked to more humdrum and common notions of e.g. length as measured by rods and so forth.

Kuhn applied to Kuhn

The history of both the production and the reception of Kuhn's book goes some significant way toward exemplifying his theses. One might go so far as to say that the special feature of Kuhn's "Structure of Scientific Revolutions" book is that it can account for its own production and effects, including the resistance to it, in a manner that no previous philosophical picture of science could do. And it is internal to Kuhn's account that there will be a great effort to maintain the prior paradigm in the face of a revolutionary incursion. This effort will frequently in fact extend to the revolutionaries themselves. Thus Kuhn emphasizes not only their frequent reluctance to face the broader and ultimate consequences of their own innovations, but even to recognise that their's truly were major innovations, and even to make those innovations in the first place. Thus, as discussed earlier, Kuhn finds Planck, for instance, to have been a much more reluctant revolutionary than his traditionally been thought. According to Kuhn, Planck

resisted strongly the idea that he had discovered the quantum, especially around the crucial period of 1906, and not only around and after 1912, when it became more generally recognized among his peers that he was reluctant to come with them down the revolutionary road *he* had begun the construction of. And Kuhn famously quotes with approval Planck's own telling remark that scientists relatively rarely manage be converted to a new paradigm:

> A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.[108]

The difference is even starker when one looks at the shift from Popper to the Logical Positivists, when, that is, one compares Kuhn to the Vienna Circle on science, in particular to Carl Hempel. Hempel's attempt at producing a Confirmational logic for science led to the desperate anomalies of his and Goodman's paradoxes - but his own account of science has nothing to say about why any of this should have happened. Whereas Kuhn can point to the state of crisis that philosophers of science were gradually, reluctantly realizing their 'discipline' was in; and to the revolution that 'reluctantly' ensued when he displaced the orthodox wisdom on the relevance of history of science for philosophy of science, on the dubious utility of the context of justification *vs.* context of discovery principle, and so on.

There is an obvious analogy with Freud here. Freud famously predicted that his views would spawn various kinds of critical responses among his own followers and enemies, responses of exactly the kind that his views would naturally predict, i.e. that his followers would have Oedipal reactions against him, that his opponents would be working up (as well as through) their own

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[108] Ibid. p. 151.

resistances because of wanting to repress the threatening aspects of Freudian thought, *etc.* Again: Freud could account for the emergence of his own views and (more importantly) of the forms of opposition to them (and him) on the basis of his own views, and this was in his time arguably an unprecedented phenomenon in intellectual history. One can go so far as to say this: if Freud's views had not been fiercely resisted, this would have counted significantly against their validity. If Freud had not generated resistance, if his views had not been repeatedly and variously rejected, then we would have been well placed, according to his own lights, to reject them.

Kuhn by contrast would of course not castigate a theory, or a paradigm, merely for working to find evidence that will support it, for resorting to *ad hoc* hypotheses, *etc.* But, more importantly in the present context, Kuhn can explain his own emergence, and the resistance to his views in a manner roughly after that of Freud. A revolution in the philosophy of science should be expected only at a time when there is some perception emerging of anomaly or monstrosity; one should expect its fomenter to have his or her feet very much in the old tradition, and not even to realize at first the revolutionary effects of his own views; there should be communication difficulties of a major sort between the newly emergent paradigm and defenders of the old verities and so on. On this last point, of course, Kuhn made capital from the problems he on the one hand and the Falsificationists (and those influenced by the Logical Empiricists) on the other had in debating each other - a point that must have infuriated his rationalist audience in the discussions recorded in 'Criticism and the growth of knowledge', for example. For Kuhn endeavoured to present the "cross-purposes" which he discerned between himself and his critics as 'confirming evidence' for his picture, as itself a very interesting example of the phenomenon of "partial communication", "the talking-through-each-other that regularly characterizes discourse between participants in incommensurable points of view". It is

important not to be deceived by the apparent availability of a moderate reading of these phrases and remarks. The term "partial communication" might appear to imply only a careful equanimity concerning the allegedly limited degree to which "complete understanding" between humans is ever possible. But Kuhn is claiming:

The inevitable result [of paradigm-shift] is what we must call, though the term is not quite right, a misunderstanding between the two competing schools.[109]

The term is "not quite right" because in everyday language a "misunderstanding" is correctable. But here it is not. Here it is inevitable, intrinsically unavoidable. "Communication across the revolutionary divide is *inevitably* partial."[110]This is a qualitatively different situation from everyday human situations which one is familiar with; Kuhn is implying that there is a signal and powerful form of 'incommensurability' here. But in outline: for example, even when pre and post-paradigm claims are made using the same words, there is no possibility of normal mutual understanding, for the words "inevitably" mean something different in one text than they do in another.

Normal Science

"Normal science" is, by contrast, on the surface an unexciting, even a dreary, term. Why does Thomas Kuhn, the philosopher of scientific revolution spend so much time dwelling on this much more boring, mundane topic? Surely scientific revolutions are at the heart of Kuhn's account; surely "normal science" is merely their adjunct? How can this revolutionary in the philosophy of science allow, apparently, that science may progress normally, cumulatively, outside of revolutionary periods? Certainly, some of Kuhn's

[109] Ibid. p. 149.

[110] Ibid. p. 149.

supporters, for example, certain Post-Modernists applaud the dramatic and apparently epoch-making notion of 'scientific revolution'; and some of Kuhn's critics, for example, certain traditionalist philosophers of science deplore and abhor the very same, and argue for a general continuity of scientific thought, for new theories subsuming old, etc.

But appearances may be deceptive: much as Kuhn claims that what Aristotle saw when he looked at a pendulum was a stone falling with difficulty, while Galileo saw a body that almost succeeded in repeating the same motion over and over again, so what some commentators have seen as the most conservative part of Kuhn's work, others have seen as the most radical. Depending on one's point of view, Kuhn's idea of 'normal science' is either a mundane and relatively unexciting sidebar or the very centrepiece of his 'revolutionary' philosophy of science. Yes, remarkable as it might sound, "normal science" (and the notion of "puzzle-solving" through which it is in large measure defined), and not "scientific revolution", is arguably at the heart of Kuhn's revolutionary contribution to the philosophy of science. And those who would find in normal science a holdover of the old paradigm in the philosophy of science, a less 'exciting' aspect of Kuhn's thought, are arguably entirely mistaken.

A strong clue to this being the true state of affairs may be detected in the debates between Kuhn and perhaps his premier critics, those who (besides the Logical Positivists and their cohorts and successors) he was above all attacking or superseding the Popperians. One might have expected Popper and co. to have rallied above all against the apparent irrationalism of the notion of 'scientific revolution', and at concomitant ideas, which one has already begun to investigate, ideas such as 'paradigm-shift', e.g. the notion that before and after Copernicus astrophysicists were operating in and under different paradigms, and thus could not be compared. One might have

expected Kuhn's chief critics to have aimed their main counter-claims squarely at the idea that the Copernican revolution and others like it really took place under anything like Kuhn's terms. For those terms can appear to imply that scientific revolutions, paradigm-shifts, can never be rationally motivated.

But if one looks, for instance, at the document which above all records the clash between Kuhn and his critics, the volume 'Criticism and the growth of knowledge', which comprises the key papers given when Kuhn met face to face with Watkins, Toulmin, Popper, Lakatos, Feyerabend and others in July 1965, one finds a quite different picture. The preponderance of the dispute centred precisely on normal science, rather than revolutionary science. Indeed, this is obvious even in the titles of some of the papers given on that occasion. Karl Popper: "Normal science and its dangers". Even more starkly, J.W.N.Watkins: "Against 'Normal Science'". Furthermore, Feyerabend often pictured as an intellectual ally of Kuhn's, had very similar complaints on that occasion.

Normal science was not so arresting a phenomenon, and some commentators, noting Kuhn's references to its 'cumulative' character, even managed to interpret it as nothing more than 'rational enquiry' in the traditional sense. The consequent image of revolutions as impassable crevasses ripping across the path of rational scientific progress was vivid and exciting, and aroused great interest. This was, however, an image sustained entirely by an outmoded and untenable stereotype of the growth of knowledge; and when it is set aside the value of Kuhn's concept becomes more open to question, and several weaknesses become evident in the manner of its formulation. It is because of its comparative lack of theoretical interest that Kuhn's account of revolutions is less valuable than his discussion of normal science. The latter is of fundamental theoretical importance because it

describes many general characteristics of cognition and culture which it is difficult to imagine could be otherwise. The former does not do this, and accordingly can be at best no more than an empirical description of some selected episodes in the history of science.

Normal Science: The attempt to demonstrate the agreement of the paradigm with the world, at the few places where one might claim that they can be directly compared. This explicitly anti-Popperian idea (Popper would exclaim that scientists ought not to be trying to confirm a paradigm's effectiveness), for Kuhn, accurately reflects what much of ordinary everyday science is about. For instance, the creation of special telescopes designed to demonstrate the presence of the annual parallax of the stars predicted by Copernicus. A paradigm is a challenge, according to Kuhn: the challenge is to make it work as well as it possibly can, and this requires much diligence and ingenuity.

Kuhn's account of 'normal science' can even, controversially, be seen as a novel model of what it is for a collectivity of persons to be engaged in rational inquiry. Of course, many forms of rational inquiry are not science, but arguably, normal science can be read as a model for rational inquiry in general. A model emphasizing that much must be taken for granted for anything to be disagreed upon, that a focus on advancing research requires a disciplined exploration of an agreed agenda, etc. This would be Kuhn as philosopher par excellence. For this would be a mode of argument going way beyond sociology or history.

Consider again Kuhn as a revolutionary in the philosophy of science. The concept of 'normal science' is not a conservative innovation: it is very threatening, it is radical, and it was largely hitherto unrecognised as vital, foundational, for the study of science, for studies of science which do not take the finished discovery or theory as the only relevant standpoint from which to

tell a tale of scientific change, and which do not focus on the rare unexpected innovation made by an isolated or eccentric man as the be all and end all of such change. It's threatening, because it says that hardly any of science is like the Popperians in particular said it was. And because even scientific revolutions in their socio-historical concretion emerge out of the same processes, not literally out of odd isolated eccentrics with bold and brave new ideas. That's what Kuhn shows in his studies of the Copernican and quantum revolutions. That Copernicus and Planck were conservative normal scientists. That might justly be called a radical idea that revolutions happen through the pursuit of normal science and virtually only through its pursuit. This thought is in a sense stronger than Kuhn's important and well-known claim that "Anomaly appears only against the background provided by the paradigm.... By ensuring that the paradigm will not be too easily surrendered, resistance guarantees that scientists will no be lightly distracted and that the anomalies that lead to paradigm change will penetrate existing knowledge to the core. So long as the tools a paradigm supplies continue to prove capable of solving the problems it defines, science moves fastest and penetrates most deeply through confident employment of those tools."[111] For it results in less weight being needed to be put upon the idea that there is a different *kind* of scientific practice orresearch which occurs in situations of 'crisis'. The distinction between normal and extraordinary science, so severely criticized by Toulmin and others, is of less import once one has understood that the actual practice of science need not be that different in order for its results to be extraordinary. To anticipate, one may claim that the point of talk of incommensurability can be separated more or less completely from any tentative distinction between ordinary and extraordinary science. For sure, scientists will do different things before and after revolutions, but that does not imply that the kind of science

[111] Ibid. p. 65.

done during a transitional period need be qualitatively different from that done before and afterward. One may think that this point deflects criticisms of Kuhn focussing on his not having rigorously distinguished normal from extraordinary science, despite his purported claim that one must do so.

However, in a quite different sense to that just discussed, in the normative sense that the Popperians are interested in, the concept of Kuhnian normal science itself may indeed be alleged to be conservative in a pejorative fashion. Popper and his disciples considered the idea of normal science dangerous precisely because they recognised both that it was above all in this idea that Kuhn was undermining their picture of the essential nature of science, and because they wished to hold that normal science was conservative science. Popperian imperative was to cast the net of theories widely, to risk all in the pursuit of the growth of knowledge, to expose oneself maximally to falsification. They thus held, against Kuhn, that normal science was mostly a bad thing, and that Kuhn was effectively presenting with an apologia for it, conservatively and dangerously.

In a certain sense, indeed, one might even go so far as to say that the real criticism directed at Kuhn by Popper *et al* was that Kuhn is not sufficiently the philosopher of scientific revolution. Popper basically says to Kuhn that the problem with him was his notion of normal science, and that he should quite the idea of normal science to accept him by Popper. Popper is ready to agree with Kuhn, if the latter just gets rid of the idea of normal science. He agrees with Kuhn on his idea of scientific revolutions. But Popper claims that science is a series of revolutions without a pause like normal science.

Kuhn's critics at least need to sort out what it is they are accusing him of. For Popper's primary accusation that people are, for Kuhn, stuck in a framework, that he is an irrationalist in thinking that free unframed thought is

impossible is of course the very opposite of the accusation that others make most central. And that Kuhn is an irrationalist in thinking that drastic change is too easy, in preaching the gospel of scientific revolution. And after all, even gestalt switches are not unconstrained. Quite the contrary: one can see a duck or a rabbit, but little or nothing else.

This connects directly to one's thought previously that one might risk describing Kuhn as providing the basis for an anti-Foundationalist epistemology, with at its centre a reconceptualisation of the nature of rational inquiry focussed around the nature of normal science. Perhaps seeing Kuhn as doing this makes him look less extreme than either those who accuse Kuhn of an 'anything goes' mentality or those who accuse hi of being a 'frameworkist' would have it.

Kuhn's revolution in the philosophy of science is, we would suggest therefore, rather widely misunderstood by those not closely familiar with it, and perhaps unaware of its threat, force, or promise. Barry Barnes is right in this, at least so far as the social sciences are concerned. He says that Kuhn's most radical successful contribution to the philosophy of science is probably not his particular rendition of 'scientific revolution', nor exactly his much-misunderstood notion of 'paradigm-shift'. It is in his role specifically as the philosopher of normal science that Kuhn's most authentically revolutionary contribution is to be found. It was in his insistence, that is, on the mechanisms through which science is and has to be normally non-revolutionary, that Kuhn struck a blow to the heart of the Popperian enterprise, and depicted a 'new' vast realm of science, one which conformed to the standard positivist image of science only at the huge cost of rendering the latter more or less trivial. Trivial because Kuhn explained how the 'cumulativeness' of normal science was always and only possible and sensible against the background of a paradigm (a disciplinary matrix), and

through the means of exploring that paradigm, whereas for logical empiricists and their successors, the cumulativeness of knowledge was absolute.

The question of social scientists' appropriation of Kuhn

When one starts to look closely at Kuhn in relation to the *social* sciences, a question may strike to one, because Kuhn is without much doubt the most apparently an influential philosopher of the social sciences. And yet he wrote almost *nothing* directly on the topic. Kuhn has been enthusiastically taken up by some Post-Modernists, by some apologists for the social sciences, and by major social theorists. They've read him as systematically licensing the thought that if only social scientists were able to get each other to agree on a 'paradigm' within which to focus their research, then the social sciences would genuinely be sciences.

Contrariwise, Kuhn has been viewed with alarm by Popper, by Feyerabend, and by mainstream realist philosophers of science for just the same reason that he apparently legitimates the pretensions of the social sciences and much more besides when what should be happening (according to these critics) is the remorseless exposure of the 'social sciences'' non-scientific status, unless and until they adopt an acceptable methodology etc.

The conundrum here is much sharpened when one notes that Kuhn himself wondered rather angrily and irritatedly what all the fuss was about. He evidently felt that both his fans and his foes had got the wrong end of the stick in supposing his views to have these drastic implications for the social sciences. One may like to explore here the possibility that he might have been right about his own work, the possibility, that is, that observers of science tend to have the wrong image of the scientificity of the kind of the non-natural sciences.

Feyerabendian critique of Kuhn

Kuhn writes of 'pre-paradigmatic' sciences. And of the emergence of a paradigm through the establishing by one of the schools of thought that exist in 'pre-paradigmatic' disciplines of a hegemony, a dominance. This can sound awfully like what Kuhn's followers and foes (mentioned above) find in his text. But does what Kuhn writes about this in fact imply a prescription for what social scientists ought to do? Bearing in mind our earlier discussion of "paradigms" and "normal science", for this one has to focus in on one of Kuhn's rare direct remarks on the social sciences in this context:

> In parts of biology -- the study of heredity, for example -- the first universally received paradigms are still more recent; and it remains an open question what parts of social science have yet acquired such paradigms at all. History suggests that the road to a firm research consensus is extraordinarily arduous.[112]

It is worth paying quite close attention to this quotation. Does it imply that social sciences must be on the road to a research consensus, if they are to be doing anything worthwhile? Does it license the thought, 'obvious' to positivists but also attractive to any who look to put a social science on a 'secure' or 'scientific' footing, that what is really required is a paradigm to bring the social science in question together 'under one roof', to put it firmly on "the route to normal science"?

The use of the word "yet" might imply such a teleological vision. And likewise the phrase that Kuhn uses elsewhere, "pre-paradigmatic". But just because certain disciplines have become ... disciplines, have become sciences, surely cannot imply that all will. For example, here is one possibility: that the social sciences will eventually come to appear as astrology, that is, as a

[112] Ibid. p. 15.

pathetic attempt to ape science, failing due to its failure to have a genuine tradition of research, a genuine actionable set of problems and puzzles. Here is another possibility: that the social sciences might 'stay' in what Kuhn describes (misleadingly perhaps again) as the " 'early' fact-gathering" stage. That they might remain 'disciplines without a paradigm' (a phrase deliberately lacking the imaginable teleological consequences of "pre-paradigmatic"). Here is a third possibility: that the social sciences might be best understood as already in some degree operating in a manner which is ill-captured by the formula of "fact-gathering", but not in a manner akin to that of a science -e.g. perhaps they have a systematically 'hermeneutic' structure.

Kuhn lays down no advice or prognostication for disciplines without a paradigm. There is *nowhere* in Kuhn -- not in the quote given above, nor anywhere else -- a claim that one can confidently predict that in a discipline with schools, the eventual victory of one school can be confidently predicted. Kuhn's claim concerning the emergence of paradigms is purely a *retrospective* claim. He is talking about the structure of the emergence of those disciplines that have become sciences. Not providing a manual for the creation of new sciences. He is, at least by implication and omission, pretty clear that that there can never be a guarantee that a discipline without a paradigm will acquire one, and thus no sense in which it can be obvious and perspicuous that the social sciences are well-conceptualised as on the road to normal science.

For the victory of a school, the construction of certain types of institutions is perhaps necessary, and certainly afterward. But this does not imply that it is a good idea to construct such institutions at any particular time. Nor that the construction of it will ever be enough. One needs to have sets of agreed-upon exemplars, common methods or ways of acting, and an absence of ongoing foundational disputes. There are strict limits to the extent

to which any of these can be imposed upon others in the discipline unwilling to be imposed upon. One can try to suppress foundational disputes -- for example, through hegemony in a professional association or in educational institutes in a discipline -- but this is liable to be to some extent self-defeating, especially in any climate valuing academic freedom, *etc.* Whichever way one cuts the cake, it looks like scientificity just is not in the institutions. And the struggle of schools for hegemony, the attempt to turn a school prematurely into a paradigm, can be the most self-defeating move of all.

Kuhn ought neither to be praised nor buried for having apparently given 'pre-paradigmatic' sciences a road or a menu toward normal science. Because, appearances to the contrary, he simply did not do so. Careful reading indicates that he did not even attempt to provide such a road or recipe.

'ANYTHING GOES' AND FEYERABEND

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CHAPTER 5

'ANYTHING GOES' AND FEYERABEND

Against Method

In his introduction to "Against Method", Paul Feyerabend quotes Einstein:

> The external conditions which are set for the [scientist] by the facts of experience do not permit him to let himself be too much restricted, in the construction of his conceptual world, by the adherence to an epistemological system. He therefore, must appear to the systematic epistemologist as a type of unscrupulous opportunist...[113]

He quoted Einstein to show that how complex a situation a scientist has to face and to wonder how naïve it is to restrict him or her by simple-minded rules which methodologists think capable of accounting science. In the same vain Feyerabend says that such a complex situation containing surprising and unforeseen developments demands complex procedures, and it is impossible to encounter the complexity with preset rules with an aim to analyze it without regard to the ever-changing conditions of history.[114]

On closer analysis, Feyerabend says, the history of science shows that science knows no 'bare facts' but the 'facts' that enter our knowledge are already viewed in a certain way and are, therefore, essentially ideational, and

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[113] Feyerabend, P.K. Against Method. London – New York: Verso. 1978. Feyerabend quotes this from "Albert Einstein: Philosopher Scientist. Ed. P. A. Schilpp. New York. 1951. pp. 68, 3f."

[114] ibid. p. 18.

therefore science can be very complex and full of mistakes, chaos. By contrast, scientific education today simplifies 'science' and conditions those working in the domain by limiting their intuitions that might lead to a blurring of boundaries. And thus it is possible to create a tradition that is held together by strict rules, and that is also successful to some extent.

But, Feyerabend asks whether this is desirable or not. He answers NO, because the world which one wants to explore is a largely unknown entity. One must therefore, keep one's options open. One must not restrict oneself in advance. A plethora of epistemological prescriptions and general principles may be available, and which may look splendid too. But who can guarantee that they are the best way to discover, not just a few isolated 'facts', but also some deep-lying secrets of nature? This is his first reason. The second reason is that a scientific education as described above (and as practiced in our schools) cannot be reconciled with a humanitarian attitude.[115]

The idea of a method contains firm, unchanging and absolutely binding principle for conducting research in science. But, according to Feyerabend, historical analysis shows that there is not a single rule that is not violated at some or other time, and it is ironical that these violations were only contributing to the progress of science, hence inevitable for science. The invention of atomism in antiquity, the Copernican Revolution, kinetic theory, quantum etc. occurred only because some thinkers, knowingly or unknowingly, broke certain obvious methodological rules, adds Feyerabend.

Against Rationality

Feyerabend is of the opinion that rationality is the final product of a conditioning and training. He thinks that a well-trained rationalist will obey his master like a pet howsoever complex his confusion might be. But the pet

[115] Ibid. p. 20.

will never realize that the appeal to reason to which he or she is succumbed to is nothing but disguised political manoeuvre. Feyerabend calls it in so many synonyms: interests, forces, propaganda, brainwashing, etc. These manipulation techniques play a much greater role that is commonly believed in the growth of knowledge and the parallel growth of silence, which can be seen from an analysis of the relationship between idea and action.[116]

According to Feyerabend, knowledge is not a series of self-consistent theories that converges towards an ideal view; it is not a gradual approach to truth. It is rather an ocean of incompatible (incommensurable) alternatives. Mythical nature of this knowledge will be revealed when one encounters an entirely different cosmology, as it is said, prejudices are found by contrast, not by analysis.

However, Feyerabend's intention is not to replace science by fairly tales. Rather his intention is to convince the reader that all methodologies have their limits. The best way to demonstrate this limit is to show how irrational some of the taken for granted basic rules are. In the case of induction, it would be show how counterintuitive procedure can be supported by argument. One thing to keep in mind is that the demonstrations and rhetorics do not express any deep conviction from his part. They merely show that people can be led by their nose in a rational way. Feyerabend uses these techniques as an undercover agent who pretends loyality to overthrow the authority of reason. Feyerabend says:

> My intention is, rather, to convince the reader that *all methodologies, even the most obvious ones, have their limits.* The best way to show this is to demonstrate the limits and even the irrationality of some rules which she, or he, is likely to

[116] Ibid. p. 25.

> regard as basic. In the case of induction (including induction by falsification) this means demonstrating how well the counterinductive procedure can be supported by argument. Always remember that the demonstration and the rhetorics used do not express any "deep conviction" of mine. They merely show how easy it is to lead people by the nose in a rational way. An anarchist is like an undercover agent who plays the game of Reason in order to undercut the authority of Reason (Truth, Honesty, justice, and so on).[117]

Neither history of science does keep a neat continuity nor the rejected or forgotten theories are dead forever. Criticism from the past has its influence in science. To show this Feyerabend tells us the example of Pythagorean view. After Aristotle and Ptolemy, the Pythagorean idea that earth moves (at that time an entirely ridiculous idea) was thrown on the rubbish heap, only to be revived by Copernicus. Feyerabend says Hermetic writings played a great role in this revival, which is yet to be understood sufficiently.

The materials that a scientist has at his disposal are his laws, mathematical techniques, epistemological prejudices, and theories. These are indeterminate in many ways, ambiguous and never fully separate from his historical background. As a result the observation language will be tied up to older speculations and thereby methodology will not be free from old hangovers. Subjective component too merges with the rest. Due to this a theory may find itself inconsistent with evidence. Not because it is incorrect, but because the accepted evidence is contaminated.

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[117] Ibid. pp. 32-33.

The materials that a scientist has at his disposal are of the historico-psychological character. It is both a mixture of objective descriptions of state of affairs but also a heap of subjective and mythical expressions of forgotten state of affairs. As this is the case, it is better one takes a fresh look at methodology. It shows that it would be extremely imprudent to let the evidence judge our theories directly and without any further ado. A straightforward and unqualified judgment of theories by 'facts' is bound to eliminate ideas.

Feyerabend makes a case study upon how Galileo won the audience to Copernicus' side against Aristotelians. Aristotelians used Tower Argument to disprove Copernicus' argument that the earth is moving. Copernicus' could not present his theory in such a way as to out beat Tower Argument because, according to Feyerabend, Tower Argument was rationally richer than that of Copernicus' argument. And then it was Galileo who won the argument for Copernicus by employing all kinds of creative ideas and propaganda.

Tower Argument

As a concrete illustration, Feyerabend briefly describes the manner in which Galileo 'defused' an important counter-argument against the idea of the motion of earth. He uses the word 'defused' instead of 'refuted' because it was a case of changing conceptual system as well as with certain attempts at concealment.

Heavy bodies, falling down from high, go by a straight and a vertical line to the surface of the earth. This was considered an irrefutable argument for the motionlessness of the earth. If the earth were moving, a stone falling from a tower should have grounded kilometers away from the tower. That is, the earth might have moved a lot by its diurnal rotation during the time gap

between the fall and the reach of the stone on the earth. In the tower experiment the stone grounded at the base of the tower, and this had been taken as proof for the motionlessness of the earth. In his own words:

> According to the argument which convinced Tycho, and which is used against the motion of the earth in Galileo's own *Trattato della sfera,* observation shows that 'heavy bodies...falling down from high, go by a straight and a vertical line to the surface of the earth. This is considered an irrefutable argument for the earth being motionless. For, it made the diurnal rotation, a tower from whose top a rock was let fall, being carried by the whirling of the earth, would travel hundreds of yards to the east in the time the rock would consume in its fall, and the rock ought to strike the earth that distance away from the base of the tower.[118]

Feyerabend says (drawing from what Galileo said) the tower argument is a product of 17th century everyday thought. They understood 'motion' in its 'operative' sense, or they assumed naïve realism with respect to motion. They were not aware that apparent motion and real motion are not always identified. From the point of view of 17th century thought and language, this argument was impeccable and forceful. Feyerabend cites this as an example of how theories which are not explicitly formulated, enter the debate in the guise of observational terms.

But it is not possible to unravel the prejudices embedded in the observational terms by a natural interpretation because concepts, just like percepts, are influenced by its background realities, and also because the content of a concepts is closely tied up to perception.

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[118] Ibid. pp. 70-71. Feyerabend quotes Galileo from his 'Dialogues'.

Galileo presents the distinction between non-operative and operative motion in a very persuasive language. Feyerabend says it is purely Galileo's creative invention that saved Copernicus's revolution. In his *Dialogue*, Galileo cites two examples; one is that of a man traveling in a boat in which the traveler need not adjust his eyes to look at the sail yard while the boat in which he sits is moving. What one witness in the case is the non-operative motion. In the second example, a man is trying to hunt a deer. The hunter is not moving much relatively to the running deer, that why the motion is felt here.

When he takes aim of his arrow to his target-deer, he has to adjust his aim by moving as the deer is running away. In this case, the hunter is feeling motion. Here the motion is operative.

The notion of motion at work in tower argument is the non-operative motion. That is why the motion of the stone is never felt.

The other paradigm is of the motion of compact objects. To illustrate this Galileo gives the example of a hunter aiming his arrow towards a running deer. Here the motion is operative. Here Galileo's presentation made it easy to accept that relative motion is applicable not only to boasts, birds, but to the 'solid and well-established earth' as a whole. One will have the impression that this readiness was there in his or her mind, and that it needed only to wake one up to it. Feyerabend says that this impression is erroneous and it is the result of Galileo's 'propagandistic machinations, and that it can be better described as a change of our conceptual system or change of experience that allows us to accommodate the Copernicus doctrine.

> It is this change which underlies the transition from the Aristotelian point of view to the epistemology of modern science.[119]

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[119] Ibid. p. 89.

This is how Feyerabend explains viewing natural phenomena in a new way leads to a re-evaluation of all experience.

One can now think that it leads to the invention of a new kind of experience. And this new experience is more sophisticated and more speculative than is the experience of Aristotle or common sense. Feyerabend says:

> Speaking paradoxically but not incorrectly, one may say that *Galileo invents an experience that has metaphysical ingredients*. It is by means of such an experience that the transition from a geostatic cosmology to the point of view of Copernicus and Kepler is achieved.[120]

Feyerabend is of the opinion that new ideas must go beyond the available evidence in order to be of value. As opposed to this, he says, Karl Popper holds that good scientists refuse to employ *ad hoc* hypotheses and are rightly to do so, and also that new theories must have excess content but should not be infected by *ad hoc* adaptations. However, Feyerabend lends unambiguous support to Lakatos' position that new theories are, and cannot be anything but, *ad hoc*, and that excess content should be created in a piecemeal fashion, by gradually extending them to facts and domains. Feyerabend claims that Galileo had used *ad hoc* hypotheses.

One may be tempted to believe that the transition from pre-Copernican Cosmology to that of 17th century was a neat one or in other words, the theories supporting the former had many lacunas and were refuted and replaced by better ones. But, Feyerabend says this was not so. He says that the latter Cosmology had enough problems and was really not able to overcome them, but survived all attacks by means of trickery and propaganda.

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[120] Ibid. p. 92.

Feyerabend wants to point out the prejudices involved in the extremely common assumptions of some thinkers who argue for the necessity of maintaining a strict law and order in scientific practice. These common assumptions include beliefs such as the elements of our knowledge – the theories, the observations, and the principles of arguments – are timeless entities and are related to each other in a way that is independent of the events that produce them. It is the voice of these assumptions that is heard in expressions like 'science deals with propositions, not with statements or sentences', and 'the context of justification and of discovery is different'.

However, the procedure overlooks that science is a complex and heterogeneous *historical process* which contains vague and incoherent anticipations of future ideologies side by side with highly sophisticated theoretical systems and ancient and petrified forms of thought.[121]

Reason grants that the ideas may rise in very disorderly way and the origin of point of view may depend up on class, gender, passion, personal idiosyncrasies etc., but it also demands that while judging these ideas, certain well-defined rules are to be followed. Feyerabend quarrels with this position by saying that the historical examples show the contrary. He says there are situations in which most liberal theories and rules eliminate an idea, and later the same idea is recognized as the efficient and quite fitting to the new requirements. And the survived idea will be treated as quite in tune with reason. But the historical examples show that they survived because prejudice, passion, conceit, errors, sheer pigheadedness and co. opposed the dictates of reason. That is, Copernicanism and other 'rational' views exist today only because reason was overruled at some time in their past. The same is true about magic and witchcraft; they have been overruled at some point of

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[121] Ibid. p.146.

time by reason. These periods had no neat methodology as we have today, and so they did not know which directions to go and this worked well, therefore, Feyerabend suggests that it is advisable to let one's inclination go against reason in any circumstances, so that science may profit from it.

According to Feyerabend, Popperian doctrine starts with a problem. A problem is the result of a conflict between an expectation and observation. Having formulated a problem, one tries to solve it. Solving a problem means inventing a relevant falsifiable theory. Next comes the criticism of the theory that has been selected to solve the problem. Successful criticism of the theory removes that theory once and for all and this becomes a new problem, viz., to explain

1. Why was this theory so far successful? And
2. And why it failed? For this, it needs a new theory, which must be able to reproduce the earlier theories' successes, but should not repeat the same mistakes, and also should be able to make new predictions so far not made before.

Adapting these, one proceeds by conjectures and refutations from less general theories to more general theories, expanding the content of knowledge.

Feyerabend is a proponent of anarchism in science and just for that he is dead against law and order in science. He is extravagant while speaking against critical rationalism. He asks two questions. First, is it desirable to live in accordance with the rules of critical rationalism? Second, is it possible to have both the science of today and these rules? Feyerabend answers with a firm and resounding No. According to him, development of an institution or an idea or a practice would not start from a problem but from an irrelevant activity such as playing. In the same vein, Lakatos was saying, strict falsification would have eliminated science itself. Increased content too is a

false note. Usually the overthrown theory would be rich in content compared to replaced theory, which would initially have only a narrow domain of facts though it may be enjoying paradigmatic support. Feyerabend sums up his criticism of critical rationalism thus:

> To sum up: wherever we look, whatever examples we consider, we see that the principles of critical rationalism (take falsifications seriously; increase content; avoid *ad hoc* hypotheses; 'be honest' – whatever *that* means; and so on) and, *a fortiori*, the principles of logical empiricism (be precise; base your theories on measurements; avoid vague and unstable ideas; and so on) give an inadequate account of the past development of science and are liable to hinder science in the future. They give an inadequate account of science because science is much more 'sloppy' and 'irrational' than its methodological image. And, they are liable to hinder it, because the attempt to make science more 'rational' and more precise is bound to wipe it out, as we have seen. The difference between science and methodology, which is such an obvious fact of history, therefore, indicates a weakness of the latter, and perhaps of the 'laws of reason' as well. For what appears as 'sloppiness', 'chaos', or 'opportunism' when compared with such laws has a most important function in the development of those very theories which we today regard as essential parts of our knowledge of nature. *These 'deviations', these 'errors', are preconditions of progress.*[122]

[122] ibid. p.179.

In one of his works, Lakatos shares similar views with Feyerabend. Feyerabend had close communication with Lakatos, and they had joint programs too. Lakatos is one of the few thinkers who noticed the tremendous gulf that existed between various images of science and the real science.

Imre Lakatos examines some of the instances of falsification that happened in history of science, and then finds out that some of the most celebrated falsification happened are plainly irrational. And if at all rational, they rest on rationality principles different from those which has been discussed so far.[123]

Feyerabend call himself an anarchist. His approach towards knowledge is that of an epistemological Anarchist. He distinguishes this from skepticism and political anarchism. According to him the skeptic regards every view as equally good, or equally bad but never makes any judgment, while an epistemological anarchist has no compunction to defend the tritest, or the most outrageous statements. A political anarchist may try to remove a certain form of life, while the epistemological anarchist may defend all forms of life. An epistemological anarchist has neither long-standing loyalty nor all time aversion. Like the Dadaist, he has no programmes, and he is against all programmes, but sometimes he may defend very strongly a status quo. For to be a true Dadaist, one must also be an ant-Dadaist, says Feyerabend. It is in this sense Feyerabend declares 'anything goes'. However, it seems that Feyerabend is aware of the side effects of the implication of 'anything goes'. He shares his anxiety with Lakatos:

> Lakatos is concerned about intellectual pollution. I share his concern. Illiterate and incompetent books flood the market, empty verbiage full of strange and esoteric terms claims to

[123] Lakatos, Imre. "Falsification and the Methodology of Research Programmes". Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge. Cambridge. 1970.

> express profound insights, 'experts' without brains, without character, and without even a modicum of intellectual, stylistic, emotional temperament tell us about our 'condition' and the means of improving it, and they do not only preach to *us* who might be able to look through them, they are let loose on our children and permitted to drag them down into their own intellectual squalor.[124]

Feyerabend is conscious of this grave situation. But at the same time he wonders what methodology can do about it.

Critical Comments Against Feyerabend

Feyerabend's relativism has attracted criticism from many quarters. Some critics have claimed that Feyerabend turns Galileo into an "unrepentant" supporter of Feyerabend's claims on methodology. He is also accused for interpreting the events in history of science in such a manner that those events suit well to his views on scientific practice.

Feyerabend, Kuhn, and Lakatos have pointed out the inadequacies of methodologies to capture the rationality of successful science. They turn to history to show that eminent scientist like Galileo's, Newton's, and Einstein's procedures did not conform to the so-called methodologies. In opposition to this, Larry Laudan argues first of all that historical facts need not be considered as criteria for methodologies and there is no necessity it to be seen as a meta-methodology. He goes on to say that in different epochs the aims of science may change. It is agent-specific as well as context-specific. And it is a necessary condition of rationality that an agent should believe his method that promotes his aim. According to Laudan, we must consider: what actions were taken; what the agent's ends or aims were; the background beliefs which

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[124] Ibid. p.217.

informed the agent's judgments about the consequences of his or her possible actions. The background beliefs of the past scientists are different from ours, and their beliefs were set for the requirements of their aims in science. So, Laudan comments, it is foolish to apply our methodology, which has been set for our aims in science, to understand the activities of the past scientists. Though their cognitive aims were the same as ours, their utility and background beliefs were obviously different. For example, Newton had considered that one of the aims of natural sciences was to show the hand of God in aspects of creation. Laudan cautions us that the judgments about the rationality or irrationality of Newton's theory choices have to be made in the light of Newton's cognitive values and against the background of Newton's prior beliefs. Ignore those ingredients; one is no longer in a position even to address – let alone to settle – the question of Newton's rationality.

Thus, Laudan concludes that the rationality is one thing and the methodology is quite another thing, and that the historicists have fused these into one.

Larry Laudan has said that specific rationality is time-dependent[125] This argument implies that what is viewed as legitimate and reasonably by one epoch or one intellectual tradition could be viewed as illegitimate and not reasonable by another epoch or another intellectual tradition. To give an example, the inequality that was justified in Sparta is viewed as illegitimate by the present society.

Paul Feyerabend adopted a more radical and provocative position than Kuhn, welcoming the relativist conclusions Kuhn was reluctant to embrace fully and questioning whether even logical and mathematical norms need be

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[125] Laudan, Larry. Progress and its Problems, Towards a Theory of Scientific Growth. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1977. p.187.

adhered to. Feyerabend emphasized strongly the alleged incommensurability between radically different scientific theories such as Newton's and Einstein's. His main argument for incommensurability depended on a holist theory of meaning. This was a reaction to the highly atomistic theories of the positivists and operationalists. Keen to tie science to experience, in order to differentiate it from what they saw as metaphysical mumbo-jumbo, some of them hoped to show that theoretical concepts such as 'electron' had a meaning which could be cashed out wholly in observational terms, specifically in terms of what one would observe, e.g. hands on galvanometer readings moving, if one performed certain tests (also supposed to be describable in purely observational terms). This view was quickly seen to be hopeless, and it became clear that highly theoretical terms get at least part of their meaning from their interrelations with other theoretical terms, as specified in the axioms of the theory, e.g. 'electron' gets its meaning partly in terms of how the term is correlated with 'proton' and with 'charge' in the theory.

But it doesn't follow from this that a change of meaning or addition of one new term changes all the meanings of the theory. Donald Davidson suggests extreme holism in the following passage (though it is probably not his considered view):

> If sentences depend for their meaning on their structure, and we understand the meaning of each item in the structure only as an abstraction from the totality in which it features, then we can give the meaning of any sentence (or word) only by giving the meaning of every sentence (and word) in the language.[126]

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[126] Davidson, Donald. Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1984. p. 22.

It is in this way Davidson suggests a remedial solution to Feyerabend in order to get rid of his thesis of incommensurability. So Feyerabend's radical conclusions are not supported by argument. However, at least he tries to support his conclusions by reasoning which strives to conform to the standards of argument and logic accepted by scientists and mathematicians. He tries to do that even when arguing that logic and mathematics are not absolute, even when trying to destroy the citadel of logical/mathematical rationality from within. If he didn't do that, if he merely ranted against logic, truth, objectivity, if he stuck wholly to scare-quoting or italicizing the notions without giving any reason acceptable to those who employ the notion why they ought not to, then he would not be worth paying attention to. He belongs, though, to a long 'Trojan Horse' tradition in Western philosophy that attempts to undermine its key notions from within by employing those notions against themselves.

MORAL THEORIES AND RELATIVISM

Mukudnaunni. A. P. “Philosophy and relativism: A study of the relativist positions in theories of knowledge, meaning and morality” Thesis. Department of Philosophy , University of Calicut, 2006

CHAPTER 6

MORAL THEORIES AND RELATIVISM

Moral Relativism

The term 'moral relativism' is understood in a variety of ways. Most often it is associated with an empirical thesis that there are deep and widespread moral disagreements and a metaethical thesis that the truth or justification of moral judgments is not absolute, but relative to some group of persons. Sometimes 'moral relativism' is connected with a normative position about how we ought to think about or act towards those with whom we morally disagree.

From the beginnings of the Western tradition philosophers have debated the nature and implications of moral diversity. Differences in customs and values the Greeks encountered through trade, travel and war motivated the argument attributed to the sophist Protagoras in Platos Theaetetus: that human custom determines what is fine and ugly, just and unjust.[127]

Anthropologists in the twentieth century, such as Ruth Benedict (1934), have emphasized the fundamental differences between the moralities of small-scale traditional societies and the modern West. For example, many traditional societies are focused on community-centred values that require the promotion and sustenance of a common life of relationships, in contrast to both the deontological morality of individual rights and the morality of utilitarianism that are the most prominent within modern Western moral

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[127] Wong, David. B. "Moral Relativism". Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Online. Internet. September 24 2006.

philosophy. Within this philosophy itself moral diversity is represented by the debates between utilitarians and deontologists, and more recently criticism of both camps by defenders of virtue theory and communitarianism.[128]

Such differences have motivated the doctrine of descriptive relativism: that there exists extensive diversity of moral judgment across time, societies and individuals. The descriptive relativist might go so far as to assert that no significant similarities exist between social groups and traditions.

The most heated debate about relativism revolves around the question of whether descriptive relativism supports meta-ethical relativism. That is, the claim that there is no single or most justified morality. Critics of meta-ethical relativism point out that moral disagreement is consistent with the possibility that some moral judgments are truer or more justified than others, just as disagreement among scientists does not imply that truth is relative in science. However, moral relativists are not impressed by this analogy. They may need to found moral relativism on epistemic relativism to build a better defense of moral relativism.

There are radical and moderate versions of meta-ethical relativism. Radical relativists hold that any morality is as true or as justified as any other. Moderate relativists deny that there is any single true morality but also hold hat some moralities are truer or more justified than others. On Wong's view, for instance, certain determinate features of human nature and similarities in the circumstances and requirements of social cooperation combine to produce universal constraints on what an adequate morality must be like.

Normative relativism holds that it is morally wrong to pass judgment on or to interfere with the moral practices of others who have adopted moralities different from one's own. This is often defended by

[128] Ibid.

anthropologists, perhaps in reaction to those western conceptions of the inferiority of other cultures that played a role in colonialism.[129]

Morality

Once morality had its base in religion. Many firmly believed that without God human beings would do whatever they want and would result in utter chaos. However, Kant was able to establish his notion of morality independent of god. His notion of morality is related to his notion of knowledge. According to him, knowledge is possible because of the faculties in-built in creatures that experience through the categories of space and time. For him, morality goes along with freedom. Man is a rational being. So he or she can know what is right by making use of his or her own reason, and therefore morality comes from within. Everyone is endowed with reason and so everyone has the right to be an independent agent. From this comes the implication that everyone is an end in-itself, no one is an instrument of the other. This is one of the peculiarities of his notion of morality. Secondly morality is like duty. One has to do one's duty without thinking about the consequence of it. A principle in order to be moral has to be universalizable. Then only the other can be protected from exploitation as a means to an end.

One can raise the question how Kant can say that the other should not be treated as a means to an end without thinking about the consequence of moral action. Kant came up with his theory from his presupposition that human beings are basically rational.

Bentham and Mill too based their notion of morality on human nature but they did not believe that human being is a rational animal. For them, rationality is the servant of passion or desire. From this supposition they inferred that human beings would only try to maximize their pleasure and

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[129] ibid.

avoid pain, and they use reason only to achieve this. Hence their notion of morality is bound up with the consequence of an act.

Utilitarianism has given a mundane ground to morality. For, moral action is something that increases happiness of all. The question why one should be moral has been answered by utilitarianism because the answer is maximum happiness for all. However the question has not be answered forever because the question is coming back with modification. It reappears in the form 'why should I bother about the happiness of all?' A tentative answer to this question could be, 'because there are circumstances in which one's happiness depends upon other's sufferings.'

Existentialist claims of morality do not go along with both the Kantian and the utilitarian account of morality because, according to existentialists, reason cannot provide moral guidelines. For, there is nothing either within or outside which can give grounds to moral laws. According to existentialists, human beings do what they do out of their free choice. Thus the responsibility for an action is to be borne by the individual because he or she did it out of free choice.

After Virtue

In 'After Virtue', Alasdair MacIntyre presents a thought experiment. An imaginary world in which happens a cultural calamity, and thus all the achievement are destroyed. Utter chaos follows. Consequently books are charred and laboratories are destroyed. However, some people try to revive the destroyed science and culture. They gather up remnants. Reads bits of papers saved. Children learn formulas bye heart out of context. To a certain they succeed to revive the lost science, but in a totally disarrayed manner. They begin to use words like 'neutrino', 'atomic weight', 'mass', 'specific gravity', etc., but not the way science has used them. If analytic philosophy

was to flourish there, MacIntyre says, it will not reveal the fact of this disorder because analytic philosophy will only describe. Analytic philosophy would only elucidate the conceptual structures of the imaginary world as it had done in normal cases. Neither phenomenology nor existentialism could find anything wrong with these false simulacra of natural science.[130]

Why MacIntyre constructs this imaginary world? It is to show that in the actual world, which everyone inhabits, the language of morality is in the same state of disorder as in the imaginary world he described. And to point out that philosophical analysis, the dominant philosophies like analytic philosophy and phenomenology will not help to detect the disorders of moral thought and practice.

Contemporary Moral Utterance

About the contemporary moral utterance MacIntyre says it is expressing more on the side of disagreement and which is interminable in its character. He thinks there seem to be no rational way of settling it in today's cultural scenario. This is because these debates are conceptually incommensurable. That is to say:

> ... The rival premises are such that we possess no rational way of weighing the claims of one as against another[131].

The nature of contemporary moral debates, according to MacIntyre, is like pure assertion and counter-assertion because no one possesses unassailable criteria or compelling reason to convince one another. Moral positions in contemporary moral debate have their roots in history. But they are now functioning with the absence of their original contexts. Over

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[130] MacIntyre, Alasdair. After Virtue. 2nd Ed. London: Duckworth. 1985. pp. 1-2.

[131] Ibid. p.8.

centuries the meaning of the evaluative terms too has changed. MacIntyre asks how the history of such changes ought to be written. He supposes that the language of morality has passed from a state of order to a state of disorder. Contemporary morality treats morality sometimes as the exercise of rational power, sometimes as mere expressive assertion. This inconsistency is the symptom of disorder, says MacIntyre. Another thing contemporary moral arguments do is to treat Plato, Hume, Mill, etc contemporary to the moral philosophers of today, also contemporary to each other. Doing so is to abstract those writers from their culture and social milieu in which they lived and thought.

Emotivism is a relativist position in ethics. According to this doctrine, all evaluative judgments are expressions of attitude or feeling. Emotivism differentiates between fact and morality. Facts are either true or false, and therefore agreement can be secured by rational method, whereas moral judgment being expression of feeling, rationality has no role to play. Hence the inevitable conclusion is that moral disagreement is rationally interminable. However, according to MacIntyre, emotivism as a theory fails for three reasons. The first is that emotivism does not identify which feeling or attitude is being expressed through moral judgment. For the question what kind of feeling, emotivists will answer that it is the expression of approval, for example, 'this is good'. But they remain silent if asked what kind of approval. The second reason why emotivism fails is that emotivists try to equate preference and evaluative judgment. Preference is personal, whereas evaluative expression not. Personal preference, for its reason-giving force, depends upon who utters the judgment and to whom it is addressed. The other, the evaluative expression does not depend on the context of utterance for its reason-giving force.

Emotive theory is purported to be a theory of meaning. But MacIntyre points out that expression of feeling or attitude is not characteristically a function of meaning. Rather it is of use in certain occasions. To show this he quotes an example that Gilbert Ryle had use in which a school master shout to a student as the expression of his angry feeling on the student's mistake in arithmetic, 'seven times seven equals forty-nine'. Here the meaning of the sentence and its use are entirely different. The meaning and its use might be odd with each other in many cases. Thus one may not understand what someone expresses while that person vents out a feeling. In certain cases meaning may conceal its use. Suppose someone appeals to independent impersonal criteria when invoking a judgment, one cannot say, perhaps, that person might be using his expression in a manipulative way. Due to these failings MacIntyre suggests to disregard emotive theory's claim to universal validity. But he is interested in its historical evolution.

The interests of a group might have influenced the success of a moral theory and the rejection of some other. That is what MacIntyre finds out in his historical investigations on the success of intuitionism. G E Moore's *Principia Ethica* was greeted with a great enthusiasm by the intellectuals of that time. MacIntyre calls this silliness because he says the central positions of Moore's moral theory are impoverished. Moore defines 'good' as an indefinable simple intuitive property, and that it has nothing to do with 'pleasant' as well as with the claim that 'good' is conducive to evolutionary survival. MacIntyre says Moore seems to have relied on a bad dictionary for definition, and that this position is defective. For Moore, 'right' is something that is the best alternative action, which brings the most good. MacIntyre treats this as utilitarian position. Towards the end of book, MacIntyre says, Moore claims the aim of life is aesthetic enjoyment. Why this theory gained success, according to MacIntyre is that acceptance of that theory can serve to

reject nineteenth century moral theories, and the rejection of them was the interest of a group of intellectuals of Moore's time. MacIntyre considers emotivism as the successor theory of Moore's intuitionism.

What emotivism asserts is that there can be no valid rational justification for the existence of an objective moral standard. This claim rests upon the claim that neither in the past nor in the present the attempt to give a rational justification for objective morality became a success. MacIntyre says Stevenson had sensed that saying 'I disapprove of this' enjoyed less prestige than saying 'that is bad', but missed to notice that 'that is bad' enjoys better prestige because it appeals to an objective and impersonal standard. Analytical philosophers rejected emotivism as it failed as a theory of meaning of moral expressions. This is because the central concern of analytical philosophers is that of deciphering key expressions in both everyday and scientific language. Yet emotivism did not die yet. Emotivist arguments still come out through many thinkers in spite of their not subscribing to emotivism. That shows the cultural power of emotivism.

MacIntyre shows the difference between what emotivists claim and what he tradition makes:

> What emotivism however did fail to reckon with is the difference that it would make to morality if emotivism is not only true but also widely believed to be true. Stevenson, for example, understood very clearly that saying 'I disapprove of this; do so as well!' does not have the same force as saying 'This is bad!' He noted that a kind of prestige attached to the latter, which does not attach to the former.[132]

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[132] ibid. p. 19.

The resistance within analytical philosophers against emotivism was in the form of an argument according to which an agent can only justify his moral position by invoking a universal rule which is derived from a more general principle, and that again is logically derived from another principle. This process goes through a chain of reason until no reason can be given. Therefore the terminus of justification is unguided by criteria. That means emotivism is not left far behind. Frederich Nietzsche and Jean Paul Sartre had criticized conventional morality. Sartre held that recognition one's own choices is the sole source of moral judgment. Nietzsche considered the claim for objective moral judgment as the mask of weak people to assert themselves. Both of these views share the substance emotivism. Like this emotivism reappears in different philosophical guises, that is why MacIntyre wanted a confrontation with emotivism in developing his thesis. According to him this is the era of emotivist culture, and a variety of concepts and modes of behavior of this time presuppose the truth of emotivism.[133]

Sociological Implications of Morality

According to MacIntyre, morality implies social embodiments in most of the moral theories including emotivism. Even Kant who restricted such phenomena to noumenal has expressed in his thoughts about law, history and politics, though Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Adam Smith, the avowed emotivists, and the narrow conception of morality of Moore did not acknowledge this. Arguing that there is a social content to morality as moral philosophy presupposes sociology, MacIntyre confronts emotivism and asks what the social content of emotivism is. Emotivism makes the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations.

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[133] Ibid. p. 22.

Characters which model social roles are the embodiment of moral values, says MacIntyre. Saying this is not saying that a culture would unanimously embrace that moral value, but at least it would give the focal point with reference to which disagreement can evolve. It is like this: persistent attack against bureaucracy reinforce the idea that it is by reference to the relationship with bureaucracy that self in that society has to define itself. Self acquires its definition through social conflicts. That does not mean that self is just inherited social roles. It means that apart from social role self has a long and complex history. The current end point of that history is the contemporary emotivist self.[134]

MacIntyre takes Jean Paul Sartre's and Irving Goffman's conceptions of self as examples of emotivist self, and he calls such a self as democratized self. Sartre's self is nothing in itself, which is posed against the social world. The role self plays in social world is accidental. By contrast Goffman's conception of self is just the opposite. For him self is a 'peg' on which roles are hung, and as such self is empty, only roles are there. These conflicting conceptions have, but, one thing in common. That self has no content. Hence the self thus conceived lacks any criteria. Even if emotivists profess value, principle, etc., they are just expressions of attitude. As this is the case, no rational history is possible for the emotivist self. It may have continuity, but only as the body which is the bearer of the self, and also memory. Thus this self acquires an abstract and a ghostly character as it loses the social embodiment. MacIntyre sees this as a loss in degrees when compares the emotivist self with its historical predecessors. This is because self is now thought of lacking any social identity, whereas its historical predecessors enjoyed social identity, and this has been stripped away in the new self.

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[134] Ibid. p.131.

Describing the characteristics of the pre-modern self, MacIntyre says:

> In many pre-modern traditional societies it is through his or her membership in a variety of social groups that the individual identities himself or herself and is identified by others. I am brother, cousin and grandson, member of this household, that village, this tribe[135].

This is how individuals inherit a self in pre-modern world. A self is someone in a set of interlocking social relationship; occupying a space there the individual becomes part of a group's activities. The meaning of that self is achieving the common goal of the group. It is a journey to be fulfilled by death. MacIntyre cites here a Greek proverb: 'call no man happy until he is dead'[136] Modern self is stripped off this character, but it is never regarded as a loss, instead is celebrated as freedom, a self-congratulating gain, from the social bondages of hierarchies and the superstition of teleology.

However, emotivism is not devoid of character. It is at home in a society where bureaucracy and individualism are both partners and antagonists. Only two opportunities are open there: either the sovereignty of free individual liberty or control of individual liberty by bureaucracy for better organizational results.

MacIntyre says today's morality, the modern morality, is the end product of a historical transformation. Today's morality has two mail features: multifariousness and incommensurability. It is prone to end in a shrill tone, and there is a rush for closing the debate. One may argue that these features MacIntyre points out are inevitable part of any moral judgment.

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[135] ibid. p. 33.

[136] Ibid. p. 34.

But MacIntyre is aware of this question, and he is prepared to meet this question.

The Meaning Of 'Morality'

Both in Latin and in Greek there was no equivalent word for 'moral' until it is translated back into Latin. 'Moral' is the etymological descendent of 'moralis'. 'Moralis' means 'pertaining to character'. Here character means one's disposition to behave in a particular way or to lead a particular kind of life.

The early use of 'moral' in English stood for the lesson a passage in literature teaches. It meant simply 'practical'. Only in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it started to take its modern meaning. In seventeenth century, for the first time, 'moral' was used in the most restricted sense, as something to do primarily with sexual behavior. For example, 'immoral' could be equated with 'being sexually lax'. By late seventeenth century 'moral' began to gain a sphere distinguishing it from theological, legal and aesthetic.[137]

Not only the history of 'moral' but also the history of attempts of justification is central to MacIntyre's thesis. He begins this venture by recounting backward from Kierkegaard onwards. According to MacIntyre, there are incoherencies in kierkegaard's writings. Ethical and aesthetic are two incommensurable options in his options of life. What rests on individuals is to exercise his or her radical choice between them. Kierkegaard thinks one has to chose ethical life, but there is not enough reason to do so. When reason fails, the opened for all option is to accept authority, in his case the authority of religion. For MacIntyre, to accept authority without the backing of reason is arbitrative, hence irrational. MacIntyre says authority is not always

[137] Ibid. pp-38-39.

arbitrary, and it is in Kierkegaard's writings the links between reason and authority are broken. Another incoherency of Kierkegaard is that he combines novel with the traditional. Kierkegaard is conservatively accepting the inherited life as 'the moral'. MacIntyre says contemporary morality does not see moral as 'the moral', instead aware of rival moral alternatives. The root of Kierkegaard's incoherencies is in Immanuel Kant, says MacIntyre.[138] Kant's moral philosophy has two deceptive theses. One that if the rules of morality are rational, then they must be the same for all rational beings, and the second is that if the rules binding on all rational being, then the inability to put into practice is unimportant. Only the will is needed. Kant has never tried to vindicate his maxims rationally. He had no doubt about rational strength of those inherited maxims. So the content of Kant's moral philosophy remained conservative. The same happened in Kierkegaard whose ideas are mostly from Kant. Yet when Kierkegaard sees the basis of the ethical in choice, Kant sees it in reason.

Kant's universalizable maxims are easily manipulated for trivial and non-moral maxims. According to Kant's rule, to kill oneself as pain outweighs happiness is inconsistent because such willing contradicts the impulse to live planted in all human beings. One can manipulate this same reasoning if applied to the maxim: to cut one's hair is inconsistent with the natural willing of the air to grow. However, such mistakes are not important because, MacIntyre says, Kant has a basic formulation, 'Always act so as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of others, as an end, and not as a means.'[139]

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[138] Ibid. p. 41.

[139] Ibid. p. 46.

Though Kant's formulation has moral content, it is inconsistent because it is not impossible to live by the maxim 'let everyone be except me as means'. Failures of Kant and Kierkegaard are closely related. Kierkegaard attempted to vindicate morality with his notion of choice. It was a historical response to Kant's failure to vindicate morality with the notion of reason, and which in turn was a historical response to David Hume's appeal to desire and to the passions. All these philosophers agree about the content of morality and the need to give a justification. However, MacIntyre says, it is bound to fail as there is an ineradicable discrepancy between their views which comes forth from different routes of history. What these philosophers inherited is fragments of a well-structured conception morality. Aristotelian ethics is three fold. It believes the given human nature is untutored, and it has a potentiality to act towards its telos. The passage from the first stage to the latter is guided by rationally based precepts. Modern moral philosophy has inherited only fragments of this three-fold structure of morality. The point missing is telos. In his second book of the second *Critique* Kant is presupposing a teleological framework, says MacIntyre. Without telos morality is impossible or at least detaching morality from teleological framework one will transform the character of morality radically.[140]

In Aristotle one can see the functional concept of man. It was to 'harp' and 'a playing harp' that Aristotle compared man and his functions, says MacIntyre. MacIntyre juxtaposes Aristotle's functional definition with modern moral philosophy, and shows what the latter has lost. The argument that no evaluative judgments can be drawn from factual statements is treated as an all time truth by its proponents. But MacIntyre says they have to preclude functional concepts from morality to do so. It is lack of historical consciousness that makes them to say so. MacIntyre gives some examples of

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[140] Ibid. p. 56.

drawing valid evaluative judgments from factual statements. One among them is: A watch shows wrong time, and it is too heavy to carry it along. One can draw validly an evaluative conclusion from this factual statement that this is a bad watch because functional concept of 'watch' entails showing right time and also light enough to wear on the wrist. Eighteenth century project had attempts of giving justification to morality trying to understand inherited moral theories within its context, even if with a lot of incoherencies. But modern moral philosophy appears to have several all connection with traditions. According to MacIntyre, one can see a final break in modern moral philosophy with moral traditions.

In Aristotelian tradition calling some act just or right is making a factual statement too because a good man at such a situation would act the same way. This is possible because essential character of man is presupposed here. Once the notion of essential human purposes disappears, it would be impossible to judge moral judgment as factual judgments. However, what is loss to MacIntyre is gain to emotivists. They consider this loss as liberation of the self from the bondages of beliefs and teleology.

MacIntyre sees the problems of modern moral theory as the outcome of the failure of enlightenment project. Invention of 'individual', as a moral agent by the modernity created a situation where the inherited aspects of morality had to be accounted without appealing either to divine law or to teleology. Two ways were opened. One was utilitarianism and the other was the extension of Kantian practical reason. For utilitarianism good is something that increases pleasure and happiness in most quality and quantity to maximum people with least pain. Yet there are no criteria to decide what is actually pleasure giving because pleasures are largely incommensurable. The polymorphous character of pleasure and happiness renders them useless utilitarianism. Hence the notion of the greatest happiness to the greatest

number is an empty notion. MacIntyre says, "It is indeed a pseudo-concept available for a variety of ideological uses, but no more than that"[141] Later Sidgwick, says MacIntyre, recognized that moral injunctions of utilitarianism couldn't be derived from psychological foundations, and he confessed that where looked for cosmos he saw only chaos. What Sidgwick considered as failure Moore interpreted as liberating and enlightening, and which did the spadework for emotivism to gain a cogent appeal. The history of utilitarianism, says MacIntyre, thus links eighteenth century project to give justification to morality to the twentieth century's decline into emotivism.

Contemporary moral experience, according to MacIntyre, has a paradoxical character. Each has learned to believe that each one is autonomous moral agent, but in actual experience each one is engaged social practices pervaded by manipulative social relationship, for example: bureaucratic relations. Following Kant's views, the notion of right has been put forward just utilitarianism put forward the notion of utility. Both these notions are purported to give an objective and impersonal criterion to moral values. But actually, says MacIntyre, they do not give this. Just because of this there would be a gap between the meaning of these notions and the effect when they are put into practice. This, according to MacIntyre, is how the phenomenon of incommensurable premises in modern moral debates arises. Claims invoking utility, and claims invoking right, and also claims invoking traditional moral values participate in contemporary moral debate. It is no wonder that no decision between each other is impossible. Moral incommensurability is the product of this historical conjunction.

Understanding contemporary situation as this kind of a historical conjunction may provide insights to understand the politics of modern

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[141] Ibid. p. 64.

societies. Politics in this society would constitute the parallel march of debates based right and utility giving voice to individualism and bureaucracy respectively. This debate will have a semblance of rationality, but a mock rationality, and this mock rationality of debate will conceal the will and power at work in attempts of resolution. This is why *protest* becomes the major moral feature and *indignation* becomes the predominant emotion of modern society. But, according to MacIntyre, as protest is based on the notion of right, it is incommensurable with the arguments based on the notion of utility, which is the concern of bureaucratic organizations. That is why protest arises like self-assertive shrills. Hence protests cannot be rationally effective.

For MacIntyre, the current problems of moral debates are the out come of the failure of the enlightenment project. According to him, true reasoning requires intellectual and moral virtues, hence his scheme centers on unifying moral conviction and rational justification. According to MacIntyre, the current solution to moral debate is emotivism, but it lacks informing presuppositions and background beliefs because it is an amalgam of social and cultural fragments inherited from disparate traditions, and hence it is impossible to arrive at agreed rationally justifiable conclusions. Therefore what goes on is just assertion and counter assertion from incompatible premises. However, MacIntyre's agenda is not to establish the validity of tradition over against the emotivist moral debate. Instead MacIntyre's goal is the generation of authentic character. That is, to form people who by nature have a moral disposition, who reason with their internal conviction, who believe in results, and who towards the knowledge of truth about the human good. He rejects detached objectivity because such an enquiry lacks sufficient rational and moral resources. For him, tradition is the ration form of enquiry, because he thinks progress only occurs through internal participation in the dialects or conflicts of a tradition. He is speaking about the rational enquiry embedded in tradition, which is capable of vindication,

also to give remedies to the problems left over by its predecessors belonging to the history of the same tradition. Local life shapes a tradition's peculiar teleology. As an example MacIntyre shows the case of Aristotle whose philosophical schema had presupposed citizenship in the Greek *polis*.

Detached enquiry cannot understand specific themes like justice, observes MacIntyre. It can only be understood within the horizon of the particular tradition because the adequacy of a special part will depend on the adequacy and the subsequent of the whole system. MacIntyre admits that traditions are mutually incommensurable because the procedures of rational enquiry may mirror their distinct concepts and beliefs. However, incommensurability for MacIntyre is not that which makes communication or agreement impossible, on the contrary it is the first step towards consensus. Rather it opens a diversity of standpoints, and thereby offering a better explanation and solution to the problems. According to MacIntyre, not all cultures produce rational traditions. A culture has to undergo three stages attain what he calls an argument extended through time. The first stage is the existence of a community with beliefs and practices. In the second stage they subject the received texts and beliefs into question, provide novel explanation and alternate interpretation. In third stage these questioning results in new formulations, and these new formulations will solve the previous inadequacies. This third stage will be an ongoing dynamic.

Truth is pivotal for the internal momentum of the tradition. Truth, for MacIntyre, is relative to traditions. Because, he says, the definition of 'truth' is particular to a tradition. Also he thinks that truth claims are founded in the historical and cultural givens. Falsity, according him, is the result of an inadequate mind. He believes an adequate mind can have access to universal truth, external to a tradition.

Traditions in Conflict

Some traditions may be sterile, and some may have come to a standstill in terms of growth. At such a point of juncture, the problems of a tradition could be solved drawing from the knowledge of another tradition. Though traditions are incommensurable to each other, there may have similarities and parallels. Here understanding the background of one tradition by another is pivotal. It requires an empathic mind for each party. It is like studying each other from the other's situation.

The Value of MacIntyre

McIntyre's is a constructive philosophical project. His endeavor was to unite both the intellectual and the moral aspects of human life. For this he mainly depends on his notion 'rationality of tradition'. But he has not made this notion clear, it is still ambiguous.

Incommensurability Thesis

Although he is not primarily a philosopher of science, MacIntyre has drawn on post-Kuhnian methodological reflection in his formulation of a historicist theory of knowledge[142] or what his more recent work terms tradition-constituted inquiry.[143] In many respects, MacIntyre's traditions are similar to the research programs described in the work of Imre Lakatos. Both thinkers propose a shift in focus from atomic propositions to some type of holism by making an entire theory, or series of theories, the proper object of evaluation. Each argues that the issues investigated by participants in research

[142] Ibid. p. 271.

[143] MacIntyre, Alasdair. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame press. 1988. P. 354.

traditions are not timeless questions, but are crucially shaped by their own problematics. Without devaluing consistency and logical rigor, each supposes that incoherence of a certain sort is the motor of intellectual progress. And finally, both philosophers adhere to a realist conception of truth. In short, MacIntyre and Lakatos want to abandon positivist methodological assumptions and acknowledge the historical dimension of scientific enquiry, without succumbing to any species of anti-realism.

Lakatos' Critique of MacIntyre's Notion of Incommensurability

These similarities create the appearance of essential continuity between Lakatos and MacIntyre. One might be tempted to view MacIntyre's theory of traditions as an application of Lakatos philosophy of science to his own interests in ethics. Closer examination, however, shows that MacIntyre's theory of traditions and Lakatos methodology of scientific research programs are incompatible, because they take divergent positions on the relation between incommensurability and rationality in theory-change. Lakatos holds that incommensurability is impossible, because it prohibits an observer from affirming that movement from one research program to another is ever rational. MacIntyre, by contrast, defends both incommensurability and rationality in theory-change, and employs several strategies to dissolve any assumed tension between the two. After probing this disagreement, I will conclude that MacIntyre has the better of the argument, while leaving us with some questions about his own research program.

Lakatos rejects the incommensurability of rival scientific theories, a thesis advanced in the work of Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend. Lakatos advances two objections against incommensurability thesis. The first is the empirical fact that a single scientist can simultaneously work on two rival and ostensibly incommensurable research programs. This fact undermines Kuhn's

thesis of the psychological incommensurability of rival programs.[144] Despite his use of psychological metaphors, Kuhn is not denying the ability of a scientist to entertain two rival paradigms. In fact, incommensurability thesis is a thesis about linguistic structure, not of the workings of human brain.

Lakatos second objection to incommensurability thesis is considerably more interesting. It assumes the form of an indirect attack on it. If rival and ostensibly incommensurable theories are neither inconsistent with each other, nor comparable for content, then it becomes impossible to say that allegiance to one research program is more rational than allegiance to another. If such comparative judgments are impossible, then it appears that while scientists may decide to switch from one large-scale theory to another, there are never any reasons that mandate or justify the switch. The conclusion is that incommensurability and rationality in theory-change are simply incompatible.

However, by itself, this argument does not refute incommensurability thesis. It simply holds that if one affirms this thesis, then one must deny the appearance of rationality in theory-change. If one wants to save the appearance, however, then one must deny the possibility of the notion of incommensurability. This conclusion is considerably weaker than the claim that the notion of incommensurability is false, but it is sufficient to separate Lakatos from MacIntyre.

Against Lakatos, MacIntyre denies that incommensurability thesis and rationality in theory-change are incompatible, and argues that one can simultaneously affirm the existence of genuine incommensurability between

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[144] Lakatos, Imre. The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes. Philosophical Papers. Vol. 1. Ed. J. Worrall and G. Currie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1977. p. 112.

traditions and the rational character of switch in allegiance at least on occasion from one incommensurable tradition to another.

After making the claim that incommensurability thesis and rationality in theory-change are incompatible, Lakatos proceeds to argue that even if the historical record seems to show that large-scale bodies of theory are incommensurable, and thereby confirm incommensurability thesis, it remains the case that some research programs can be rationally chosen against others. This argument is based on a distinction between the internal history of science and its actual history. The elements of the internal history are the rational reconstructions of theories that the seeker of scientific truth, unlike the purely descriptive historian, can and must devise.

The actual history may be safely relegated to the footnotes[145] Theories as described by actual history may well be incommensurable. But those who reconstruct rationally can place incommensurable paradigms in a relationship of logical inconsistency, and make their content comparable, by using a dictionary (of his or her own creation) that enables translation between rival theories. Lakatos' strategy is not a straightforward denial of the notion of incommensurability, but a restriction of its scope to actual, descriptive history. This move weakens the notion of incommensurability by rendering it irrelevant in the normative context of evaluation and adjudication.

MacIntyre's Reply

In forcing himself to distort the historical record, Lakatos can never provide rational justification for changes from one theory to another. At best, he can only justify the switch from one caricature to another. If this is the case, then it appears that there are no rational grounds for eliminating scientific theories. One can eliminate only their caricatured simulacra, which

[145] Ibid. p. 120.

are all too likely to be drawn from a perspective that already knows the correct outcome. Something like this is the objection of MacIntyre, who in response to Lakatos dismissal of actual history argues that it matters enormously that histories should be true, just as it matters that our scientific theories make truth one of their goals.[146]

Lakatos might reply that the decision to privilege internal history over actual history is simply the price that one must pay, if one wants to preserve rationality in theory-change. MacIntyre denies this, in effect, by proposing a view that argues for the mutual compatibility of actual history, incommensurability thesis, and rationality in theory-change. If MacIntyre can deny the necessity of dispensing with the historical record, then Lakatos argument will lose much of its force, and his intention to take seriously the historical dimension of scientific change will be better honored by MacIntyre.

The first part of MacIntyre's argument is to deny that the incommensurability of rival paradigms entails their incomparability. The version of incommensurability thesis assumed by Lakatos does seem to imply the total incomparability of paradigms. Incommensurable theories have entirely different meanings, criteria and goals. Here several incommensurability theses available, not one. One may, prima facie, speak of incommensurability of meaning or criteria without postulating incommensurability of goals. The first step is to disambiguate incommensurability thesis by distinguishing several possible versions.

Incommensurability of meaning entails incommensurability of criteria and incommensurability of goals. There are no shared goals or criteria, since

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[146] MacIntyre, Alasdair. Epistemological Crisis, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science. Monist 60: 453-72. 1977. p. 469.

there is no common language in which shared goals or criteria can be formulated. This is the most radical version of the incommensurability thesis.

There is no need to postulate incommensurability of meaning. Rival theories are perfectly capable of communicating with one another. What they cannot do is to agree with another on the basis of shared criteria, either because the criteria are nonexistent, or because they are so weak as to be consistent with both theories. This version of incommensurability is less a semantic thesis than a thesis about truth.

If rival theories necessarily have the same subject matter, they will also have the same goals. The assumption is that goals are defined in terms of the shared subject matter. This seems questionable, because two theories can take as their subject the relative motion of bodies, and yet have different goals. One theory might want to predict novel facts, while another might privilege simplicity. If shifting Kuhnian values are understood as the goals of rival theories, then it appears that the possession of shared subject matter does not entail identity of goals. The problem may disappear, however, if primary goals and secondary goals were distinguished. Secondary goals are epistemic values that serve as means to ends, for example, logical consistency, compatibility with other knowledge, fertility, unifying power, coherence. They are valued because they enable research programs to achieve goals that do not change over time, the primary goals of empirical predictive accuracy and explanatory power (goals whose fulfillment is truth-indicative, for scientific realism). If this distinction is valid, then MacIntyre can say that competing scientific theories have constant goals, even as they lack common criteria. For instance: rival paradigms in physics, despite differences in criteria, each have as their goal the formulation of general and accurate equations for motion.

Still lacking is an account of how rational theory-change is possible between two incommensurable theories, if they lack common decision criteria. Lakatos assumes that without common criteria, no rational adjudication between rival theories is possible.

MacIntyre argues that, at least in some cases, traditions fail not by external criteria, and not by criteria ostensibly held in common with other traditions but by their own standards. If this is true, then one can imagine a comparison between two rival incommensurable theories. One theory fails by its own standards, and the other does not. It is rational, then, to abandon the failed theory. This by itself does not preserve rationality in theory-change in the full sense. It saves only the rationality of theory abandonment. MacIntyre is aware of this, and adds that it is rational to adopt the theory that does not fail only if can explain the reasons for the defeat of its rival.

By refining the notion of incommensurability, and appropriating the idea of internal failure, MacIntyre has provided us with the outlines of a conception on which one can adjudicate between two rival incommensurable theories, with no common decision criteria between them. His account does not resort to Lakatos' expedient of imposing common criteria onto rival theories, and thereby falsifying them. By making the failure of paradigms a matter of their internal logic, it avoids the hollowness of critiques that rely on standards external to the theories that are the object of criticism.

MacIntyre's solution to the problem left by Lakatos is not without difficulties of its own. One can make a common objection to MacIntyre's conception of tradition-constituted enquiry, and then proceed to raise some questions. The objection is that MacIntyre's own evaluations require a criterion that is not internal to any particular tradition, but that is common to all of them. In other words, MacIntyre covertly uses a meta-criterion, viz. the demand that a tradition succeed, or not fail, by its own standards. This

criterion, it seems, does not derive from a single tradition, but is the neutral standing ground whose existence MacIntyre affirms in practice, even as he denies it in theory.[147]

This objection rests on a confusion. The claim that the meta-criterion is not unique to a single tradition does not imply that its source lies outside of any tradition whatever. It may be that the demand to aim at the accomplishment of particular goals (whose proper description cannot detain us here) is a constitutive part of all scientific traditions, and that the criterion has no existence outside of them. MacIntyre can easily deny that he is invoking a meta-criterion, which hovers outside of the relevant traditions.

The common objection to MacIntyre fails, but some questions remain. Epistemological problems attend the notion of a tradition's internal failure. How does one know that what appears to be a failed theory has genuinely failed by its own standards? At many points during the history of a tradition, a gap will appear between what the theory does and what its criteria say it ought to do. When is the gap so wide that it constitutes a failure? Certainly in narratives written by the opposition the size of the gap will render the theory dead, never to rise again. But proponents of the theory can often tell another story, in which the alleged failures are transitory setbacks, or even specimens of the anomalies that, on MacIntyre's own account, are the condition of all intellectual progress.

MacIntyre can respond that there are criteria for distinguishing fruitful tensions from incoherencies that cause internal failure. This response, however, merely raises the same question once again. Do the criteria intend to distinguish between temporary fatigue and total collapse constitute

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[147] MacIntyre, Alasdair. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame press. P. 350.

impersonal standards, or are they also expressions of parochial bias? Knowing precisely when a tradition has failed by its own standards, without begging the question against its adherents whose own perspective may convince them that the tradition has stalled without having failed may be more difficult than MacIntyre allows. Alongside narratives of failure will be narratives whose interpretations are more charitable. Only rarely is the truth-value of these interpretations not a matter of controversy.

But even it were possible to establish that a particular tradition has unmistakably failed, and failed by its own standards, further questions remain. Why should success or failure in terms of internal criteria be normative for rationality? Why is this type of failure a decisive reason for rejecting a tradition? One can imagine a scenario in which two rival, incommensurable theories differ. One theory has criteria that are easy to meet; those of the second are more difficult to satisfy. Yet it is possible that the second theory is better than the first, even if the first succeeds in terms of its own criteria and the second fails. Why abandon the second tradition, if the only reason for doing so is the cheap success of the first? MacIntyre may respond that traditions whose standards are too high do not collapse but if they are able to flourish reformulate their criteria, without losing their essential identity. This line of response may be promising, but it raises some questions. What are the identity conditions of a tradition? Who determines these, and how? What distinguishes the substance of a tradition from its accidents? How does one map the logical relations among various traditions? When does a body of doctrine become a tradition?

The persistence of these issues as disputed questions requires MacIntyre to say more about the ontology of traditions. To conclude, it must be said that while Lakatos philosophy of science is vulnerable, since it depends on a strong dismissal of actual history, his conception of research

programs broke much ground for later accounts that attempt to preserve a thoroughgoing holism and realism without denying the existence of incommensurability. Among such accounts, MacIntyre's tradition-constituted inquiry is perhaps the most promising. Certainly it leaves unanswered questions.

Moral Disagreement

Ethical relativism is a philosophical position that belongs to a wide canvas of debate on moral disagreement. In his introduction to "Moral Disagreements" Christopher W. Gowans distinguishes between participant perspective and observer perspective. The first belong to those fight for human rights. For them, moral disagreement is unfair because participant perspective presupposes a morality that is applicable to the whole society. This is an objectivist position, whereas observer perspective recognizes moral disagreement as a fact.

Relativist arguments in moral thoughts has its beginning in remote past. Two prominent figures in Greek history in 5th century had doubted objectivity in morality. Herodotus endorsed Pindar's dictum, "Custom is king of all", and Protagoras said:

> Whatever practices seem right and laudable to any particular state are so, for that state.[148]

Moral relativism, in contemporary moral debates, is the view that moral convictions are never true in a straightforward sense, though they have a relative truth-value. Sometimes they are true, and some people are justified in believing they are true. Truth-values of moral propositions are not

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[148] Plato. Theaetetus, Collected Dialogues of Plato. Ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1961. p. 167c.

independent of people's attitudes. Relative truth-value is in reference to the convictions and practices of a group of persons such as society or culture. That is to say, the judgment that polygamy is morally wrong is neither true nor false in an absolute sense. It may be true for one society and false for another society.[149]

It is no easy to formulate relativism. It involves many complications. First, it has to be decided whether a moral judgment is relative to the group which makes the judgment or the group which is being judged. This makes a difference when someone judges another person belonging to another group, for example: A person in England morally judges a person in China. Secondly, it is the question of how a group is defined. There may have many criteria: in terms of gender, race, religion, territory, culture, ethnicity, etc. Thirdly, moral views of all in a group may not be homogenous, there may have serious disagreement. Then arises the question of how this issue could be tackled. Finally, suppose some members of group are members of anther group too, and these two groups entertain entirely different moral views. How this could be solved?[150]

All these questions suggest that relativism in need of a more complete and precise formulation than is often supposed. According to Gowans, the last three questions may lead to the direction of subjectivism, the view that the truth-value of moral judgments is a function not of groups but of individuals. That shows that relativism is a position different from subjectivism, and that relativism purports to retain a limited sense of intersubjective authority of moral norms. As the tradition definition of relativism is not able to explain

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[149] Gowans, Christopher. W. "Introduction: Debates about Moral Disagreement." Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher.W.Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. Pp. 25-26.

[150] Ibid. p. 27.

the cases like one group embracing other group's values, changes within the groups, and so on, Gowans attempts to give an updated definition.

Gowans begins with questioning Isaiah Berlin on his statement that no single theory can capture 'morality'. Isaiah Berlin's position is a bit inconsistent and question begging because it raises the question why one should embrace a measure of nonobjectivism if one takes the conflicting values to be objective. Alasdair MacIntyre too takes a mixed position though different from Isaiah Berlin's, observes Gowans. MacIntyre not only defends objective position but also takes nonobjectivist position. According to MacIntyre, there are incommensurable positions, but this incommensurability is not a permanent one. During cultural crises there may have cross valuation between traditions, and at that time one tradition may value another tradition in high esteem for its superior moral values, and gradually the incommensurability is wiped out. Therefore, MacIntyre thinks that a nonobjectivist has no cogent place to stand. Gowans finds a loophole in MacIntyre argument and counter argues that even if MacIntyre were true, surely, a nonobjectivist may have a place to stand. For example, by immigration, marriage or upbringing a person might occupy two conflicting tradition and may conclude that nonobjectivist account is the best explanation as far as he or she is concerned.[151] Yet Gowans' response to MacIntyre is less an outcome of the failure of the latter than the latter's argument being a bit unclear and ambiguous.

Skepticism, a close relative of relativism, is one among the nonobjectivist positions. However, skepticism has to be distinguished from relativism. Skepticism is an ability to suspend judgment when the opposed and favored accounts show an equipollence to both sides. Here the opposed

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[151] Ibid. p. 33.

account does not mean affirmation and negation, but in meaning it is similar to conflicting accounts. 'equipollence' means equality with regard to being convincing or unconvincing. Suspense of the judgment is a standstill of the intellect. That is, detaching oneself from either rejecting or positing anything.[152] This definition shows that skepticism is a totally different philosophical position from what relativism purported to be.

David Hume is an ardent critic of objectivist conception of morality. to show that there is no universal standard to morality he compares the value-rich lives of Pascal and Diogenes. Both Diogenes and Pascal were men of virtue and were geniuses. The foundation of the character of Diogenes endeavor was to render himself an independent being. He endeavored to confine his wants, desires, and pleasures within himself. Pascal's character was quite opposite. He never controlled his wants and never confined his infirmities within himself. His aim was to keep a perpetual dependence. Diogenes supported himself with pride, magnanimity, and an idea of superiority above his fellow creatures. Pascal was humble, full of self-hatred, and yet endeavored to attain the virtues, as far as possible. Both of these people attracted general admiration in their different ages, despite both of these represented entirely different standards of morality. If there is an universal standard of morality, how can these two entirely opposite standards of morals would be respected equally?[153]

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[152] Empiricus, Sextus. "Outlines of Skepticism." Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher .W .Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. p. 47.

[153] Hume, David. "A Dialogue." Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher. W. Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. p. 79.

Beyond Morality

According to Friederich Nietzsche, so far moral philosophers have tried to give morality a rational foundation, which they wrongly believed they have given. However, actual problems of morality arise only when different moralities are compared. What is lacking in all 'sciences of moral' is the problem of morality itself. What philosophers called 'rational foundation of morality' and tried to supply was just the scholarly variations of the faith in the prevalent morality itself, a new expression his or her faith in it. What they did in practical was the opposite of an examination, analysis, questioning, and vivisection of this very faith.[154] Nietzsche stood for the trans-valuation of all values. That is, a complete rethinking of the whole philosophical and religious tradition that produced these traditional values. Nietzsche had never developed a single theme consistently; instead his books are collections of varied ideas which address relevant philosophical issues.

Critique of Rationality

According to Richard A. Shweder, one of the central myths of the modern period in the West is the idea that the world is divided up by then and now, and them and us; religion and superstition on the one side and, science and rationality on the other side. This is a myth, he says, born three centuries ago with Enlightenment. Shweder observes that many modernist authors, for example: Ernest Gellner in anthropology, Jean Piaget in psychology considered premodern period as a dark age of intellectual confusion. That is, premodern period was characterized as a time of intellectual confusion of language with reality, of physical suffering with moral transgressions, of subjectivity with objectivity, of custom and nature. They constructed a

[154] Nietzsche, Friederich. "Beyond Good and Evil." Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher.W.Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. p. 82.

premodern mind of presupposed separations and distinctions: of language versus reality, subject versus object, and custom versus nature. This has been challenged by postmodern scholarship.[155]

Western thought, Shweder commends, from Plato through Descartes to contemporary 'structuralisms', has been trying to recover the abstract forms, universal grammar, or pure being hidden beneath the 'superficialities' of any particular person's mental functioning or any particular people's social life. Descartes used a method of eraser through radical doubt whereby everything sensuous, subjective, embodied, temporary, local or tradition-bound is viewed as prejudice, dogma or illusion and he waived free from doubting only those which can be validated by autonomous reason namely deductive logic. And others have made famous a method of subtraction like 'convergent validation', 'interobserver validity', and 'data aggregation', especially in the social sciences, whereby everything different is treated as error, noise or bias. Shweder seeks a midway in matters related to rationality, objectivity, and tradition. He says reason and objectivity do not save one from error, ignorance and confusion, but they are not in opposition to tradition. Neither error, nor ignorance and confusion are proper synonyms for tradition, custom and folk belief.[156] Also Shweder agree with Hilary Putnam's view that there are external facts, that one can even say what they are, and what one cannot say is whether – because it makes no sense – facts are independent of all conceptual choices.

Fact-value Distinction

Objectivity comes into moral philosophy, according to Bernard Williams, when ethical belief is compared with knowledge and other beliefs,

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[155] Shweder, Richard. "The Astonishment of Anthropology." Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher.W.Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. p.103.

[156] Ibid. p.106.

which have a claim to truth. The distinction between facts and value comes in this context. According to Bernard Williams, the distinction between science and ethics is simple. In scientific enquiry there should ideally be convergence on an answer, but in ethics such a convergence is beyond hope.[157]

To the claim that convergence is possible in ethical judgment too, Bernard Williams responds that thick ethical concepts, where the convergence is found, like coward, lie, brutality, and gratitude are characteristically related to reason for action or are concepts of 'action-guiding'. He says that one can say, then, that the application of these concepts is at the same time world-guided. Here he asks how can it be both at once?

Prescriptivists provide a solution to this problem. They hold that any such concepts can be analyzed into a prescriptive element and a descriptive element. It is the descriptive feature that allows it to be world-guided and the prescriptive feature that allows it to be action-guiding. However, Bernard William is critical of the prescriptivist solution because, first of all, one cannot, perhaps, stay away all the time from the evaluative interests of a society, and then to pick up the concept as a device for dividing up. To show some light on this problem, he assumes an artificial situation in a hyper traditional society. Those who live in such a society have to believe the judgment they made in accordance with the best available propositional knowledge. For this their judgment would have to be true. They have to satisfy another condition that is to make sure that the first two conditions must be nonaccidentally linked. Granted the way, they get it and believe. Suppose

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[157] Williams, Bernard. "Knowledge, Science, Convergence." Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher.W.Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. p. 131.

the truth had been otherwise, they would have acquired a different belief. Of course true in another situation.[158]

Bernard William raises another objection to the prescriptivist attempt to account morality. suppose the headman of the community in that hyper traditional society makes the statement that F is a boy, and if it is true, the observer can agree to it and say, 'the headman's statement that F is a boy is true.' Then, can the observer say 'F is a boy'? The observer may not say so because he or she is not a member of the community. The observer does not share those people's belief.[159] Here Bernard Williams wonders, how one can make a judgment by using some universal moral notion, which the society accepts and at the same time the observer may very well reject. For Bernard William, the basic question is to how one is to understand the relations between practice and reflection. A judgment, he adds, using a very general concept is the product of reflection. If it were not a hyper traditional society, there would be some level of reflective questioning and criticism.

An objectivist model will see the members of the society as trying to find out the truth of the value, whereas a nonobjectivist model would see the ethical judgment as part of their way of living. He rejects the objectivist view of ethical life. Nonetheless he is ready to admit that there are some ethical beliefs, universally held and vague like 'one has to have special reason to kill', which will survive at the reflective level.

He does not rule out all forms of objectivism. There is still chance for the project of giving an objective grounding to ethical life. The plausible schema in that direction is to look at the idea about human nature. That would be the best ethical life though it is probable that it would undermine the

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[158] Ibid. p. 132.

[159] Ibid. p. 133.

ethical options in a given social situation. Bernard William concludes this discussion with these words:

> The objective grounding would not bring it about that judgments using those concepts were true or could be known: this was so already. But it would enable us to recognize that certain of them were the best or most appropriate thick concepts to use. Between the two extremes of the one very general position and the many concrete ones, other ethical beliefs would be true only in the oblique sense that they were the beliefs that would help us to find our way around in a social world which – on this optimistic program – was shown to be the best social world for human beings.[160]

Virtue Centered Morality and Right centered Morality and Relativity

There are differences between the truth conditions of moral statements based on virtue-centered moralities and the truth conditions of moral statements based on right-centered moralities. There is no word in Greek to correspond to the modern 'ought'.[161] In Greek there is no clear distinction between "ought" and "owe' (dein).[162] In Greek, this word was used to designate duties tied to the practice of a particular social and political structure. The Chinese word for 'ought' (ying) too had same meaning. On

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[160] Ibid. p.140.

[161] Wong, David. B. "Moral Relativity and Tolerance." Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher.W.Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. p. 141.

[162] MacIntyre, Alasdair. After Virtue. 2nd Ed. London: Duckworth. 1985. p. 115.

the contrary Western 'ought' designates duties that transcend any particular social and political structure.[163]

Wong says 'ought' does not play much an important role in virtue-centered morality as 'good'. In Greek morality the emphasis is given to the freedom of performing certain range of actions, for example, participating in the ruling. Which is not the case in modern morality. Citing this that Wong distinguishes between virtue-centered morality and right-centered morality. Greeks were concerned about how to sustain the common good of the society, and Chinese Confucianism was concerned most in removing all barriers that prevents one from becoming a *yen*, that is, becoming a person with a fully realized social nature who could act in accordance with filial piety and brotherly respect. By contrast modern morality gives emphasis on political and civil liberties – expression, religion, and so on.

Now Wong asks whether there is any variation in the truth conditions of these types of morality. then he asks himself whether this difference in the import of morality in different time and place is because of environment relativity. Then he cites a study which claims the case of environmental relativity. That was a study on Zuni by May and Abraham Edel. According to them, the moral emphasis in that community was for the common good of all, and not for the civil liberty. The interpretation given to this phenomenon, the close-knit of the community, by May and Edel was that Zuni live in an isolated desert environment, not only that they were quite permanent there, but also they were subject to attack from without.

Wong is not satisfied with this interpretation because other culture with hard material conditions that might motivate a virtue-centered morality

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[163] Wong, David. B. "Moral Relativity and Tolerance." Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher.W.Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. p. 141.

did not do so. The Eskimos of the Greenland are an example. For the Eskimos, the ideal man is one who does what he pleases and takes what he wants without fear. An absolutist would argue that a virtue-centered morality is better for the Eskimos, and if they do not adopt it, then it is their mistake. Wong wants interject here with a question: how it could be a mistake?

Relativist Argument from the Justification Principle

According to Wong, absolutist theories have failed incurably in explaining moral disagreement and diversity. Human beings are in need of solving internal as well as interpersonal conflicts. Morality is a social creation for serving this purpose, and which has been evolved in response to these needs. There are constraints on what morality could be like. These constraints are derived from physical environment, from standards of rationality, and also from human nature. However, these constraints could not eliminate morality. There is moral relativity, which is the indication of the plasticity of human nature.[164]

In this regard Immanuel Kant's formula for humanity is that one ought always to treat humanity never simply as means but always as ends in itself. When someone gives a false promise to another, says Kant, that man is being deceived.

Kant continues:

> Cannot possible agree with...[that] way of behaving to him, and so cannot himself share the end of the action[165].

For Kant, rational nature human being is as ends in themselves. One implication of Kant's formula, according to Wong, is that one should not

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[164] Ibid. p. 147.

[165] Kant, Immanuel. Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals. Trans. H. J. Paton. 2nd ed. New York: Harper & Raw. 1968. p. 68.

interfere with others, who are ends in themselves, unless with their permission or if acceptable to them, but with the condition that they have to be fully rational and informed of all relevant circumstances. This is why Wong calls Kant's formula as 'justification principle'. He says, the notion of individual autonomy is central and pervasive in the moral tradition that descended from Europe, and Kant's principle is a plausible expression of that notion.

Wong has tried to experiment with the justification principle by combining moral relativism with Kant's principles. He suggests that if moral relativism is true, A and B can have conflicting moralities that are equally true and therefore may be equally justified. Kant envisaged that there is only a single moral system valid for all rational human beings. However, Wong argues that one need not be an absolute to resolve to refrain from interfering with the permissible ends of others. He also suggests that justification principle must not always follow from practical reason, but compassion, concern for others, etc., can be good reason for holding the justification principle.

Wong's relativist moral theory is relative with respect to justification, but nonrelative with respect to the content of truth conditions. That is to say, one society can condemn the intolerant behavior of another society even if intolerance is justifiable to the latter. Here one question may arise. Can one society justify interfering another society that behaves intolerantly? Wong suggests weighing lesser evil in such cases.[166]

Nonrelative Virtues

Having observed different societies, a relativist may have been impressed by the variety of local virtues and moral justifications. The

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[166] Wong, David. B. "Moral Relativity and Tolerance." Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher. W. Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. p. 152.

impressions of the relativist may shatter Aristotle's conception of virtue. For the relativist, Aristotle's account of virtue is nothing more than self-admiration of his own local virtues. Martha Nussbaum would like to register her objection here. She comes to the defense of Aristotle, and argues that Aristotle was not only a critic of the values of his time but also was addressing to the human element that is underlying in all cultures of all times. She says a deep enquiry into the way in which Aristotle enumerated and individuated will show that Aristotle was not just describing what was admired in his society, but that he was isolating a sphere of human experience, which more or less any human being will have to face in their life, that of making some choices rather than the other, and act in some way rather some other ways, etc. Then Aristotle asks himself what is it to choose and respond well within that sphere, and also what is to choose defectively.[167]

One cannot escape, says Martha, the virtues Aristotle speaks about so far as one live one's own life irrespective of where and when one lives. Because the spheres in which Aristotelian virtues belong are the everyday experience like attitude, behavior, death, appetite, facing things, etc. The sphere of experience fixes the reference of virtue. She calls this the 'grounding of experience.' If further developed, the Aristotelian claim is that it will retain the grounding in actual human experience while gaining the ability to criticize local and traditional moralities for the sake of a more inclusive account of the circumstances of human life. This is the strong of point of virtue ethics.[168]

One of the counter arguments to this Aristotelian position is that it cannot be expected that there would be a single answer to virtue related

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[167] Nussbaum, Martha. "Nonrelative Virtues." Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher W. Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. p. 169.

[168] Ibid. pp. 171-72.

questions even though there may arguably be a sharable common grounding. Another objection is that it is naive to suppose that there may not have cultural variations once a common ground is realized. A relativist may argue further that even the perceptive experience is a construction by culture of a particular time and place, and in fact there is no 'innocent eye' as one might presume. Martha Nussbaum hopefully believes that it may lead to a nonrelative position. For example, Karl Marx believed that bourgeois justice, generosity, etc., presuppose conditions and structures that are not ideal because bourgeois virtues are responses to defective relations of production. All of the abstract notions would be eliminated once communism is achieved. This was what Marx meant when he said communism leads human beings beyond ethics.

To the objection that there may not be a single answer to virtue related questions, Martha responds that the process of comparative and critical debate will eliminate numerous contenders and the remaining plurality of acceptable accounts may or may not be capable of being subsumed under a single account of greater generality. To the second objection, she says that it is true that a general answer to a specific question may be several and varied in connection with other local practices and other local conditions. The customs involved in friendship in England and Athens are very different. Yet they can share the Aristotelian criteria of mutual benefit, well-wishing, shared conception of good, some forms of living together, enjoyment, mutual awareness, etc.[169]

To the relativist argument Martha replies that the fact that a virtuous decision is context sensitive does not imply that it is relative to a limited context. Aristotelian ethics keeps a delicate balance between the general and

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[169] Ibid. p. 174.

the particular specifications of virtues. In Aristotelian ethics, particularism is fully compatible with objectivity. It is relative only in the sense that a good navigational judgment is sensitive to a particular weather conditions and it is right objectively everywhere in the human world. And finally, according to Martha, Aristotelian virtues are open to revision in the light of new circumstances and new evidences, and are flexible to local conditions that the relativist would desire.

Regarding the common ground experience, Martha adds a few more observations. Despite the evident differences in the specific cultural shaping of the grounding experience, people in one culture do converse with the people in other cultures, understand them, and allow themselves to be moved by others. Such a sense of community overlaps in the sphere created by the grounding experience. Furthermore, it seems hardly any cultural group is now focused upon its own tradition isolated from the other cultures as relativist thinks it to be. Cross-cultural communication and debates are ubiquitous today.[170]

One may ask what actually the basic experience is when Martha refers to grounding of experience. Martha does not think that the Aristotelian basic experience is free from interpretation, but insists that there is much family resemblance and much overlap across societies. The sphere of common experience is not bedrock of completely uninterpreted given data. What is claimed to have is a nuclei of experience around which the constructions of different societies proceed. It is not something pure, not unsullied nature, it is human nature. There is just human life as it is lived. However, in life as it is lived, people would find a family of experiences

[170] Ibid. p. 176.

sharable with each other, which can provide starting points of cross-cultural reflections.[171]

Positive and Normative Conceptions of Morality

Alan Gewirth presents a distinction between *positive* and *normative* conceptions of morality. Positive conception of morality consists in rules or directives whereas normative conception consists in moral precepts or rules or principles. The validity of morality in its normative conception is independent of whether someone contingently believes it or not. This is the central difference between positive and normative conceptions of morality. if this distinction is accepted, then one can compare two different meanings of the phrase 'moral knowledge.' As per one of those meanings, moral knowledge is empirical knowledge about the various positive moralities. These are appropriately studied by empirical disciplines like sociology, social psychology, anthropology, cultural history, and so forth.[172]

This distinction is relevant to 'Culture' also. In the normative conception 'culture' stands for a refined development of the standards of the excellence of human beings. In the positive conceptions, usually by anthropologists, 'culture' is a way of life as it is understood, symbolized, and evaluated by the group that lives it. Thus, in the positive sense, cultures are plural and relativist. By contrast normative conception of morality is concerned with constituting a universal validity to moral knowledge.

The conflicts within the positive conceptions of morality makes one look for an alternative, say, normative conception. If positive conception of

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[171] Ibid. p. 177.

[172] Gewirth, Alan. "Is Cultural Pluralism Relevant to Moral Knowledge?" Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher.W.Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. p. 180.

morality is accepted, then questions that come up in times of conflict would be, which of these positive moralities, if any, is valid or justified, as against its various rivals? But if normative concept of morality is accepted, then the questions would be not these: what is recognized, believed, or accepted?, but rather, what is morally right or valid, so that it *ought* to be believed and accepted?[173]

But the relativist would say the distinction between normative and positive has not yet been established, and that this argument is nothing but a group's positive conception and so relative to other conceptions because others too use *ought* and claim validity. In response to this Gewirth moves to the second level distinction – theoretical and argumentative, and says there is a normative morality, which ought to be accepted as universally valid. This suggestion comes from the fact that 'action' is the universal context of moralities and of all practice. For the ultimate aim of all moralities and practical precepts is to tell us how to act. Thus, he says, the general context of action transcends the differences of positive cultures and moralities. This supreme principle of morality involves generic rights: freedom and well-being. When someone rejects these rights, she or he is caught in a contradiction with the necessary conditions involved in that person's agency regarding the context of action.

According to Gewirth, relativism has crippling difficulties. Using relativist arguments Nazi killing of Jews can be justified as morally right. If moral rightness is to be judged within a group, then it is morally right for the Nazi. This argument gives the other group only one option that they can just disagree with the others on their action and moral standards. According to

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[173] Ibid. p. 182.

this view, there is no way to get beyond the relativism of some group's 'convention or agreement.'

Gewirth explains:

> What is especially damaging about this view, then, is not only that it could sanction the most monstrous violations of human rights, but also, more generally, that it makes it impossible to present rationally grounded moral criticisms, in a non-question-begging way, of the positive moralities of other cultures or societies.[174]

A serious criticism against upholding rationality as the basis of universally valid moral knowledge is that the so-called rationality itself is a product Western culture. This is to say that there are other rationalities too, quite different from the Western rationality in various other cultures. This critical argument claims, therefore, that there is no non-question-begging way for proving the superiority of any one of these conceptions of reason. To this objection Gewirth replies that, first, deduction and induction are the only sure ways of avoiding arbitrariness and attaining objectivity. Second, any attempt to justify religion or any kind of faith cannot escape using deductive and inductive reason. Finally, if deductive and reasoning has to pass tests set by religion and other faiths, that too requires, at the end, validation by deductive or inductive reasoning. He concludes his reply by saying that any attack on deductive and inductive reason or any claim to supersede it by some other human power or criterion must rely on such reason ultimately to justify its claims for validity.[175]

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[174] Ibid. p. 184.

[175] Ibid. p. 185.

Pluralism and Relativism

Pluralism and relativism are two different things, says Isaiah Berlin. When one person prefers coffee, and another person prefer Champaign, that means they have different tastes. There is no more to be said, says Isaiah Berlin, this is relativism. But Herder and Vico do not agree with this. For them, it is pluralism. Isaiah Berlin say, people read novels from medieval Japan, derive light from each other, understand others, and so on. If societies were enclosed, every society would have confined themselves in their impenetrable bubbles. But that does not happen. Because, he thinks, what makes human is common to all. That is the bridge between different civilizations. But values of a society are its own. Similarly values of other are theirs. One is free to criticize values of others, but one cannot pretend to not understanding others or to regard values are purely subjective.[176]

Isaiah Berlin is of the view that there is a world of objective values. But this objectivity does not kill differences. He says that values may clash even within an individual, but that does not mean some of which are true and others are false. These collisions of values are the essence of what a human being is.

What is Rationality?

According to Alasdair MacIntyre, in order to understand what is justice, we have to know what is rationality first. But when we go on to that we will come to know that rationality too is a notion of manifold dimensions. He says we inhabit in a culture in which rationally justified beliefs co-exist with rival assertion unsupported by any valid rational justifications. So

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[176] Berlin, Isaiah. "The Pursuit of the Ideal." Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher.W.Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. p. 198.

disputed questions concerning justice and practical rationality comes into the public realm in the form of assertion and counter assertion, not as an enquiry. Enlightenment thinkers believed, by putting this onto public realm for open debate allowing each to prove against the other, reason would replace unreason.

MacIntyre's notion of rationality is different from the rationality of the West. According to him, Enlightenment ideas have blinded everyone from seeing the life-rich rationality of the tradition. Contemporary world has lost all connection with such rationality. His endeavor is to recover the rationality of tradition:

> ...a conception of rational inquiry as embodied in a tradition, a conception according to which the standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that tradition.[177]

Traditions between each other may be incommensurable. Logical incompatibility and incommensurability may both be there. But it does not follow that what is said from within one tradition cannot be heard in another. Quite the contrary, it is because competing traditions share some standards that the adherents of these two are able to disagree.

MacIntyre' Rationality Versus Relativist and Perspectivist Challenges

According to MacIntyre the two major problems a rational enquiry faces are namely relativist and perspectivist challenges. Relativists claim that debate between and rational choice among rival traditions is impossible;

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[177] MacIntyre, Alasdair. "The Rationality of Traditions." Moral Disagreements. Ed. Christopher. .Gowans. London and New York: Routledge. 2000. p.206.

perspectivist challenge denies the possibility of making truth-claims from within any one tradition.

These, the relativist challenge and the perspectivist, challenge share some common premises and actually are parts of a single argument. Both of these are fundamentally misconceived, argues MacIntyre. Their apparent power comes from the inversion of the Enlightenment notions of truth and rationality. Post-Enlightenment protagonists like relativism and perspectivism claim that if the Enlightenment ideas are not true then their alternative is the only possible one. MacIntyre says that neither of them has recognized the rationality possessed by the traditions.

In reply to these challenges, what MacIntyre does is to provide an account of the rationality implicit in the practice of traditions. According to him, the initial development of a tradition involves three stages. In the first stage, the beliefs, texts and authorities are not put into question. In the second, inadequacies of various types are identified, and in the third remedies like reformulation, revaluation, etc., are made.

Tradition and beliefs are not one. They are different. The development of a tradition is to be distinguished from the development of a belief. All beliefs are subject to change. Its systematic and deliberate character can distinguish the development of a tradition. Theorizing marks even the earliest stage of enquiry in a tradition. This is to be distinguished from what happens to beliefs in times of mass conversion in a community. In the third stage, newly developed beliefs would be in a position to contrast itself with the old beliefs, and while comparing the discrepancy between the old and the new would be very obvious. In the light of the new beliefs, old belief's failure to correspond to reality will be convincingly clear.

The third stage of the development in tradition is marked by the ability to look back and recognize its own previous intellectual inadequacy or the intellectual inadequacy of its predecessors. This self-reflective awareness makes sure that such intellectual inadequacies would never repeat in this history of that tradition. The test for truth in the present, therefore, is always to summon up as many questions and as many objections of the greatest strength possible. The truth of intellectual adequacy is decided by its capacity to withstand the dialectical questioning and framing of objections.[178]

It is in the third stage, a theory is framed. This theory may vary from one tradition to another. Nonetheless, these traditions will recognize each other what they share, and a common pattern will be shared, though not universally. Dialectical questioning and framing of objections would be at work. Standard forms of argument will be developed. The argument, which appeal to authority, will be established. Yet, the identification of incoherence within the established beliefs will provide impetus and a reason for further enquiry. The conception of rationality and truth thus embodied in tradition is at odd with Cartesian and Hegelian notion of rationality. Cartesian or Hegelian notions of rationality begins with some sets of established beliefs that are not self-justifying, but are interpreted as epistemological first principles. MacIntyre's notion of rationality is tradition-constituted. The absolute knowledge of the Hegelian system is a chimera from this standpoint. However, the truth arrived at in third stage is not times less truth because, according to MacIntyre, no tradition can ever rule out the future possibility of its present beliefs and judgments being shown to be inadequate in a variety of ways.[179]

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[178] Ibid. p. 210.

[179] Ibid. p. 211.

Up to this level MacIntyre's account of the rationality of tradition has not encountered the challenges of relativism and perspectivism. Traditions will times of epistemological crises. Epistemological crisis occurs when the rational enquiry by which tradition achieved progress for a long time gets exhausted of its weaponry, comes to a standstill, and become sterile. This is a situation in which the use of methods of enquiry and forms of argument so far contributed to rational progress begins disclosing new inadequacies, hither to unrecognized incoherences and new problems to which there is no remedy from within the established fabric of beliefs of a tradition. To meet this epistemological crisis, there is no other way but to invent or discover new concepts. MacIntyre suggests that the new concepts should have the following requirements:

1. The new and rich concept must be able to furnish a solution to the crisis.
2. The new concepts must be capable of explaining how the crisis emerged.
3. And these concepts should see by giving a solution to the crises in such way that the continuity of the enquiry is not broken.

For this to happen it needs to occur imaginative conceptual innovations. Sometimes, at epistemological crisis, one tradition may find an argument from an alien tradition helpful to solve their crisis. It is here that MacIntyre show how misconceived a relativist is. Borrowing a concept or an idea or an argument from an alien tradition does not follow that the alien tradition is a superior one. Perhaps except the case of the one such successful argument, in all other cases the alien tradition might have nothing to boast about.

As the initial step towards taking up the challenge posed by the relativist, MacIntyre puts forth a prior question: is the relativist inside or outside the tradition? If the relativist is inside the tradition, then there is no relativism is impossible. MacIntyre argues:

> Such a person, in the absence of serious epistemological crisis within his or her tradition, could have no reason for putting his or her allegiance to it in question and every reason for continuing in that allegiance.[180]

The second possibility is that the relativist might be outside all traditions:

> To be outside all tradition is to be a stranger to enquiry: it is to be in a state of intellectual and moral destitution, a condition from which it is impossible to issue the relativist challenge.[181]

The perspectivist is committed to maintaining the claim that the truth-claim of one tradition cannot defeat the truth-claim of another tradition. To this, MacIntyre's reply is that the perspectivist takes Hegelian conception of truth, the first epistemological principle, for granted. The perspectivist challenge fails, again, to take notice of how integral the concept of truth is to tradition-constituted forms of enquiry. MacIntyre adds to this by pointing out the perspectivist's failure to cognize the fact that the multiplicity of traditions does not afford a multiplicity of perspectives, but it offers only multiplicity of conflicts. He concludes his reply by saying that, like relativism, perspectivism is possible only to outsiders of all traditions, but in vain.

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[180] Ibid. p. 215.

[181] Ibid. p. 215.

Indefinability of Good and Relativism

G.E. Moore discussed the definition of good or lack thereof in his work *Principia Ethica.* There he defined his own term; he alleged that there is a, 'naturalistic fallacy' whereby persons attempting to define the word good think of examples of good things and falsely state that these examples define the word good, rather than good having defined them.

Moore says about the problems involved in defining good:

> How good is to be defined? Now it may be thought that this is a verbal question. A definition does indeed often mean the expressing of one word's meaning in other words. But this is not the sort of definition I am asking for. Such a definition can never be of ultimate importance in any study except lexicography. If I wanted that kind of definition I should have to consider in the first place how people generally use the word 'good'; but my business is not with its proper usage, as established by custom.[182]

According to Moore's indefinability thesis, good is a simple non-complex property as yellowness is a simple property. For him, goodness is unanalyzable, and therefore indefinable.

Postmodern Ethics

Postmodern ethics deals with moral problems which men and woman living in a postmodern world face. The problems include new ones which were unknown to past generations or which were not articulated then as part

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[182] Moore, G. E. Principia Ethica. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1903. p. 6.

of human experience. About the novelty of postmodern approach to ethics Zygmunt Bauman says:

> I suggest that the novelty of the postmodern approach to ethics consists first and foremost not in the abandoning of characteristically modern moral concerns, but in the rejection of the typically modern ways of going about its moral problems (that is, responding to moral challenges with coercive normative regulation in political practice, and the philosophical search for absolutes, universals and foundations in theory).[183]

By this it does not mean that the great issues of ethics like social justice, human rights, collective welfare, etc., have lost its topicality in postmodern ethics. Rather postmodern ethics see, and deal with, these issues in a novel way.

Postmodern ethics is part and parcel of postmodernism. The term postmodernism is found to be applied in a multitude of sense. There were no serious attempts to monitor the use of the term. And among the great variety of things called postmodern have no single thing that is in common. However, theoreticians of postmodernism generally characterize postmodernism as a radical shift from the modernism. Modernism is the offshoot of the Enlightenment period. Reliance on notions such as rationality, truth, reason, good, beauty and progress was characteristic of modernism.

Modernism refers to an attitude or view, whereas modernity refers to a state of affairs in which the dominant worldview is modernist. Postmodernism is a total shift from modernism. Postmodernity indicates that modernity no longer exists. According to postmodern ethics the moral order is not something existing independent from one's moral judgments. It

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[183] Bauman, Zygmunt. Postmodern Ethics. Oxford: Blackwell. 1993. pp-3-4.

concedes that moral order may be real, but it is not as a product of human being's relationship to a natural order of things but to a cultural order of things. If different cultures at different times have different values, then it can be said that moral judgments are not independent of a context. Postmodernism declares all cultures as valuable in their own light. And this has led to the dead end of pluralism and relativism, without any way to evaluate cultural expressions, culminating in extreme postmodernism.

Postmodernity witnesses a kind of broken lives in the contemporary world. This condition is the result of breaking up of modern hopes and ambitions. This state of affairs, according to Bauman, enables people to give primal importance to morality. In the next step he calls human beings as moral beings (existentially). To express this view he employs the notion of 'the other,' and 'the responsibility for the other.' The notion of responsibility is not a product of social arrangement and personal training. On the contrary it frames the primal scene from which social arrangement and personal instruction start.

CONCLUSION

Mukudnaunni. A. P. “Philosophy and relativism: A study of the relativist positions in theories of knowledge, meaning and morality” Thesis. Department of Philosophy , University of Calicut, 2006

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Pluralistic Relativism, Contextualism, Constructivism

It is often argued against pluralistic relativism that there are deep universal feature and relative surface features. That is, for example no one will object to the fact that normally all human beings have two hands with five fingers, but what one does with ten fingers is not universal at all: some play badminton, some play other games.

A standard claim against pluralistic relativism is that it commits self-contradiction. That claim too is contradictory because if pluralistic relativism follows a universal agenda, pluralistic relativism would be committing self-contradiction. Then a nonrelativist may argue that if that were the case, it would not bind a nonrelativist, and so demands no serious attention.

Another point pluralists make is that discourse can have other aims than truth and falsity like expressions, understanding, and playfulness. But, pluralists have either to ignore or to address the issue of truth, which is the point of issue. When they address the question of truth, they always make universal statements, for example: it is true for all cultures that reality is socially constructed, knowledge is interpretational (not merely representational), values are not eternal Platonic archetypes but are culturally and intersubjectively molded. The postmodernist makes statements which are binding to all human beings, such as the contextuality of all the meanings, pluralistic nature of values, the historicity of all truth. Since all those statements are context-transcending claims made by those who insist that there are no context-transcending claims, and then all of those involve deeply embedded self-contradictions.

What most pluralists do not acknowledge is how much local and relative knowledge the universal philosophers allow: The staggering preponderance of occasions is local and plural. The point, again, is that certain features are context-transcending and universal, but most particular matters are not - and any theory that tries to deny either of those is almost certainly an inadequate theory.

A common pluralist retort is that they do believe in universals, but those universals are dialectically at play with all particulars, where 'dialectic' as actually used simply denies universals *qua* universals and thus continues the pluralist's greatest of dreams: smashing anything universal other than his own values, which are true for all cultures.

Husserl's attempt to patch up differences

According to J. N. Mohanty, Edmund Husserl when tried to refute relativism has gone through two different stages. Early attempts to refute relativism can be seen in Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* and in the *logos* essay of 1910. In these Husserl has tried to refute certain forms of relativism, especially psychologism, historicism, biological specisim. He regarded all these as varieties of relativism. But, Mohanty says, paradoxically phenomenology had relativism within itself, though it has been anti-relativistic by its inception.

Mohanty gives an account of how early Husserl argued against relativism:

> In general, in the early attempts to refute relativism, Husserl appealed to the fact that the relativist asserts a thesis even if he had one; or, that he has no first level thesis, only he has a second level meta-thesis that he has none; or that the alleged inconsistency is not logical but pragmatic, and even if it were

> logical he does not accept that logic anyway. And so the conversation would go.[184]

Mohanty continues:

> Husserl also argued that in so far as the relativist makes truth relative to some entity – a mind, biological organism, society, history, culture, or what have you – he must admit some non-relativistic nature of that entity to which he makes truth relative, so he cannot be wholesale relativistic. But the relativist may concede, at a meta level, that truth is relative to one's mind; he may refuse to advance a non-relativistic theory of mind so that at the first level the thesis would have many possible formulations, each of which will have a hypothetical antecedent, 'If the mind is... then...' Husserl, perhaps, at the stage of the Logische Untersuchungen would have responded to this move by urging that this 'If... then...' must itself be objectively true.[185]

To this the relativist would reply that 'If.., then..' has no absolute construal, rather its construal depends upon what logic one adopts.

According to Mohanty, Husserl also argues that the relativist departs arbitrarily from the way we mean by the meaning of 'truth'. But this offers an easy victory for the relativist who would say that the 'we' means having a culture and there are cultures and meaning differ from culture to culture. To this Husserl, following the criticism of Frege against psychologism, may argue that the relativist admit only the predicate 'taken to be true' while this

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[184] Mohanty, J. N. "Explorations in Philosophy: Western Philosophy". Essays By J. N. Mohanty. Ed. Bina Gupta. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2002. pp. 87-95. p. 87.

[185] Ibid. p. 88.

predicate contains the word 'true' which must be non-relativistically construed. But the relativist may retort by saying 'taken-to-be-true' is not further analyzable, that is the word 'true' cannot be separated from the phrase.

Mohanty recalls one more criticism advanced by Husserl in the *Logos* essay. According to Husserl, from facts only facts can follow. Likewise from historical facts, other historical facts. But from facts one cannot draw any conclusions which would entail either confirming or refuting an idea. Absolutely objective truth is an idea. So no amount of historical, psychological or ethnological facts could refute the idea that truth in itself is true for every man. An idea is neither a subjective representation nor the fact that it has not yet been possible to reach such absolute truth prove that the idea is invalid in the sense that it is, in principle, impossible to be actualized. However, the relativist – accepting Husserl's claim that European science and philosophy have been guided by this idea – would argue again making use of Husserl's own principle that facts can only entail fact. Therefore fact cannot be used to prove that all of mankind ought to pursue that idea.[186]

Husserl views naturalism as well as historicism as forms of relativism. In all of them Husserl sees attempts of explaining away ideas by facts, reducing life into a heap of unintelligible facts. Again, as response to this, the relativist may point out that several historical epochs have been guided by several ideas and that means that different epochs have entertained different ideas which denies the claim that there is an idea valid for all epochs.

Later in his life Husserl became convinced about the difficulty of overcoming relativism. As he thematized the life-world he found other dimensions of the problem of relativism. He came to realize that there are

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[186] Ibid. pp. 88-89.

many life-worlds, not one life-world. Mohanty quotes Husserl's paragraph on this theme:

> Thus, the stuff we scholars experience and are familiar with – scientific works, literature in the form of books, newspapers, etc., - is simply not present for the Zulus, even though the books are mere things are present, possibly as things endowed with some kind of magical powers – with which interpretation they are, in turn, not present for us... Every social group has a different concrete world. (AV9).[187]

A meaningful sentence in one life-world could be utterly meaningless in another life-world. This was in Husserl's mind when he wrote:

> Concerning truth and falsehood, being and non-being, in our world we can take issue with one another; not however with the Bantu, since he has in accord with his unique 'we' another surrounding world. (AV10).[188]

In a manuscript on the idea of science, Husserl goes on to assert that different practices have different standards of exactness. (Compare the standards of exactness in supermarkets with the standards of exactness in the pharmacy.) But he never stopped his attempt to constitute a non-relative world. Mohanty quotes from A VI 2 where Husserl speaks of relative, occasional, subjective truth:

> Practical truth is relative to the practical aim, which is only attuned to a certain local situation. The relativism ensuing from

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[187] Ibid. p. 90.

[188] Ibid. p. 90.

> proximity or distance from this situation belongs to the essence of the experiential world as such.[189]

Again the problem of overcoming this relativism of situations arises. General answer to this is: by idealization.

The last quotation, says Mohanty, seems to address a relativity that permeates in everything. It is thought in terms of near and far, home and foreign. A child's home is first of all his room. Gradually he gets familiarized with his room, later the world. Thus the foreign is overcome by familiarization. Here comes the problem of 'understanding the other'. It looks impossible because the other has his own historicity. Even understanding oneself by the help of memory is a Herculean task. How can we understand the other completely, his interests, etc.? But there is a model, the 'I'. There is a core commonality all these relative worlds share. The gap between the far and the near is closed by analogizing the apperception of the far as it were near. Thus a universal situation is arrived at. And the present world can be understood as a situation of the present and past worlds.

Mohanty gives a picture of how relativism in-built in the theory of life-worlds rises up when Husserl tries to overcome it:

> Certain relativity even affects the very meaning of 'science' (A IV II of 1934). I have my own idea of science, others have theirs. The peasant has his own idea of science. And yet science aims at determining the nature of the world in itself, as it is for 'everyone'. Who is this everyone? And whose conception of science is it that aims at being in itself? If it is

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[189] Ibid. p. 91.

> this modern European conception of science, what privilege has it over other possible conception of science?[190]

Husserl has not stopped the idea of overcoming relativism which manifests various sorts of relativism. He set up on himself the task how the world in itself for everyone can be conceptualized. Mohanty says Husserl aim was clear but he had no idea how to make sense of it. The answer in terms of idealization is general one. The task is to show what specific processes are involved. Mohanty lists some of the suggestions Husserl had in mind:

1. The different life-worlds have a common structure. This common structure makes it possible to begin to understand another life-world.
2. The most unknown and unfamiliar foreign world has always a core of familiarity, a typicality which inevitably come to one's aid.
3. In cultural relativism, though different world of meaning exists, there are common factors: perception, sensory data, etc. By striping, firstly, the cultural factors to these basic common factors, then again reconstituting the same again without assuming the knowledge of the other can help arrive at a common world.
4. Even totally different ego subjects have common structure of corporeality and of consciousness.
5. The identity of a world is constituted through different overlapping worlds.

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[190] Ibid. pp. 92-93.

6. On various occasions Husserl concretizes the abstract schema by adding that it is only through communication that a common world comes to be gradually constituted.

7. Science too is situation bound. It too is determined by its tradition, aims, etc. Yet this tradition is able to understand other traditions.

8. Everybody has parents. This shows that past is infinite like future. Thus, from infinite space and time, it occurs to him the notion of 'iterability'. Iterability is the root of idealization. Husserl also brings in the case of Euclidean geometry as an example of how we extend our experience to that cannot be experienced, a real case of induction. Though the iterative induction leads to an infinite world, it also entails a homogenous world.

Husserl neither gives up facts nor idea. His attempt was to bridge the gap between fact and idea.

Why should one be rational?

Many are of the opinion that it is excellent to be rational, but no one knows what it is to be rational and why it is so important to be rational, say Feyerabend.[191] There are instances in which certain actions are treated as rational: presocrates were called rational when they omitted Gods in their explanations; Einstein was called rational because he abolished 'ether'. This shows that being rational means accepting what is believed to be true.

But it is not easy to say that something is true. One may find out later that what he or she believed as true was not true. In this sense, calling something true and believing in it at certain times makes no sense. The

[191] Feyerabend, P. K. Knowledge, Science and Relativism. Philosophical Papers. Vol. 3. Ed. John Preston. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1999. p. 200.

realization that the character of truth is precarious or hypothetical may tempt one to explore more. And one may come to think that the definition of rationality as adherence to a view can no longer be maintained.

An alternate way of thinking is available in Homer. Homer has not one notion of knowledge, but many.[192] This notion of knowledge is not defined as instances of a matrix of knowledge. No arguments have been able to show that the modern notions of truth are superior to Homer's notion of knowledge. It is therefore advisable to connect rationality with procedures rather than with views. Rationality then is connected with procedures and its results. According to this argument, one can say, being rational means sticking to certain procedures, rules and standards.

This explanation of rationality obviously invites a battalion of questions. One can ask why sticking to rule and being orderly is better than being erratic, how it is to chose among procedures, and how one can be assured that an accepted procedure is in the long run continue to be acceptable. One of the answers to the first question could be that the universe is orderly, so that only by an orderly procedure it can be explored. Feyerabend says the claim that universe orderly cannot be accepted without criticism. He says it has been seen that there are erratic incidents in universe.[193] Science is trying to tame these erratic incidents in an orderly procedure, and it is like moving in the opposite direction, and sticking to such uniform procedure will only make people less capable in dealing with surprises. The so-called orderly world whose laws are not manifest has a lot of surprises in store. And there is no reason to believe that the apparent regularities of the world are its laws.

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[192] Ibid. p. 200.

[193] Ibid. p. 201.

Feyerabend distinguishes rationalism into two: naive rationalism and sophisticated rationalism. Naive rationalists believe that there are universal standards. One has only to stick to them, come what may. Feyerabend says science belongs to this category, and philosophers like Lakatos, Russell, Descartes, Newton, etc. Sophisticated rationalists do not believe that there are universal standards. Standards, for them, are restricted to certain conditions. Feyerabend lists only the names of Aristotle and Hegel for this category.[194]

Arguments of institutional rationalists are similar to that of relativists. Institutional rationalists claim that one calls certain things rational because that person is part and parcel of that tradition or institution. That is something is accepted as rational because those who accept it is part of that tradition or institutional practices. Quite naturally one may ask if there are many traditions and institutions, why one should accept the rules or procedures of a particular tradition as rational.

Philosophers of Enlightenment including Kant have a reply the question raised above. They think that there are common features shared by all traditions, and these common features are rich enough to give a rich framework for life. Feyerabend's criticism against this claim is as follows.[195] Modern rationalists take their cue from science. But science has no uniform procedures. Scientists often reject their once employed procedures, finding them irrational. Modern science had shown some initial success, and success combined with powerful interest group gave it an upper hand. That is why competitors like alchemy and magic had to withdraw. Their withdrawal is temporary only. Once science finds itself in trouble, these competitors will come back again. All rationalities are anchored in one tradition or another.

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[194] Ibid. p. 202.

[195] Ibid. p. 204.

There are no standards outside tradition. Therefore the dream of modern rationalist to influence a tradition with universal standards is in vain. Feyerabend concludes this part of the argumentation with the declaration of a result:

> There is not one rationality, but there are many and it is up to us to choose the one we like the best.[196]

The arguments and claims of Feyerabend so far examined are sufficient enough to brand him a relativist. He openly declares it too. Unlike many others, Feyerabend declares himself a relativist. Relativism is averted, according to Feyerabend, because it may lead to chaos. A relativist has to take decisions, while rationalists are like crying children who find solace in advices. Whatever be Feyerabend's characterization of rationalism, his views that went in defense of philosophical position are very clearly a sort of 'anything goes'. And no doubt, 'anything goes' has philosophical consequences which one can obviously call 'relativism'.

Internalism and Relativism

What so far Feyerabend argued can be restated like this. Every conceptual system is as good as any other. But Hilary Putnam has a sharp argument against this. First of all Putnam admits that our concepts are not totally uncontaminated by conceptualization. However he makes a distinction between 'anything goes' and the claim that there are experiential inputs to knowledge. Putnam experiments with 'anything goes' in an example. Suppose one has accepted 'anything goes' or every concept is as good as any other, and this person picks up a conceptual system that holds that one can fly.

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[196] Ibid. p. 208.

Accepting this concept, the character here jumps out of a window to fly. One can just imagine what happened to that fellow.[197]

Putnam's alternative is internalism. He admits that knowledge is not a story with no constrains except internal coherence. But it denies that there are inputs which are not by themselves to a some extent shaped by our own concepts. Though our concepts are contaminated by conceptualization, every concept is at least a bit proved, and it is better than having none. Concepts are about reality. It is objective too. Objective here is not the metaphysical objectivity equivalent to God's Eye view. It is something restricted to the person who conceptualizes.

Rational acceptability and truth are different. 3000 years ago it was rationally acceptable to believe that earth was flat. People of that time were justified in believing so. Now it is irrational. But that does not mean that 3000 years it was true. If it were true, one may have conclude that in the past was the earth was flat and now it has changed its shape. Instead rational acceptability is relative to a person.[198] As Putnam's this statement shows, truth is always dealt in terms of a matter of degree. From this one can conclude that he accepts a sort of qualified relativism, something that can be understood in terms of degree.

According to Putnam the extension of a word cannot be fully accounted either by a battery of semantic rules or by means of paradigmatic examples. These attempts are only partial, for example an iced tea and water can be just water in certain contexts of categorical understanding. Putnam approaches rationality in novel way. He say whether a belief is rational or not

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[197] Putnam, Hilary. Reason, Truth and History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1981. p. 54.

[198] Ibid. p. 55.

is not to be determined by the rationality of certain culture or groups, but by means of an ideal theory of rationality.[199] An ideal theory of rationality must give necessary and sufficient conditions for a belief to be rational in any possible world. It must give criteria which would enable one to understand in cases one cannot presently see the bottom of. In ethics, for example, one starts with individual rights, and then formulates maxims like 'be kind to strangers'. One may happen to be in a foreign country, imagining so one can agree to the maxim that one ought to be kind to a stranger. In that way rationality of ethical values has to be developed. About his conception of rationality Putnam says:

> The way to develop a better understanding of the nature of rationality – the only way we know – is, likewise, to develop better philosophical conceptions of rationality.[200]

Inconsistency of Relativism

Almost all the philosophers agree that total relativism is inconsistent. There are catchy one-liners like if all is relative, then the relative too is relative. It is contradictory to hold a point of view while claiming that no point of view is either better or worse than any other.

Plato was the first to employ that sort of argument against Protagoras, says Putnam.[201] Protagoras said when someone says 'x' that means that person says 'x'. That is, if one person says 'snow is white', that means that person says 'snow is white', and nothing more. Here that utterance is true only to that person. Protagoras argument implies that no utterance has same

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[199] Ibid. p. 104.

[200] Ibid. p. 105.

[201] Ibid. p. 120.

meaning for one person and for anyone else. This has intimate connection between relativism and incommensurability. Plato took this to be *a reductio ad absurdum.*

According to Putnam, this argument of Protagoras is an absolutist one. If it has to be a relativist argument, he must have said that his claim is only a relative claim. Similar arguments are seen in contemporary scene also. The claims like every culture will have its own standards, and truth is relative to those standards, are just an extension of the Protagorian argument. Putnam says, even Michel Foucault's claim, that justification is relative to a discourse, is no exception. All these claims are absolutist.

Plato had understood this with his pondering attention into the depth of the argument. Wittgenstein too has sensed this problem of relativism. His demonstration against methodological solipsism, a form of relativism, is an example of his relativism-critique. According to Putnam, Wittgenstein's argument is an excellent one against relativism generally. In Putnam's words:

> The argument is that the relativist cannot, in the end, make any sense of the distinction between *being right* and *thinking he is right;* and that means that there is, in the end, no difference between *asserting* or *thinking,* on the one hand, and *making noises* (*or producing mental images*) on the other. But this means that (on this conception) I am not a *thinker* at all but a *mere* animal. To hold such a view is commit suicide.[202]

Putnam finds a relation between arguments of Plato and Wittgenstein against relativism with the arguments of Quine and Davidson against the claims of incommensurability. Quine and Davidson argue that a consistent relativist cannot treat another person as a speaker because when a person

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[202] Ibid. p. 122.

speaks to a relativist what this person is doing can never be understood because of incommensurability. As the person's noises (speech) are too incommensurable, he might just be making mere noises.

Many great thinkers have been attracted to extreme forms of relativism. There might have different factors at work behind this phenomenon. Putnam tries to understand why this happen. Kuhn has moderated his early views. But Feyerabend and Michel Foucault have gone to the other extreme. There might have political reasons for this, Putnam observes:

> There is something political in their minds: both Feyerabend and Foucault link our present institutionalized criteria of rationality with capitalism, exploitation, and even with sexual repression. Clearly there are many divergent reasons why people are attracted to extreme relativism today, the idea that all existing institutions and traditions are bad being one of them.[203]

Putnam has made a good critique of consistent relativism, the extreme form of relativism. However, certain views of Putnam have to be treated as relativistic, especially his conception of truth. He considers truth as idealized justification. This is a notion that can lead to relativistic consequences.

Rorty's Critique of Rationality

According to Rorty in the contemporary world notions of 'science', 'rationality', 'objectivity' and 'truth' are bound up with one another.[204] And also he views natural sciences as paradigms of rationality. As a result of the

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[203] Ibid. p. 126.

[204] Rorty, Richard. Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth. Philosophical Papers. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1991.

present day belief in the supremacy of natural science, it is taken for granted that to be rational is to follow certain procedures laid up in advance.

Rorty says that now scientist has replaced priest. And so scientist is seen as the person who keeps humanity in touch with something beyond. Science is seen as a place where one can encounter the world, where scientist is the priest. Owing to this mythological aura of science, rationality has become a new commitment.

While enquiring what rationality is, Rorty distinguishes two senses in which rationality is understood. In one sense, to be rational is to be able to lay down criteria in advance or to be methodical. That is what science is doing. In this sense, natural science can be taken as the paradigm of rationality. But this sense of rationality puts humanities in trouble. Rorty says:

> If we thought we knew the goals of the culture and society in advance, we would have no use for the humanities – as totalitarian societies in fact do not. It is characteristic of democratic and pluralistic societies to continually redefine their goals. But if to be rational means to satisfy criteria, then this process of redefinition is bound to be nonrational.[205]

There is another sense in which rationality is understood, says Rorty. In this sense rationality is synonymous with 'sane', 'reasonable' or 'civilized'. In this sense, to be rational is to have a set of moral virtues. Tolerance, willingness to listen, respect for the opinion of others, reliance on persualtion rather than force are some of these virtues. This rationality makes it possible to discuss any topic in a manner that eschews dogmatism, defensiveness, and righteous indignation.

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[205] Ibid. pp. 36-37.

This is a weaker conception of rationality, but Rorty recommends to accept this and to avoid stronger concept. According to him, it was a mistake to accept scientist as a priest, a link between human and nonhuman. He also recommends to eradicate distinction like objective and subjective, 'genuine knowledge' and 'mere opinion', factual and judgmental.

Rorty has participated in the debates on rationality that have been going on since the publication of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* While many attacked Kuhn for being dangerously relativistic, Rorty congratulated him for softening the difference between science and nonscience. Rorty calls himself a pragmatist friend of Kuhn. Rorty says that he belongs to the group of 'new fuzzies' because he thinks new fuzziness has to be launched in order to blur distinctions between fact and value, subjective and objective, etc. created by the critical conception of rationality. Rorty would like to substitute the idea of 'unforced agreement' for that of 'objectivity.'[206]

Those who think pragmatic view of rationality as unwholesomely relativistic, imagines Rorty, may ask whom among the unforced agreement can be applied, that is, for example, whether among 'us' or 'the Nazis'. Rorty answers that it is among 'us.' He calls this an ethnocentric answer. It suggests that one must work by one's own light; beliefs suggested by another culture needs to be tested by attempting to weave them into one's own original beliefs. For Rorty, 'us' is an extendable construction. One can enlarge the scope of 'us' by regarding other people, other cultures, etc., as members of 'our' group, among them unforced agreement is to be sought.

Rorty rejects the notion of correspondence with reality. Those who think that dropping the notion of correspondence with reality as relativistic

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[206] Ibid. p. 38.

believe that reality is 'out there' waiting for the seeker to reach it. Rorty see this as an unfortunate attempt to carry religious view of the world over into a secularized world. According to Rorty believing that one is heading towards the ultimate truth or that one is in the right direction is similar to what Kuhn had said of scientific text books interpreting the story of the past science as a story of progress.

Rorty rejects traditional notions of rationality, and says that the only sense in which science is exemplary is that it is a model of human solidarity. According to Rorty, Hume's distinction between "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact" survives in the contemporary philosophy's distinction between "questions of language" and "questions of fact." Pragmatists would like to avoid this distinction. Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson, etc., have, says Rorty, shown how one learns to live without such distinctions.

Pragmatists recommend that all such theoretical questions should be replaced with practical questions about whether one ought to keep the present values, theories and practices or to look for alternative ones. In such a changed situation one will only be responsible to oneself. However, Rorty says, this is not a solipsist fantasy. Instead, he regards it as an alternative account of the nature of intellectual and moral responsibility.

When the new fuzzies, whom Rorty says he belongs to, try to revive Dewey's repudiation of criteriology, they are said to be relativistic. In a criterionless world people become defenseless. There is no touchstone with which to compare the plurality of views when one has to make their choice among them.

For pragmatists – Rorty calls himself a pragmatist – what they know about truth is that it is what wins in a free and open encounter. Rorty argues that pragmatists' view about truth is not a relativistic one. He argues:

> We do not infer from "there is no way to step outside communities to a neutral standpoint" that "there is no rational way to justify liberal communities over totalitarian communities."[207]

According to Feyerabend, science is one tradition among many, and he says the only principle that does not inhibit progress in science is 'anything goes'. Both Kuhn and Feyerabend use the notion of incommensurability and both of their findings have consequences of relativism. Kuhn has said, "there is no theory independent way to reconstruct phrases like 'really there.'"[208] This could be regarded as a relativistic statement. Though later Kuhn has softened the sharpness of the relativistic aspects of his views, still many of his positions are relativistic.

In his 'Two dogmas of empiricism', Quine questions the validity of analytic/synthetic cleavage, and also the validity of reductionism. According to Quine, both of these beliefs are ill founded, and therefore the boundary between science and metaphysics is blurred. With Kuhn's radical interpretation of science the boundary between science and nonscience too has been blurred.

Relativism continues to be an important but controversial position that one encounters in contemporary debates about the nature of truth, knowledge, rationality, and science. These debates can sometimes be confusing because people neither agree about exactly what relativism affirms, nor about whose views should be described as a relativistic.

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[207] Ibid. p.42.

[208] Kuhn, Thomas. S. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. 2nd Ed. USA: The University of Chicago. 1970. p.

Critics of relativism sometimes seem to assume that relativists are denying that they believe—or denying themselves the right to believe—obvious truths. But the more sophisticated relativists do not deny that statements like "the earth is round" are true. They just favor a certain philosophical account of what is involved and implied when we describe such statements as "true". The situation here is reminiscent of the debate between idealists and some of their materialist critics. The critics charge idealists like Berkeley with holding that our sense perceptions are illusions, and they think they can refute this doctrine by doing things like kicking stones. But the idealists do not see themselves as holding or implying any such view. They just think that the materialist explanation of our sense-experiences is philosophically problematic; so they offer what they take to be a more coherent alternative.

On the other hand, relativism is sometimes advanced quite crudely. Then, instead of being a philosophical view about the status of our beliefs and the limitations on how we might support these beliefs, it becomes an excuse for accepting uncritically one's own culture's assumptions and epistemic norms; or it serves to rationalize intellectual apathy or slackness masquerading as tolerance of diverse opinions. Just as idealists still have to negotiate what we normally call the material world, so relativists have to make decisions about whether particular claims are true or false. Their philosophical relativism may incline them towards being more open-minded and tolerant than dyed-in-the-wool absolutists and objectivists. But they cannot avoid adopting specific standpoints, choosing between theories, and endorsing particular beliefs and values. At bottom, the debate over relativism is about whether it is possible for relativists to make these commitments consistently and sincerely.

Many of Quine's notions have relativistic consequences. When Quine says sentences have meaning only within a theory, it means that sentences depend on a framework or theory to have meaning. This claim is no different from relativist's claim. Normative semantic relativism is a claim that meaning of a particular sentence depends on a particular framework to have a meaning or to make any sense. Quine's claim that there are no intertheoretical meaning implies the same claim of the relativist, therefore it can be concluded that Quine's claim on the nature of meaning has relativist consequence.

To avoid this consequence Quine has tried other alternatives. He studied the synonymous relationship of stimulus meaning. It was for avoiding relativist consequence that Quine replaced sentences with stimulus meaning. But later he found that it too is problematic. That he saw the stimulus meaning of 'red' too tends to vary from person to person and occasions to occasions.

Wittgenstein has said that meaning is determined by its use. On certainty he has said that certainty is just the learned certainty. That when someone says that something is certain, the certainty that he or she speaks about is actually the trained certainty. In "On Certainty" Wittgenstein says meaning is a contextually dependent phenomenon, that is meaning of a word or a sentence or a gesture is relative to a situation. All these suggestions lead to relativistic position. In the same work, he says, no knowledge can be certain outside its language-game.

According to Swoyer, normative conceptual relativism holds that there is no single use in which the use of concept is right or wrong. Wittgenstein's use theory of meaning more or less fits to this definition. Hence one can say that Wittgenstein's use theory of meaning has relativist consequences.

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